

# Bilateral Inter Faith Dialogue in the UK

Report on a seminar held at Lambeth Palace on 30 March 2009



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# Foreword

This report records the proceedings of a day conference looking at the special value of dialogue between people of two different faith traditions: bilateral dialogue. It was the first in a series of events in the 'Soundings' series which the Inter Faith Network for the UK is holding across 2009–2011, looking at issues in the field of contemporary inter faith dialogue and engagement in the UK today.

The Inter Faith Network is most grateful to Dr Rowan Williams, the Archbishop of Canterbury, not only for allowing the use of Lambeth Palace as the venue for the event but also for his key note opening address and his closing reflections.

Bilateral (or trilateral) and multilateral dialogue are, of course, both needed and complement each other. Context and need determines which is appropriate. But the importance of bilateral dialogue is sometimes overlooked or underestimated and we hope that this report will contribute to a better recognition of its significance. We hope too that the reflections and wisdom shared by participants and captured in it will encourage the development of new bilateral dialogues as well as strengthening support for existing ones.



Rt Revd Dr Tom Butler  
Co-Chair



Dr Girdari Lal Bhan  
Co-Chair



# Key points from the day

These are not conclusions agreed by the meeting as a whole, but points and suggestions made by individual participants in the course of the day's wide-ranging discussions. This compilation is arranged by broad theme.

## The vital importance of bilateral dialogue

- 1 Dialogue between two traditions plays a vital role in enabling people to wrestle with difficult aspects of their past shared histories and explore what they have in common. The importance of these bilateral dialogues needs to be more widely appreciated.

## The nature of dialogue

- 2 Dialogue has to be truly two directional or else it is not true dialogue.
- 3 Dialogue is a process – not a product. It requires the building up of trusting relationships. It may start from an artificial situation but then allows natural human relationships to flourish.
- 4 In dialogue there is going to be discomfort and tension. There is going to be anxiety. Courage is needed to work at the edges of our discomfort.
- 5 Bilateral dialogue is a risky business because you cannot get away from the searching questions. To enter into bilateral dialogue puts you in a very intimate situation where you are confronted with yourself – and with the need for self-examination. You cannot get away from the questions from the other person so there is a challenge to who you are, and also a risk of hurting the other. But for these very same reasons it makes possible a sharpness of focus that allows us to go

deep and to move beyond being strangers to each other. It helps us to develop a common language and vision with our neighbours and to live well together, without abandoning our identities.

- 6 Humility is a key ingredient in dialogue. We cannot come in with a preset superiority, a preset group of notions that “I am right” and “I am here now to change you to my way of thinking and my way of living”. True dialogue involves learning to respect one another, learning to discover the intellectual and spiritual depth that the other can give, that the other holds and which is precious and informative and that the other can share.
- 7 Discerning and building on beliefs, concerns or values which may be held in common is vital. But so too is taking difference seriously and finding ways to handle this.
- 8 Communication is not just a matter of using words; it is also about presence and example. Whether we are concerned with multilateral or bilateral dialogues, we have to find ways of somehow piercing behind the familiar to speak about what is most important to us – and what we most desire to share.
- 9 Shared silence, exploring one another's character in the silence and being prepared to listen before we speak to one another are part of real two way dialogue.
- 10 The worst possible way in which we can approach inter faith dialogue is anxiously. If we approach it hopefully and gratefully we shall be exhibiting some of that ‘unbearable lightness of being’ which ought to belong to a person of religious conviction.
- 11 In all types of encounters there will be difference – difference in terms of

experience, in terms of thinking, in terms of feeling and in terms of action. We need to develop enough capacity to hold that difference so we can begin then to dialogue with it in an effective, creative and productive way.

- 12 While religious organisations engage with each other institutionally, dialogue is essentially between individuals and collections of individuals and not between organisations or between whole communities.

## Focus of dialogue/types of dialogue

- 13 Dialogue is sometimes about theological and philosophical issues but in many cases it focuses on particular issues, such as the economy or education. The different purposes of engagement together, whether to explore the spiritual dimension of different traditions or to engage with public square issues, need to be borne in mind.
- 14 The context must govern what kind of dialogue is most appropriate within a particular local scene.
- 15 It is important not to assume that one particular mode of dialogue is the only legitimate one.
- 16 We need many different strategies for developing dialogue amongst and between communities – meeting people, creating relationships, working with neighbours, talking to neighbours and enabling the lived experience of encounter.
- 17 Spadework and investment is required to make initiatives work – with young people in particular but more generally too. You need the necessary understanding and information about a community. In the case of young people you have to work with the teachers, the religious authorities,

but most of all, you have to work with parents to build up their trust and to understand what a community's needs are.

- 18 Youth projects which have yielded really good results are ones that have built on the common interests of young people.
- 19 The role of women in fostering dialogue is important. Transparency in the process of engaging women, at the very outset of, say, developing an inter faith group, requires openness, honesty, transparency to be there, because women work quite heavily on trust. Creating an atmosphere of authenticity and genuineness is very important.

## Tackling difficult issues

- 20 It is important not to just push to one side the fact of religious divides but for faith communities to engage with them.
- 21 A tendency to excessive political correctness needs to be resisted in dialogue contexts where it can mean people are reluctant to ask the kind of questions which can lead to genuine learning.
- 22 International conflicts and international issues have a real impact on bilateral dialogue. It is important to acknowledge these but a good foundation needs to be laid down first, which includes looking at the shared humanitarian aspects of these situations which can unite faith communities, rather than at the political aspects which can divide. Once we have a common understanding and appreciation of our shared humanitarian values, then we can begin to have a more sober discussion of the political aspects.
- 23 There is a need to discuss openly issues surrounding questions of mission, proselytism and conversion and to recognise that conversion can create tension within inter faith contexts. There are strongly held, differing views on

whether mission negates dialogue and whether inter faith harmony precludes mission.

## Participation, process and resourcing

- 24 It is particularly important that the participants in a dialogue have a sense of ownership of the initiative.
- 25 It is important to widen the number of people from each community who are involved in dialogue and to have many people reflecting a community – not just one person ‘representing’ it. Involvement of young people and of women in dialogue is vital.
- 26 The energy for deepening relations between communities comes from within these communities at least as often as it comes from some external influence or authority trying to broker those relations. We are already talking to each other before people urge us to do so or try to organise us to do it. It is quite important that there is, in all our communities, motivation to do that talking together.
- 27 It is important to maintain continuity in dialogue in order to be able to build on what has gone before. This requires smaller and more committed dialogue groups. The role of committed individuals in helping initiate and sustain dialogue is very important. The best outcomes are not achieved in a moment, but require a long period of time and commitment.
- 28 Successful dialogue focuses strongly on common ground.
- 29 It is vital to have a careful specification of goals. A memorandum of understanding or set of guidelines for a dialogue process can be important. For example, it can be important to make statements together but there needs to be a protocol for agreeing these.
- 30 Good dialogue can happen with no funding but funding can be crucial to sustaining inter faith work – whether multilateral or bilateral.
- 31 Available funding is limited and can lead to competition between bodies, and Government funding mechanisms may not have always fully taken into account all that is needed to achieve depth in inter faith relationships. Insufficient Government funding is going to bilateral, trilateral and issue focused national inter faith organisations. Relatively little is going their way in terms of resources compared with funding of local inter faith groups and regional faith forums through programmes like ‘Faith in Action’. The funding process has been skewed by the emphasis on ‘preventing violent extremism’.
- 32 Most dialogue is local but national faith communities and inter faith organisations have an important role in encouraging and sustaining dialogues. Many involved in dialogue are volunteers and so capacity building is one really important aspect of developing the dialogue – in the sense of building the capacity for it within the constraints of the organisational resources that are available.
- 33 Bilateral dialogue is not an instrument of social policy, but a process that comes out of faith communities themselves.
- 34 It can be valuable to have issue-based dialogue, but there can be problems where an agenda focuses heavily and repeatedly on contentious and difficult issues.
- 35 There is a need to encourage ‘neighbourliness’ or informal dialogue between individuals.
- 36 People often feel more comfortable meeting in the context of a community centre, rather than inviting ‘strangers’ into their own home.

