



Archbishop Justin Welby and the Anglican Archbishops of Wales, Scotland and Ireland came together with members of the Welsh Muslim community at [the event at Cardiff City Hall](#), which was called Working for the Common Good: A Christian & Islamic Perspective.

***Read a transcript of Archbishop Justin's speech:***

First Minister, Secretary State, Your Grace, fellow Primates, distinguished guests,

As we meet in security and comfort for this dinner, I wish to start my remarks by acknowledging the deaths of so many people on pilgrimage in Mecca. This desperate event reminds us of the fragility of life and the precious gift of each unique child of God. Please let me convey my sincere condolences to the Muslim community both here and worldwide. I am especially conscious that loss of life at such a sacred time and place is especially challenging.

The context of our meeting is one of excitement here (the score was 23/13 to Wales) but fear in many places. That fear seeps into our society, and begins to work at the cracks between us in our diversity, deepening them into barriers between us. The answer to fear is truth and love, truth about each other, and confidence in each other. I am delighted to see my friend Sheikh Ibrahim Moghra, with whom I have met in Lent or in Ramadan, and from whom I have learned.

This evening, I shall seek to speak as a Christian, not glossing over differences, but challenging fear. Darkness is cast out by by the light of truth and love.

Within the Christian tradition, there are a number of theological and philosophical truths and values that are eternal, springing from the very nature of God. They thus apply in all circumstances everywhere. They are the values that have called Christians to martyrdom over the centuries, and with other faith groups to stand up against apartheid, to resist the Nazis, to acknowledge guilt where we have gone wrong, as we often have. They are values that spring out of the person of Jesus Christ.

The first of these springs from the fact of incarnation, that in Christian belief we understand that Jesus was at the same time both fully God and fully human, two natures in one person. Incarnation is summed up in a title of Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us. Not just God for us, but God with us in all the mess of the life in which we live.

That tells us that the God we worship is one who is intimately concerned with the events of the world we live in, and thus that must include the care of creation and the environment with which he has entrusted us. It must also include the way in which the world's resources are distributed and shared.

Incarnation - God taking human form and human nature - demonstrates the value that God sets on life.

Jesus said to his disciples, "I come to bring life in all its fullness." Incarnation demands that we support life in all its fullness, with its difficulties and its challenges. By implication that means that the sanctity of life is essential.

The way we cherish every individual, from the brightest and the richest and the most important, to those who have learning difficulties or disabilities of one kind or another, to those with dementia or chronic conditions in old age, because of incarnation all are equally valuable. There is no such thing as valueless life.

This sanctity of life springing from incarnation, and also from crucifixion, from the Christian understanding that God died on the cross so that human beings might know God, that infinite value put by God on human life was combined with Jesus' pattern of permitting people to insult him, to turn away from him, to refuse his teaching and his words.

As Christians we understand that to mean that God gives us free will; its exercise may have consequences, but it is an essential. We therefore believe that people should be free to worship and free not to worship. They should be free to change how they worship and whom they worship. They should be free to express their views, even ones with which we disagree very strongly.

Yet because the death of Jesus was in answer to human sin and failure, Christians believe in the fallibility of human beings and the cost and consequences of that. So the exercise of free will should not be without consequences. People must choose, but that choice must be something they acknowledge and accept the results of.

Incarnation and crucifixion, the understanding of human sin as a tendency within each human being, leads us also to ask questions about why we go to war and what we are doing when we go to war; how war is conducted and how precious each human life really is.

It is very remarkable that Islamic teaching on just war is very similar indeed to that of Christianity. Our faiths, coming from different theological presuppositions, recognise the value of the human being and the dignity of the human being.

With these differences and similarities, and above all the call to the common good and the value and dignity of the human being, we have to ask ourselves about our vision as faith communities, and how we interact with the secular power. I should say here that that interaction, although it is not always smooth, should always be from our part with respect.

In the New Testament, Saint Paul teaches the Romans, and through Titus the Cretans, that they should pray for and honour and obey secular powers, except of course where they go against the clear unequivocal will of God. So, Secretary of State, First Minister, other distinguished political guests, I am sure you are aware that you are prayed for regularly, you and your colleagues in government. It is not done as duty, but

because we honour those who seek the heavy responsibility of government and bear the brickbats that go with it.

The next point I want to make I think is one that is of increasing importance in a time when there is a certain set tendency to say that religion should be privatised. To use an old expression, many think religion should be only between consenting adults in private.