## Skills for dialogue

- 37 It is important to ensure that clergy receive training to enable them to engage well with other faith communities and also that there are opportunities for them to engage such as 'twinning arrangements' between seminaries and imams and rabbis and ministers conferences.
- 38 Developing skills for dialogue and learning about inter faith issues needs to start from school age. Religious Education should address relations between different faiths as well as teaching pupils about the different faiths themselves.
- 39 Good Religious Education has an important part to play in helping young people grow in mutual understanding and schools can also have a valuable wider role in bringing young people together.
- 44 It is important to develop bilateral dialogue not only at national but also at local level. In the UK there are around 250 local inter faith groups which operate on a multilateral basis, but only a handful of local bilateral organisations.
- 45 Bilateral dialogue and multilateral inter faith engagement are not 'either/or'. They are both valuable for different reasons. In a city such as Leicester, for example, there can be a need for a range of different types of initiatives. There is a need to reflect, in each city and town and at national level, what is needed and how the different initiatives can best fit together.
- 46 In some towns, there are effectively two major faith communities.. There are usually also a number of other very much smaller faith groups. The latter are naturally involved in multilateral inter faith initiatives. But it can be artificial and unhelpful if every dialogue is seen as needing to include them. There will be issues which the two major communities need to discuss together on a bilateral basis.

## Pattern of dialogues

- 40 It is vital to develop more dialogue between Abrahamic faiths and Eastern/Dharmic faiths, ie the west Asian and the east Asian religious traditions.
- 41 Dharmic faiths think that it could be helpful to come together to engage jointly sometimes with other faiths.
- 42 It is important to promote greater dialogue between those who have a religious faith and those who do not.
- 47 Groups involved with bilateral dialogues need to continue to play a whole hearted and effective role within their multilateral local inter faith structures where these exist. Bilateral dialogue can create a sense of exclusion on the part of others, and it is important for those involved in bilateral dialogue to remain aware of the need to build good relations on a multilateral basis as well.

## Relationship between bilateral and multilateral dialogue/engagement

- 43 There is a need to encourage more bilateral initiatives. It is not always the case that a dialogue needs to be multilateral. The need for a multilateral basis needs to be justified just as much as does a bilateral or trilateral approach.
- 48 With bilateral dialogue there can be a danger that one develops accidentally what is seen by others as a set of exclusive friendships. Perhaps all bilateral groups need occasional 'break out' or 'break in' sessions, where they invite somebody from another tradition in order to have those cross-cutting engagements to avoid bilateral dialogues leading people to operate in a sort of silo, spending their time principally on one joint bilateral

relationship to the exclusion of others. However, where bilateral or trilateral organisations invite people of faiths other than those they link to be involved, this can – unless carefully handled – be experienced in a negative way as ownership of the process is not shared.

- 49 Even where there are strong multi-faith bodies in existence, there is often a need to supplement them with specific bilateral dialogue, whether on an ad hoc or a continuing basis.

- 55 Media coverage of religious groups and issues has a strong effect on how people understand each other's traditions.

## Making the work known

- 50 There is a lot of good work being done in bilateral dialogue and it is too little known. The fruits of bilateral dialogue need to be shared with others and mainstreamed.
- 51 It would be helpful for the Inter Faith Network to share experience of effective dialogue models.
- 52 It is important to counter the excessive attention which is often given to negative developments in the faith and inter faith field.
- 53 Those involved in dialogue need to convey effectively to their wider community what is happening in dialogue and feed back to their communities and draw new members into the dialogue.

## Other reflections

- 54 'Faiths' are not a homogenous block and they do not all have comparable structures and organisations, similar lines of accountability or the same kind of relationship to mainstream society. Nor, while they have much in common, do they all believe the same things.
- 54 Material on the internet exercises a great deal of influence on young people, often with damaging consequences.

# Welcome

## **Rt Rev Dr Tom Butler**, *Bishop of Southwark* *Co-Chair of the Inter Faith Network for the UK*

As one of the Co-Chairs of the Inter Faith Network (IFN), it is my pleasure and privilege to be chairing this very significant seminar today and to welcome you all to it. We are particularly grateful to the Archbishop of Canterbury, not only for allowing the seminar to be held in this fine setting of Lambeth Palace, but also for his participation in the programme, including his keynote address.

As is our custom, we shall start with a brief period of silence, remembering today with thanks the work of all in this country contributing to greater inter faith understanding.

This seminar is the first in the two year 'Soundings' series of consultative meetings and seminars being held by IFN. These will be looking at particular issues in the evolving inter faith landscape in the United Kingdom, talking through some of the major issues involved, sharing good practice and discussing potentially fruitful areas of joint work. The events will also help the Inter Faith Network to develop its own work.

The focus of today's discussion is on 'bilateral' inter faith dialogue. There are now many inter faith organisations operating at national level and at regional and local levels. Many of these operate on a multi-faith basis, drawing in all or most of the major faiths. No doubt many of us here are involved in such activity. The focus of today's seminar on bilateral dialogue in no way diminishes the importance and significance of this multilateral activity. However, dialogue between two traditions, and occasionally three, has a particular and vital role in enabling people to wrestle with difficult aspects of their past shared histories; explore what they have in common; and plan

joint projects. The importance of these bilateral dialogues needs to be more widely appreciated.

The day's programme has been designed to help identify the ingredients of successful bilateral dialogues; to share experience of existing ones; and to encourage the development of others. It will also give an opportunity to reflect on how bilateral, trilateral and multilateral initiatives relate to each other, particularly at the local level, but also more generally. The programme is a packed one, but as much time as possible has been built in for question and discussion, to draw full benefit from the wisdom of all our colleagues here who are involved in bilateral discussions of one sort or another.

First, let me invite Archbishop Rowan Williams to speak. There will be time for some questions and discussions after his opening remarks.

# Keynote address

## Dr Rowan Williams, *Archbishop of Canterbury*

Thank you very much indeed, Bishop, and perhaps I may, in my turn, welcome you all formally to Lambeth Palace.

I have been asked to provide some scene setting on bilateral dialogue. First of all, I want to set out what I think some of the problems and challenges are in approaches to multilateral inter faith co-operation at the moment; secondly, to look at what the energy and focus is in the best of current bilateral dialogues and where there is more work to be done; and, thirdly, if you will bear with me, to speak about my own experience of different sorts of bilateral encounter, to illustrate some of the themes that can arise there.

So let me begin with a very broad – and probably slightly caricatured – picture of where I think the problems are in some attitudes to multilateral inter faith work and co-operation. I think many of these problems have to do with the word ‘faith’. It is being used in a rather new way, comparatively speaking, on the British scene. ‘Faiths’, as an umbrella term for different sorts of religious community, has come now to be the standard way of talking about communities of religious conviction here and elsewhere. Although it is very convenient to have one word as shorthand for that, shorthand always conceals certain things. Shorthand also brings with it a number of assumptions which are not always helpful. So if I were trying to think myself into the mind of the well-intentioned liberal commentator in one of our national newspapers, let us say, or even the well-intentioned commentator in some of our government departments, I think it might look something like this. ‘Faith’, in this thinking, designates a fairly homogenous block of interests, diversely expressed but basically about the same sort of thing. ‘Faith communities’ are communities slightly at an

angle – sometimes more than slightly at an angle – to the mainstream of British society, and they are united by the fact that they believe things that people in the rest of society do not believe. So that is the first assumption – ‘faiths’ are a homogenous block, as it were, united by believing the things that other people do not believe.

This first assumption leads, secondly, to a search for comparable structures. Here are these communities that believe things other people do not believe. So can we not assume that each has something like the same sort of organisation: that where you have an archbishop, let us say, in Group A, you have an archbishop equivalent in Group B; where you have a parish priest figure in Group B you have a parish priest figure in Group A and so on. That, of course, has some implications about where you think the structures of authority and the lines of accountability run in communities. This is, as I sometimes irreverently put it, the ‘search for vicars in turbans’. That is to say, all communities ought to be more or less the same. If you have got a vicar in one, what is a vicar equivalent in another? And the sort of authority that a vicar has, or does not have, is equally the kind of authority that the figures you identify in other groups have as well, is it not? And the place they have in the community must be much the same, must it not?

The third thing that comes out of this set of assumptions is that some benign neutral authority needs to do the mediation between faith communities, because while they are all united by the fact that they believe things that other people in society do not believe, unfortunately they believe different things from one another. They are divided, and therefore divisive, and so – because they cannot be trusted to do this on their own – a



benign authority from elsewhere comes in to do it for them – ideally Government. I often have conversations across the river (ie within the Palace of Westminster) with people who talk about this as a ‘religiously divided society in need of mediation or brokerage’. This is a phrase that, increasingly, I have come to challenge, saying, ‘This is a religiously quite *diverse* society, but you need to be very careful about extrapolating straight from that to the idea that this is a religiously *divided* society’ – that is, that the major divisions in British society run along religious lines – because I need a bit of persuading of that.

The fourth problematic assumption in all this is that every faith community (using that language for the moment) has the same kind of relationship to mainstream society – that is, one that is a bit angular, a bit suspicious.

Now I have painted with a very broad brush and I have freely caricatured and I hope you will forgive me for doing that. But I am simply, I think, exaggerating a number of assumptions that what are sometimes called the ‘commentating classes’ in this country tend to bring to the discussion of faith communities, communities of religious conviction: an assumption that they are all rather like each other in one way, but dangerously unlike each other in other ways; that you can work out more or less parallel structures of authority within them; and that they need to be made to talk to each other by somebody else.

I will not dwell too long on the contradictions and misperceptions that underlie those assumptions, but there are a few points to make. The first and most obvious is, I suppose, that they all illustrate one of the great failings of the liberal well-meaning approach that this country often takes in assuming that the western post-Christian map of social relations is the real one, and that while there are variations round the edges, this is actually the default setting – the western situation where ‘mainstream’ means ‘secular’ and ‘secular’ means ‘without religious conviction’. That is a starting point which is

really not terribly helpful. While relations between communities of religious conviction vary, most of us in this room would I think agree that the energy for deepening relations between them comes from communities themselves at least as often as it comes from some external influence or authority trying to broker those relations. One of the messages that is sometimes difficult to get across in the public sphere is that we are *already* talking to each other before people urge us to do so or try to organise us to do it. It is quite important that there is, in all our communities, motivation to do that talking together.

There are, as I have already indicated, enormous questions raised by the assumption that the patterns of authority or leadership in different communities are much the same. That is quite a hard thing to get across because, of course, it complicates matters! The search for the ‘vicar equivalent’, or for the ‘archbishop equivalent’ for that matter, is not always a very fruitful one, because the lines of authority represented in our diverse community do not necessarily run in anything like the same way. I just use one very obvious example of this. Priesthood is a category which has a very specific meaning in some religious traditions, including my own, but it is not a category at all in Islam. It is a category of some theological, but not necessarily practical, significance in Judaism. It is a very clear category in Hinduism but does not necessarily map on to community leadership, in the way we might understand in other contexts. The implication of this is that if you go into a multilateral inter faith setting asking, ‘Will all the priests please stand up?’ you will not get very far. Nothing very helpful will happen and behind and beneath all this is something which I find is more and more necessary to underline. Faith is genuinely diverse – not just accidentally, but genuinely diverse. We have been very laudably concerned not to exaggerate the theological or ideological differences between communities. We have been very laudably concerned to say there are certain styles of living and behaving which we genuinely do hold in common, and laudably concerned to



say that we do not need to persecute or kill each other for the sake of ideas. But that laudable concern has sometimes spilled over into a confusion that says, 'And so we are all the same really. Not only do we all think the same things or do the same things, but we are all organised in the same way and we have the same sort of relations to the society around us.' That is where the muddle comes and I think it is quite important to recognise that there is a muddle.

So all of that, by way of introduction, is really to say a multilateralist approach to faith needs a bit of questioning, a bit of probing, and a bit of clarifying. If you start from the assumption that there is this row of fairly isomorphic bodies called 'faith communities' and all you need to do is get them to talk to each other like reasonable human beings, then actually nothing very transforming and nothing very interesting may happen. There are, as I will say later, some very important settings where that multilateral presence and engagement is crucial, as Bishop Tom has said, and I will say more about this.

Moving on now, I said that I would ask where the energy and motivation for dialogue comes. So in the second part of my remarks I want just to reflect on that for a few minutes. I would say that the energy for dialogue arises when I look at my human neighbour and say, 'What can I recognise?' Not necessarily 'What can I agree with?' but 'What do I recognise?' Here is someone with a profound conviction, living in the same social space as I do, and yet with different practices and a different vocabulary, and I need to ask what in that resonates, where do I see the same questions being addressed, and where do I see different questions being addressed? How do I live intelligently and indeed affectionately with the stranger who is my neighbour? How does that stranger become more than just an alien presence? The energy in dialogue comes from that – from the desire to move beyond just being strangers to each other. It is about what degree of recognition is there and thus, how do I find a language that I can share with my neighbour? How can I sort out the real gaps

between us from the accidental ones?

The more individuals and groups and convictions are involved in that process, the harder it is for that actually to happen at depth, because with more than two or three participants in conversation, there is a greater risk of what you might call the wrong sort of triangulation of relationships – the two against one, the three against four, the two against two. The risk of looking for something in common with X that you do not have in common with Y can, I think, complicate and tangle relations in some ways if we are not careful. It also risks the conversation becoming a forum for further misperception and even grievance. So I think that unless there is some scope for neighbours to engage in a fully neighbourly way, very much face to face in dialogue in the strictest sense, the risks of confusion are not going to go away. That being said, there are some very important points where it may help to see two traditions agreeing on something over against another, where you see that the divisions do not always run where you thought they might – the situations where, let us say, the Christian and the Hindu or the Jew and the Buddhist may find something in common as against the Sikh and the Muslim. And those are illuminating moments: they are not political moments, where you are trying to form alliances – they are just a reminder that the divisions do not always run in straight parallel lines where you expect them to do so. That is a wonderful discovery, I find, in the world of inter faith dialogue – that you find you are speaking the same language as somebody you never expected to be speaking the same language as, and you are not speaking the same language as somebody else you might have expected to be speaking the same language as. So there are interesting discoveries there. But for all that to work, in that very broad context, we need a very careful specification of goals. I do not think we can get very far with that without those relationships in which one to one and community to community, we tease out some specifics.

I would want to say, as a kind of footnote to that, that one thing we do not get to do very often – and probably ought to do more often – is think through what a really constructive engagement might be between, broadly, the west Asian and the east Asian religious traditions. We talk sometimes about the Abrahamic faiths and we still cast around for the right word for others, but we do not all that often mention a really serious and in depth engagement between what it is that is distinctive in what I call the west Asian family of faiths and others. I think that there is a lot of work to do there, but, as I say, it needs great precision about the goals for that process.

So the energy is about recognising the stranger, about those conversations that open up to us something in the stranger that we can actually talk to, something that allows us to shape a language and a vision together, without simply abandoning our identities; and it may well be that out of that process, if it is well done, will come the broader process of mapping faith affiliations across the wider spectrum.

Moving on to the third part of what I want to say, the point I have been trying to make is that bilateral conversation brings a level of depth and allows a level of self-questioning which does not happen when you are simply dealing with a very broad group of convictions. Conversation, properly undertaken, allows you to go deep. It allows you to ask ‘Have I understood where I am coming from?’ – never mind where the other person is coming from – which is one of the breakthrough moments, I would say, in any dialogue. Not ‘Do I understand them?’, but ‘Do I understand *me*?’ And ideally at the end of a dialogue process, you emerge with a better understanding of who you are and where you are coming from as well as of the other. And because that is quite a risky business, the trust that is needed for it to happen is best built up in that face to face close encounter.