Far from it, the faith communities are those who provide the glue in society in so many ways, from their social action through to the eternal values which they reflect and support, and which eternal values are themselves the foundation for British values of which we've heard a lot over the last few months. Because of what the Scriptures teach us, especially from the prophet Jeremiah, we are committed to seeking the welfare of the place where we live, the common good.

Christians and Muslims are not called to a ghetto-like existence, although both our faiths have from time to time acted in that way, through fear or defensiveness. We are called by contrast to be actively involved in our society not for our own good but for the common good. We are called to seek the flourishing of the society, as Jeremiah said to the Jewish exiles: "Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf for in its welfare you will find your welfare." [\[1\]](#)

The common good seeks to benefit those of faith communities and those of no faith. It urges a flourishing that is economic, environmental, political, familial and spiritual. It is something deeply rooted in freedom of religion and freedom of worship, and in the capacity to explore ideas that may be difficult for those around.

It means being committed to a society and country where not everyone agrees with us, far from it. In the book of Proverbs, the writer talks of iron sharpening iron. We are to speak truth to power to hold to account and also to be willing to be held to account ourselves.

What does such accountability both for us and by us mean?

First, it means that our interfaith engagement needs to be renewed. There has to be more honesty, a willingness to take responsibility for those of our own faith traditions who interpret our text differently and resort to violence.

I cannot say that Christians who resort to violence are not Christians. At Srebrenica the perpetrators claimed Christian faith. I cannot deny their purported Christianity, but must acknowledge that event as yet another in the long history of Christian violence, and I must repudiate that what they did was in any way following the life and teaching of Jesus.

In regard to honest dialogue, I commend to you the work of the Christian-Muslim forum and their commitment to hold the difficult conversations as well as their shared projects and desire to learn from one another.

We have unequivocally to condemn those who misuse our own Scriptures for their own ends. But condemnation, a negative, is not enough.

The mainstreams of our faiths are not at the mercy of the radicalisers who seek, in all the major faith traditions of the world (I could bring examples from many others as well as Christianity and Islam), to radicalise and to marginalise the mainstream. The mainstream of each faith needs to generate a counter-narrative that acknowledges our differences and commits to resource and support one another in defiance of those who wish to divide us. The counter-narrative must be so exciting and so beautiful that it defeats the radicalisers, with their message of hate and despair.

Christian leaders must renew their leadership, engaging with scripture to show the great vision of human salvation and flourishing that is within.

**There** lies a vision of creativity and innovation, of hope and challenge to motivate anyone: there one does not find fear and destruction, Islamophobia, mosque burning and suspicion. They are simply wrong; sin.

Most importantly, we have to unconditionally and unilaterally seek reconciliation. In the Christian tradition, we are taught to take the first steps following the path of Christ, who reached out to us while we were yet his enemies.

I remember working with a Muslim community and a Christian community that had been involved in serious riots in which many, many people had been killed. One Christian pastor, after lengthy heart searching, and confronting his own bitterness and hatred which was deep, and repenting of his own sin, led his people to seek engagement with the local Muslim community. They started by buying bread from the Muslim baker.

When the baker suddenly found his business taking off, with Christian customers, the local Imam went to see the pastor to ask why this was happening. The pastor explained, and in answer to the Imam's offer of help, requested that elders from the mosque should spend time on Sunday around the church, as Muslim youth was throwing petrol bombs at it and "it is very disturbing to the service".

The Imam agreed, but quite rightly asked that the Christians did the same thing to stop the Christian youth throwing petrol bombs into the mosque on Friday and at other times of prayer.

To cut a very long story short, over the next 18 months dialogue slowly developed, until they were working together for the common good digging a sewage system in the area. And might I add that they were still arguing ferociously with each other, but their spades and picks and shovels were used not as weapons but to improve their environment.

In England, thanks to government funding from the Department for Communities and Local Government, a small grants fund called Near Neighbours has been used to catalyse socially transformative projects, starting by people from grassroots faith backgrounds working together.

It is inspirational to consider how Somali Bravanese Muslims burnt out of their mosque were able to celebrate Iftar last year through the hospitality of the local Jewish synagogue through a Near Neighbours grant distributed through the local Anglican parish church. It was a

transformative moment for all those involved but it took courage, the courage to give and the courage to receive.

Faith communities must go the extra mile, compete with each other in the service of the common good without the falsity of syncretism. In our genuine, truthful and loving communication and action lies the challenge to fear, the building of the common good. Take courage, let us work together.

[1] [Jeremiah 29:7 NRSV](#)

10 min read

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