As I thought about that, I reflected on some of my own experience of inter faith encounter at

the bilateral level, and the ways in which I found myself driven back to ask questions about whether I understand myself. I just want to think aloud for a moment or two about those different experiences, because I found that having been challenged to reflect on bilateral conversations, I naturally went back over some thirty or forty years to think ‘How has it been? And where has it happened?’ I want to give you four little sketches of – bilateral is a rather pompous word, is it not? – conversations that I have been engaged in with other religious convictions and what has happened in that sort of one to one intensity.

It was as a student of theology, and specifically, as a student of Hebrew, that I discovered something about the world of post-biblical Judaism, something about the world of the mystical and speculative traditions of Judaism as well as the Rabbinic tradition; something about the Hasidic and Kabbalistic environments. I found myself thrown back into asking ‘How do I understand the nature of God’s presence in the universe?’ Because both Rabbinic and speculative post-biblical Judaism are very profoundly about how God is present in the universe and how that presence is honoured. In their different ways they provide hugely coherent accounts of the ‘thereness’ and the activity of God in the midst of God’s creation, which quite properly put a question to the Christian about glib versions of the finality of Jesus Christ, as if the presence of God in Jesus Christ were, so to speak, something that could be isolated from the general question of God’s presence in the created order. That in turn spills over into a whole set of very unsettling questions for Christians about what a certain account of the finality of Christ has done, spiritually and ethically, in the history of Christian relations with Jews. Has that finality, that uniqueness, ascribed to Jesus Christ so functioned as to exclude, dramatically, those whose vision of God in the universe is different? And, inevitably, is that not part of the appalling chain of consequences that led to the butchery of countless Jewish people in the twentieth century?

The encounter, in other words, with the historical self-understanding of different strands of Judaism drives me back to a set of very deep and very central questions and anxieties about my Christian faith. It obliges me to say, 'Have I yet understood the truths to which I say I am committed?' and 'Am I aware enough of the distortions and the risks that lie around it?' Although it is a bit of a move from those student days poring over Wiesel and Buber and so forth to committee meetings of the CCJ, I cannot sit in on those meetings without the memory of the questions that I have inherited from conversation, study and encounter in that particular bilateral setting. I am left with what seem to me to be properly generative and serious questions coming from that conversation, from that particular enterprise, in overcoming the strangeness of the neighbour and that is part of what I am grateful for in that connection.

Moving on, after my student days, but quite early in our married life, my wife and I went to India where she had grown up for her first eight or nine years, and I set myself the task of trying to understand something about the Hindu tradition. Now you cannot really do this in two weeks, as I suspect many people in the audience will willingly confirm! But I began to explore something of what the immensely complex and varied religious traditions of India had to say to me about, again, inclusion and exclusion, plurality and unity. In understanding revelation in a particular way, and history in a particular way, what was I not seeing that a Hindu writer, a Hindu believer, would see? How was I to cope with the Hindu accusation – and it is still repeated, very fiercely sometimes – that 'We are happy to include you, but you are not happy to include us?' It is a question that has been put to me in precisely those terms in this very room, as some of you will remember, about a year ago, and it is a very good question, because I like to think that Christianity is inclusive. And, of course, I am immediately brought up short by those who say 'Of course it is inclusive if everybody else agrees with you, but that is not necessarily what we mean by inclusion'. And I am still

puzzled by that, and when that question is raised for me in the Hindu/Christian conversation, it seems to me a very good question. I do not think the Hindu answer is the answer I can adopt, otherwise I would be Hindu. But I want to go back and ask 'How much do I mean by inclusion/absorption? How exclusive actually am I? And how far does the Christian commitment to linear historical patterns rule out some of the insights that are coming to me from quite different sources?' In a way, not unlike the encounter with Judaism, I am left with the question, 'How do I talk about the uniqueness of Christ without somehow muddling or confusing or obscuring talk about God's involvement with God's creation in a much, much broader way?' In connection with that, I have found over many years that two strands have interwoven for me in the encounter with Hinduism, represented on the one hand by the very highly developed dialogue between contemplatives of Christian/Hindu backgrounds, and above all for me by the great figure of Abhishiktananda, the French Benedictine who spent most of his life in India and wrote voluminously, about the contemplative life; and on the other hand by those, some of them represented among the Jesuits in India, who have looked for what it is in the traditions of Hinduism that provides the basis for a theology of liberation in India, for an engagement with the poor and the disadvantaged there.

I will not go on, but that is another conversation, a bilateral one, if you like, where I have been thrown back to ask some fundamental questions and also to find some fundamental enrichment in my understanding of my own prayer and my own perception of the world I inhabit.

I came, I suppose, rather late to thinking about Islam and it is really only in the last decade or so that I have had to think very, very hard about the relationship between my own community and Islam. I have often said that when I first became Archbishop of Canterbury, I had no idea that quite so much of my time and energy would be spent on

that dialogue. Yet I have found it constantly enlarging and challenging and particularly, I think, in two areas, about which I have tried to speak and reflect in the last two years. Islam has a profoundly coherent and focused account of revelation and scripture and the prophetic. In a succession of dialogues, particularly in the 'Building Bridges' seminars which I have convened annually, we have looked at those themes – revelation and scripture and the nature of the prophetic. The challenge that has come back from that has to do with the second area of reflection that has most predominated in this encounter, which is the understanding of the relationship between the religious community and the political community.

Islam, partly because of its intense focus on the revealed unity of God and the unity of the act of revelation, has a profound commitment to the unity of the human community. That is expressed by what often seems to the outsider a far closer connection between the community of belief and the political community than many other religious traditions take for granted. I like to think that Christianity is about the unity of humanity as well – only we have, of course, a long tradition in Christianity of being a bit sceptical about the unity of the community of belief and the political community. We had three centuries of being knocked around rather by the political community, being persecuted and martyred by the political community, and have inherited from that something of an arm's length feeling – you never quite know when the political community is going to turn round and bite you. This has meant for some Christians – and you must forgive the jargon here – a very eschatological approach to politics, in other words that the religious and political are not going to come together until the end of the world and we are not even sure that they will then. So the Muslim says to the Christian, 'What is this eschatology all about? What is this endless postponement of the unity of the religious and the political? If revelation is clear, then that unity ought to be real, at least rather more real than some of you unworlly

Christians try and make it.' I note here, by the way, that some Jewish people would say that Christianity is not eschatological *enough* – that is, too much has already arrived and too much is already happening – it is already done and dusted. I recall the late Gillian Rose's wonderful remark about Christianity always wanting to turn to the end of the book before working through the middle.

So you see again, that in conversation, some quite deep questions about the relation of the religious community and the social come to light in that encounter.

Then, finally, just a word about a very different sort of encounter, but also one that has been extremely important for me personally in recent years, and that is the encounter with Buddhism. I have for some years belonged to a small group of Christian and Buddhist meditators who try to find opportunities for some common practice, some sitting together, and some mutual exchange of perceptions on the basis of that. This is, in one way, simply the most challenging and enlarging bilateral encounter that I ever experience, and in another way, the most difficult. It raises some of the most fundamental questions about the nature of the self, the character of God as active and personal in the Christian tradition and not in the Buddhist, the question of the relation between creeds and therapies and practices, between what I believe and the practices that are actually healing and transformative. I am thrown back, I suppose, on the deepest questions of all, not simply 'Do I understand my creed?', but 'Do I understand what the self is and isn't?' 'Who and where am I?' I will not say more about that because it is idle to spill words on that subject.

All of this is not, I hope, just a rambling autobiography. It is an attempt to show, in a series of little photographs, or vignettes, some of what I have individually encountered and had to deal with as a result of – again, the word seems a bit inappropriate – bilateral engagement. That is, the one to one engagement with another tradition which,

because it is sustained and concentrated, allows certain questions to come up. Only as a Christian can I ask these questions, and in each context there needs to be the trust and the familiarity and the focus to allow the deepest things to come to light.

Now I would imagine that practically everyone in this room could construct a similar picture of the sort of questions that an intense engagement with one other tradition have raised for them about their central convictions and would see that as part of what the bilateral relationship is able to do. But in drawing towards a conclusion on all this, I would want to say, once again, that I am not disparaging the multilateral conversation in itself. I have warned against some misperceptions that can arise there, and I have underlined the enormous significance, as I believe it to be, of the one to one encounter, tradition and tradition engaging at depth. But there are, of course, areas where it is extremely important for communities of diverse religious conviction to come together and ask some serious questions in a society that is as morally and spiritually confused as ours is. I think there is a great deal to be said for that, so long as we understand what is happening and understand our goals. But in that, as in all areas of dialogue, I would say that what we need more than anything is to preserve our intellectual and our ethical edge – the integrity, the sharpness of focus that allows us to go deep.

So, in the spirit of dialogue, you are now free to tell me how wrong I am! Thank you.

**Bishop Tom Butler:** We have a few minutes for people to ask questions or make comments.

**Mehri Niknam, Joseph Interfaith Foundation:** Your Grace, I feel vindicated. Thank you so much. I am someone who throughout her professional work as an inter faith consultant has insisted, particularly when it was not at all fashionable to do so, that dialogue at a deep level means two sides, no more than two sides. What I call ‘meeting

and greeting’ encounters are good, but you cannot really dig deeply with more than two sides. Dialogue with three or four sides can be valuable, but dialogue in depth has to be two sides at a time.

**Dr Jagdish Sharma, Hindu Council (UK):** I believe that any dialogue, in order to be meaningful, has to be frank and that things that sometimes we hesitate to say need to be said. The generally perceived obstacle in a meaningful dialogue is a frank discussion on the subject of conversion. I have come across many examples of aggressive conversion. Many problems arise out of that. I am all for freedom to choose one’s faith according to one’s conscience. But in the context of efforts to promote good relations I am aware of the difficulties which arose in Orissa in India, where a Hindu holy man was killed. People who wrote and spoke angrily and vehemently about this did not have all the facts and nor do I. The Government of India has launched an enquiry. But it was said that he was killed because he was anti-conversion. I had to deal with numerous enquiries from different Christian organisations within this country. The issues involved need to be discussed. I am glad that you implied that conversion, or trying to change other people to your own faith, is not really a good form of dialogue. The Bible gives us a very good answer to this, in teaching us to turn the other cheek. It does not teach us to launch another crusade.

**Archbishop Rowan Williams:** There are a number of issues there about which I would be very glad to talk about further. Let me just make two quick observations. First of all, conversion from one faith to another cannot be the purpose of dialogue. Dialogue is about understanding the other as the other. That, to my mind, does not rule out the legitimacy of conversion because, as you say, freedom of religion is a very crucial part of how we understand the dignity of human beings. I think it is very sad in any context where that dignity – the freedom to choose how one responds to God – is overruled and all our communities have suffered from that in different ways. So I would say conversion as a

way of solving the problem of 'the other' is not how we should approach it, but we need to hang on to what we believe about human dignity here, as a fundamental. That is somehow implied in the whole business of dialogue itself. To respect the other's integrity in dialogue is the same kind of respect that respects the other's freedom to change their religious position, so I would want to hold those two things together.

**Alan Rainer, London Society of Jews and**

**Christians:** Thank you very much for your excellent and interesting talk. I noticed that your name was included on the list of those Christians addressed by leading Muslim scholars on 13 October 2007 when they initiated a dialogue with Pope Benedict.

In the London Society of Jews and Christians one golden rule we have in dialogue is to agree together on what is held in common and that then you can discuss those matters on which you may disagree. In that particular dialogue with the Pope, I believe that two points were generally agreed, which was love of God and love of man. Would you not think that this may be a way of going forward with dialogue, to search for what is in common first and then build on that?

**Archbishop of Rowan Williams:** I need to clarify the exchange to which you are referring. If I understand you correctly, you are referring to the 'Common Word' declaration that was signed by 138 Muslim scholars, which was addressed not just to the Pope but to all Christian leaders. In response, the Vatican has had some dialogue with some of its signatories. We also issued another statement in response to it – 'A Common Word for the Common Good' – which was an attempt to engage with the Muslims' declaration, and there was a dialogue meeting on it here last autumn. What was at the heart of the exchange was, I think, that the Muslim signatories said, 'Between Christians and Muslims there is a common word, a common discourse, about the love of God and the love of neighbour.' The Christian response to that, as represented by what I

wrote and what some others wrote, was to say 'Yes, that takes us a long way. But we also need to look at some of the ways in which the love of God, in the Christian context, does not work in quite the same way as it does in the Muslim, and to understand what those differences are'. Others have since responded to that in turn. But what you have said illustrates, I think, just what I was saying. We seek to find what we can recognise and we seek to find what kind of common language we can evolve. When those two steps have been taken, you can then have an intelligent disagreement rather than an unintelligent one and I think that is the basis for some real growth on both sides.

**Bishop Tom Butler:** Thank you very much, Archbishop. I know that you will be joining us at times in the course of the day, so there will be opportunity for participants to have their own dialogue with you elsewhere.



# Perspectives from three national bilateral dialogues (1)

## David Gifford, *Chief Executive, Council of Christians and Jews*

**Bishop Tom Butler:** We are now going to hear perspectives from three national bilateral dialogues, as we look for good practice and the lessons which can be learned from them. Very appropriately, we hear, first of all, from the Council of Christians and Jews, from David Gifford, its Chief Executive.

**David Gifford:** Thank you very much for the opportunity to share some of what we have learned in the sixty-seven years life of the Council of Christians and Jews (CCJ).

I am sure you all know the story of the gentleman who was finding his way up a Welsh valley and stopped a local man and said to him, 'How do I find my way to Llanidloes' and the local man replied, 'Well, if I was going to Llanidloes, I would not start here.' Not a helpful reply but it does show that people perceive things differently. It is rather like that when we talk about where we are going, and what our experience has been, with Jewish-Christian dialogue. We always have to remember that our experience may not be that of the other and that the path which we have taken may not necessarily be the path that others will take in the future. So we have to be somewhat careful in saying what lessons can be learned. There is individuality, a uniqueness about our experience.

When CCJ began in 1942, I do not believe that any of the indicators of success that we see today were even imagined then. Yet it *was* a successful movement that had begun. Why then, did it begin? And why was it successful? Exploring these questions may give us some idea of what we have learned and why we

have learned them and why we are able to build upon them. I think there was one motive that grabbed all of those people in 1942 and in subsequent years – an absolute desire to change society. There is often common assent to that. We all want to change society because we are dissatisfied with it. But the real task is to change *oneself* and that is a lot more difficult. To enter into bilateral dialogue puts you in a very intimate situation where you are confronted with yourself – and with self-examination, as the Archbishop said.

Those people who met together in 1942 talked about changing society because they said *enough is enough*. Remember the context then of war, of the *shoah*, of suffering, starvation. When those early CCJ members felt their way and met together then and have met subsequently since, the dialogue has often been within a culture of fear – fear from a Jewish perspective rooted in what had happened, and the possibility that it might be repeated. It has also been within the context too, on the part of Christians, one might say, of guilt – guilt that what had happened over previous centuries was very much as a result of Christians' attitude and our behaviour.

What also motivated us when we began and what has taken us through since then has perhaps been an element of desperation. Perhaps desperation, fear and saying 'enough is enough' are not the best reasons to start an organisation that wants to change society or change us ourselves. But bilateral inter faith dialogue will only be successful if those engaging in it believe in its urgency – see its activity with an element of desperation. In 1942 and subsequently, there was an urgency

about what we did. We see a rise in anti-Semitism today that is very worrying, and statistics show how worrying it is. In various places in our society, in our communities, we see that urgency again. What has happened in global situations, particularly in Lebanon a few years ago and Gaza more recently, has put a tremendous pressure upon inter faith dialogue between Christians and Jews. There is this sense of urgency – of desperation

Ten to twelve years ago, we were under some pressure to broaden the remit of CCJ, to move from bilateral to trilateral, to include Muslims in the organisation, so we would have become the Council of Christians, Jews and Muslims. But this was resisted and, despite suggestions that we should look at that again, it has continued to be resisted. Why? Perhaps the reasons why this has been resisted are because of a number of those factors to which the Archbishop pointed. One factor has perhaps been the theological perspective. Jews and Christians have a common scripture. From the earliest times of our engagement, we can talk about a tense-ness in the relationship. An understanding of Christianity cannot be achieved without a proper understanding of Judaism and there is also a need for Judaism to understand properly the way that Christianity has developed and the way that it thinks today. This need for greater understanding has brought us together to interface from a theological perspective, on a theological platform. One of the lessons that we have learned is that this is difficult because of that fear that I talked about earlier. We need to talk together but are still frightened to address some of the issues that separate us.

Perhaps expanding the dialogue has been resisted due to pragmatism. It is easier for two people to talk together, to enter into a conversation and not for a third party, or a fourth party, or a fifth party to be alienated or marginalised. There is a sense in which an intimacy can develop in the relationship. For myself, when bilateral dialogue takes place, we are able to be far more focused. In the projects that CCJ has done over the last three to four years, we have had very clear

objectives which are achievable and have been achieved and where there has been greater understanding, a building of relationship and people moving into activity even outside what CCJ has started, being springboarded to new things.

So, why is it important to us to remain bilateral, and not go down the trilateral or wider route? It is because we feel there are roots within Christianity and Judaism that are the same. They are common roots and we can build on that commonality, which makes it easier to move forward. We have to acknowledge the historical narratives of both traditions. Sometimes that is painful but we have had to do so because it allows us to come together.

We also can talk about theological *advance*. Modern day Judaism is so very different from the Judaism of the Bible and, yet, many Christians have yet to move on in their understanding of that theological advance. The same is true for Jews in relation to Christianity. But there is unfinished business and our programmes continue to address that. CCJ still take a group of clergy to Yad Vashem with our consultant, Dr Jane Clements every year. That is very important for us and it has a huge impact on advancing bilateral dialogue. Also, our society is changing and together Jews and Christians find a commonality from which to address assumptions and beliefs such as secularism, the issue of the State of Israel and its policies, Israel as a state, the issues of antisemitism, and the kind of ethical issues that are debated just across the road in the Houses of Parliament. For us, a key principle is that for any practical outworking of bilateral dialogue, we have to find those commonalities and, for us, it has been relatively straightforward to do so, although not without some struggle at times.

I was also asked to talk about some points of transferable wisdom. I am sure these have already been implied in what I have said and a lot of you will know of them anyway. But for us one of the main issues is humility. We may



enter into dialogue and think we have got that humility until the blue touch paper is actually lit. Humility is not easy when people start to talk about issues that really affect identity, your own historical narrative and that of your family too.

It is also important to remember that in bilateral dialogue, because it is intimate, you cannot get away from the questions. So there is a huge risk, a risk to who you are, and a risk also of hurting the other. Sometimes that happens.

Another bit of our transferable wisdom is the need for commitment. Some people enter dialogue and do not finish it. Some people go into it half-heartedly. I would say too that dialogue has to be a two-way street. So very often our approach is “Come and see what I do. Come and look at *my* sacred space.” But when it is the other way round and the other says, “Come and listen to what I do. Come and see what I do too. Enter it, enjoy it,” sometimes that is more difficult. But dialogue has to be a two-way street, or else it is not dialogue.

It is also important to accept that we can have different views. A group of clergy from the Guildford Diocese were talking about the issue of Israel, about a year ago. A senior Methodist minister who was present had real problems with what some of the Jewish community, and also some of the Christian community, were saying about Israel. He got very angry and there was space for that anger in that meeting. But, at the same time, from that meeting came hurt. It is OK to have another view and not dislike somebody and not walk away. That is why dialogue is also a risky thing to do. Another piece of transferable wisdom is that it is vital to know what is important to the *other*. We may all think we know what is important to the other until we really sit down in that intimate space and realise “I never understood that before.”

Most Christians accept the idea that Israel is absolutely a non-negotiable issue for many Jews. But I find that, sometimes when Jews and Christians come together in our inter

faith dialogue, our Jewish brothers and sisters have difficulty in understanding that the Christians are there, not because they were born Christian but because they are Christian by choice, by conviction. So they want, naturally, to talk about God, and their theological views. For some Jews, that is uncomfortable. Why is that so? Because it can ring bells of conversion and of unpleasantness in the past. From the beginning of CCJ, we have always said that an active or subliminal objective of conversion is not acceptable in our meetings.

Summing up, I would say that in the programmes that CCJ has done we have tried to be practical. Finding people where they are. Finding what people are thinking and meeting people where they are – whether it is clergy in dioceses, whether it is chaplains and students in universities, whether it is in schools looking at citizenship, we have met people where they are. When there are certain types of global events, dialogue becomes more difficult, as it did recently, when we had the Gaza situation. Then dialogue was put under great stress. But if we stuck to the seven points of transferable wisdom that I mentioned, we found that we could approach the hurt and the anguish that Gaza brought. And it was not just events in Gaza either but also the controversy around Bishop Williamson that caused tremendous anxiety among our CCJ groups and in our dialogue situations. Again, we come back to the key point of knowing that dialogue is risky but also, ultimately, for us can achieve far more.

**Resham Singh Sandhu, Leicester Council of Faiths and Leicester Sikh-Christian**

**Dialogue:** Could you list for me some of the achievements of CCJ since 1942? Have Jews and Christians come closer together? My second question is this: if we leave God, scripture and religion out of our dialogue with our neighbour, and would rather only know who they are and what their name is and what their family is, do not you think this would be a more comfortable place for us all to live?

**David Gifford:** As you can imagine, in sixty-seven years there have been a lot of achievements. I think particularly of our work in schools including the materials we produce for them. We have, before my time, influenced the new curriculum in schools, particularly in history but also in Religious Education. We have given evidence over the years to various Government enquiries and panels looking at issues, particularly anti-semitism but also the handling of inter faith relations more generally. There has also been a lot of activity at local level, where Jews and Christians are getting into dialogue with one another. Incidentally, I should add that we are the oldest *national* organisation in Britain, but not the oldest inter faith organisation, which is the London Society of Jews and Christians, which was started in the 1920s. One of the key issues for us has been getting people to talk together locally. In our heyday, we had about seventy-five local groups right across the country. The number is now down to about forty or so, of which about twenty-five groups are very active ones.

We have to accept that there are members of the Jewish community, who are involved with CCJ, who are not believers in God, are not theist, and who do not think it necessary to believe in God because they are Jewish. They are also active in some of our local branches. We accept their right to be there and acknowledge that they contribute to our dialogue, in terms of our understanding of the culture, history and narrative of the Jewish people. For them the issue is to understand that when Christians come to the table of dialogue, they need to show believing Christians the same openness that is offered to them and that for Christians to have a narrative that includes talk about God is very important. By and large, I would say that we achieve that mutual respect but there are times when it does cause tension in discussing future programmes and direction, particularly in areas of 'What do we talk about?'. Some of our branches want to discuss and to develop ideas about the nature of God, the nature of salvation, but there are some within our branches who find that very difficult because

they say, 'We do not want to talk about God issues.' My response is that is fine. Go where we can, not where we can't!

# Perspectives from three national bilateral dialogues (2)

## **Shaykh Ibrahim Mogra**, *Community Affairs Specialist, Christian Muslim Forum*

**Bishop Tom Butler:** We are now going to hear from the Christian-Muslim Forum. Shaykh Ibrahim Mogra is the Community Affairs Specialist of the Forum but he wears several hats and is also the Chair of the Committee of Inter Faith Relations of the Muslim Council of Britain. Today he is going to explain how, when and why the Forum came into existence and the way it has been developing its programme.

**Shaykh Ibrahim Mogra:** I chair the Inter Faith Relations Committee within the Muslim Council of Britain and that involves engagement at the European level, where I am a member of the European Council of Religious Leaders. Recently, I have been asked to chair Religions for Peace (UK). But today, I share some thoughts with you as a specialist member of the Christian Muslim Forum. My colleague Dilly Baker and I head the Community and Public Affairs specialism within the Christian Muslim Forum.

In comparison with the Council of Christians and Jews, the Christian Muslim Forum is a baby, which came into being just a little over three years ago. We are still learning how to crawl but I hope that very soon we will be able to run and walk and shall, in years to come, fly, in building better relations between these two great communities in our country. I have been asked to share with you a little about some of my other activities.

The roots of the Christian Muslim Forum go back to around 1997 when the former Archbishop, Lord Carey, said, 'For the sake of the health of this country, we need to find ways in which members of our two

communities can meet regularly together in a more structured way.' This led to a small group of people coming together, exploring the idea of having a national forum for Christians and Muslims. Several 'listening exercises' were conducted up and down the country and eventually, in 2006, we were blessed with the launch of the Christian Muslim Forum. At the launch, the present Archbishop, Dr Rowan Williams, said, 'We are looking for conversation and co-operation between two communities of faith that will remind the whole of our society that faith is a perfectly normal activity for human beings.'

That is a brief history of the Christian Muslim Forum, its coming into existence and its reasons for doing so. We now have a structure in place, which we hope will help make the running of the organisation and its day-to-day needs smoother and more manageable. Our founding patron is the Archbishop. We have two Co-Chairs, a Christian and a Muslim, and eight presidents, four Muslim and four Christian, from different traditions in order to reflect the make-up of the two faith communities in our country. For instance, if we look at the Muslim side, we have Sunnis and Shi'as. Likewise on the Christian side, there is a variety of traditions represented. We also have twelve 'specialists', six Muslim and six Christian, who have been paired up to look at six key areas of our work. Those areas, in alphabetical order, are: community and public affairs; education; family and family life; international issues; the media; and youth. In addition to this team of specialists, we also have eight 'scholar consultants'. We felt the need for us to be guided and advised by key people who specialise in their particular

religions but also in inter faith work.

The Christian Muslim Forum is a place for Muslims and Christians to meet with one another and talk about issues. But we also like to undertake practical action to reach those that really matter on the streets. I am sure you will all agree that those of us in this room are very unlikely to exchange blows if we have any disagreements. But our real concerns are with our communities out there, particularly our young people, who need to adopt the same friendliness and respectful attitude towards one another.

We have organised a number of interesting and enjoyable events. We are concentrating very much on some of our strategic values, in creating strong personal relationships between Christians and Muslims based on faith in God and commitment to the common good.

We also seek the participation of young people. That is a key focus for the Christian Muslim Forum – the involvement of young people, and also of women, in inter faith activities, which we believe to be very important. We also believe that, in order to have successful Christian-Muslim relations, we need the participation of believers of these two faiths from the full spectrum of traditions of which they are made up. We have had two events for women entitled ‘Women at the well’. These took place in a beautiful part of our country up north, in very tranquil surroundings, where the women spent time together learning about each other’s religion and culture and how they manage all the different responsibilities that they have in their day-to-day lives. These events have been a huge success. We had one in 2007 and one last year and there is going to be another one very soon.

We also believe that the drivers of our two religions and our two faith communities are the clergy and the imams. So we felt it important to give these two groups an opportunity to meet with one another and to learn about each other’s duties and methodologies. The coming together of the

clergy and the imams is not based on equivalence, to try and compare or show that these two positions carry out similar kind of work. They are very different but we have much to learn from one another. I personally have learned much from the way that Christian clergy operate and how they work, particularly in the area of pastoral work and engaging with statutory organisations, such as the governing bodies of schools, the hospitals and so on. These gatherings have been attended by large numbers of imams and clergy from up and down the country. We have not limited them to men, although, as you will appreciate, women do not fulfil the role of imam within the Muslim tradition. So we have entitled it ‘Imams and ministers’, but that title is evolving too as we have very warmly welcomed Muslim female participants at these events because they are crucial in helping build friendship and love between our two communities.

We have been providing training programmes for young people in 2007 and we are looking forward to an event that has been entitled – and you can see the youthful flavour in the title – ‘Cross, Crescent and Cool’. So young people will be coming together and celebrating their Christianness, their Muslimness, and saying that it is cool to be Christian, it is cool to be Muslim, it is cool to be a person of religion in our country.

We have not ignored children. Children hardly feature in inter faith work and perhaps that is where we need to start, very early on, to help them understand the importance of respecting one another. So we have had an event for children and the media. We have also not neglected the teachers, with whom our children spend so much time in school.

In March of last year, we held a teachers’ conference entitled ‘Belief and Being’. We deliberately did not target faith schools but targeted state schools or non-faith-based schools. It was a fantastic event. I have here some comments that the participants at this conference left behind for us and I will read out some of them because I find them to be

very inspiring. One says that, "After a long time I now felt it is not a bad thing to be a Muslim and live in Britain." Another participant said, "This has been one of the most positive and enriching meetings I have been in and I would very much welcome more." Another says, "I found the opportunity for open discussion on faith issues really stimulating." Yet another said, "I enjoyed just meeting, talking, discussing with delightful people with shared values, some of the same faith and many of a different faith." So it is creating an area for intra faith exchanges also, which is wonderful.

We have tried not to limit ourselves to this country. We are hoping to look beyond our shores and are in partnership with bodies in Indonesia. We have had an exchange visit of British Christians and Muslims going over to Indonesia, meeting their counterparts there and we have had the good fortune and privilege of welcoming Indonesians to our country to meet with Muslims and Christians here, in order to learn about our institutions and to see how we work together.

We have also had a preachers' seminar and our first Christian Muslim Family Conference. In the light of the current economic downturn, we have also had a seminar on Faith and Finance. Taking it down to the grassroots of our communities, we have had visits to places of worship from both traditions. Recently, in February, we had a Christian Muslim encounter at the Luton Central Mosque, which was enjoyed by all those who participated in it.

The way forward, we feel, is to continue building on these achievements, to spread our work and to try and make it mainstream, so that every Muslim and every Christian in our country genuinely and honestly believes in the need for this kind of engagement and co-operation for the common good. I have engaged in trilateral and multilateral dialogue but I agree entirely with the Archbishop that bilateral dialogue is where we can really get to grips with the issues that we face together.

We have recently had our residential meeting. We worked very hard to prepare what we call ethical guidelines on witnessing to our faith in our country. Both our traditions believe in inviting people to join our religion but, if that is done, then it has to be done ethically, in a proper manner.

**Ravinder Kaur Nijjar, Scottish Inter Faith**

**Council:** This particular forum is a very new one and it seems to be extremely well structured. In case we want to do something similar, it would be helpful to know where you were able to obtain funding for this kind of structure.

**Shaykh Mogra:** Julian Bond, Director of Management and Communications at CMF, is here today and he will be able to give you more specific information about this, but we have struggled to find funding, as everybody else does nowadays. But we have well-wishers, Christian and Muslim organisations, which have been very generous and we have recently appointed a professional fundraiser, who has already done some marvellous work. I would be happy to share some of what we do with regards to the fundraising without giving away too many secrets! Perhaps I could mention some of the key points with which we try to convince our potential donors about the value of our work. We want to create safe spaces for people to be able to live together and practise their faith. We do not just want to 'live and let live' but to live creatively, so that our living together gives something back to society, something that can be enjoyed by all and can be treasured for generations to come. Not only that, but as human beings we will always have difficult times, sometimes disagreements. We need to work towards healing and creating a better relationship. So the donors can see the value of the work of the forum when we share it with them in this way.

**Dr John Azumah, London School of**

**Theology:** I did not hear you mention the topic of theological training. The teaching of Christian theological students and of Muslims in Islamic colleges and *madrassas* is very

important. This is where people's minds are formed and attitudes are reinforced or prejudices broken down. How are you handling this issue at the Christian Muslim Forum?

**Shaykh Mogra:** The Forum itself is not in the business of providing theological training. We leave it to the two faith traditions to use their own institutions to provide these. But certainly we have tried to bring together those who have come through these theological seminaries so that they can meet and exchange ideas through the imams and ministers conference and the preachers seminar.

# Perspectives from three national bilateral dialogues (3)

## **Dr Girdari Lal Bhan and Rev Robin Thomson,** *Hindu Christian Forum*

**Bishop Tom Butler:** Now we move on to the most recent national bilateral initiative, namely the Hindu Christian Forum and a joint presentation on it by Dr Girdari Bhan and Rev Robin Thomson.

**Dr Girdari Lal Bhan:** Thank you for having invited us to talk to you about our experiences within the Hindu Christian Forum.

The first informal meeting that took place between the members of the two faith groups here in this country happened some seven years ago against the backdrop of some inter faith conflicts at that time in India. Several members representing the two faith communities came together and the first meeting took place at the Bhaktivedanta Manor in Watford. I want to name three people from that group who are no longer with the Forum but who were really crucial in founding this dialogue: Canon Michael Ipgrave, who at some point moved on to another post; Om Parkash Sharma, who had to step down for health reasons; and Bimal Krishna Das who went overseas for professional reasons.

At this meeting there was a very frank and lively discussion, which revealed the complexity of the issues with which we were grappling and also an apparent divergence in our viewpoints. But at the same time we were very pleased and impressed that there existed good will amongst us towards one another, and an acknowledgment of the need to address potentially contentious issues and to talk directly to each other rather than depend on hearsay. We agreed to establish a formal dialogue and this was the beginning of our

present group.

At the next meeting we had a full discussion on the issue of religious conversion. Both sides agreed that this was very constructive and we concluded by reaffirming our wishes to continue that dialogue on a regular basis. That led, in turn, to the formation of what we called the Hindu Christian Dialogue Group, with the intention of working together to address such issues, to increase our understanding of each other's viewpoints and to promote good will. Over the subsequent years we have met regularly, responding to issues as they have arisen.

The question of whether the group should involve itself with issues happening overseas was discussed and debated. We concluded that for various reasons our primary focus should be on issues facing the Hindus and Christians here in the United Kingdom, conscious that dealing with issues overseas could dilute that focus.

More recently, the group was renamed the Hindu Christian Forum UK. An earlier proposal to launch a research project to identify the issues that are of concern to our Christian and Hindu faith communities in Britain could not get off the ground. This caused a temporary setback to our progress but fortunately the Forum is now back in business.

What have the challenges been for us? I think the first one is that faiths must move from the current goal of tolerance to one of acceptance of the other. That alone can lead to a genuine respect. The second is that religious



conversion continues to be a source of major concern to the Hindu community. We will need to revisit this within our Forum in due course. Already there have been comments made about that today. The Forum has kept a low profile, partly because as a group we first have to 'gel' together and to talk together some more and also because we lack the requisite infrastructure. The third aspect is the potential of negative media coverage (and you will have heard the Archbishop's comments recently about the way the media communicates faith-related issues and indeed its stereotyping in a negative manner is a concern for us). The Hindu community is acutely conscious of this and remains gravely concerned about this issue.

Our strengths are the significant degree of trust in our relationships which has been built and our shared desire to live alongside each other as responsible citizens.

How do we look to the future? Our first aim would be to promote shared values, for example, the importance that faith places on the institution of the family and of marriage and on the care of children, the elderly and the disadvantaged – and to pursue common interests, for example working to protect the environment. There are many matters about which we have shared concerns and in relation to which we have shared values. We need to build on that.

We plan to hold discussions of a theological nature in order to increase our understanding of each other's faith. We are due to commence an independently commissioned research project, to identify areas of concern to the two faith communities here. This will beneficially inform our future dialogue within the Forum.

The Forum is now established and its infancy is over, although it is still being consolidated. That is not to minimise what we have achieved. We have built good will. We have become familiar with one other and we have established trust. That is not easy to gain. We have got an organisational structure which is

now working. So I think we look forward to doing more. We entered into this dialogue in good faith, which we sincerely hope would not be abused by anyone. There have been hiccups in the past, which were unfortunate. Although we are not exactly where we would have wanted to be, we have made significant progress, and this is a matter of satisfaction to us. Our commitment to build on that is undiminished and our immediate task will be to extend our activities at the grass roots of the two communities.

The Archbishop mentioned many points in his talk and I took heart, like many of you, when he spoke about the need in dialogue to have integrity and honesty and to have sharpness of focus. I want to rephrase what he said by saying, "At the same time we have to enter dialogue with an open mind. We cannot come in with a preset superiority, a preset group of notions that I am right and I am here now to change you to my way of thinking and my way of living." We have to learn to co-exist with each other. We have to find a middle way. It may not be exactly in the middle of the road all the time. It may be a little bit to this side, or a little bit to that side, depending on the issue. But we have to be prepared to give and take, because that is the only way to have a peaceful world in which we can live together in unity.

**Rev Robin Thomson:** I am here in place of Canon Andrew Wingate, who is our Co-Chair and is abroad this week. Of course, I cannot replace Andrew, as those of you who know him will fully realise!

Why is this dialogue important for us as Christians? Dr Bhan has already indicated that we began from the need to address issues that could be divisive. We felt it was important to address these directly, which we have been doing. But our reasons for meeting have not just been to solve problems. Our two traditions and the communities we represent have been engaging with each other for almost two thousand years in India, from the time of the Apostle Thomas – and maybe before that but certainly from then –



sometimes with much joy and mutual delight but at other times with frustration because we did not properly understand each other.

So there is all that historical background. Here in Britain, the Hindu community is the third largest faith community (to use that expression whatever it means), with a wealth of resources, cultural, social, intellectual and spiritual. So it is very important that we engage each other positively, not just to remove difficulties but also to receive from each other, as we have been hearing.

We have already heard about some of the challenges and opportunities we have faced but let me add a few more. The first was one that Dr Bhan has already mentioned: What should be the focus of our agenda? Is it issues in the UK, or issues coming from India? As he said, we have chosen to focus on the UK but it is not that easy as you cannot escape from the India connection which we love. But is it a distraction from issues that face us here in this country? So we are trying to see issues in the global context but with a UK focus.

Another point is that when issues have come up, we have not always been able to speak out effectively in a joint way. An example is that when there have been attacks on places of worship, we have not always come out with a proper statement. The issue of protection of cows here in this country, the Christmas stamps a couple of years ago, the issues in Orissa, which Dr Jagdish Sharma mentioned a few minutes ago – we have not come out with effective statements on these issues and others too. We felt as a Forum disempowered and realised that others have suffered because we did not make a proper statement. One reason for this was definitely our lack of an infrastructure, as Dr Bhan has already mentioned, to enable us to communicate rapidly with each other and then be able to speak out to the wider community.

Dr Bhan talked about conversion. I do not want to add anything more. We want to keep on addressing this issue. We did come up with a statement four or five years back, which I

think was a very good one, but we need to keep on working at that particular issue. Along with the national forum, several local groups are functioning very effectively, for example in Leicester, and we hope to build further on this using the research project that Dr Bhan mentioned, which will be based locally. We hope that coming from that will be more opportunities for local meetings and local dialogues to take place.

We have found sometimes in our discussions that we are talking to each other but are conscious of other communities that have been, as it were, ‘in the room’ with us but to which we have not referred directly. We felt that did not always help us in our discussion; we need to focus on each other. Or, if we want to refer to a third or fourth community, we need to talk about them openly. But it is not always helpful to be comparing ourselves with others.

Lastly, what we have found most important is to build trusting relationships. We have found the best way to do this is to spend time sharing our personal spiritual experiences or reflecting together on explicitly theological topics. We held a day conference three years ago on the topic of suffering. I think it was one of our best meetings. Certainly for me that was one of the highlights of our meetings together. While the research project is developed, we have two meetings planned in May and September. We want them also to focus primarily on spiritual and theological issues because we feel that will help us to understand each other because, as we have heard so many times today, when we understand each other and our concerns and build trust in each other, that will help us to address the wider issues.

**Malcolm Deboo, Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe:** Dr Bhan, you mentioned in your talk the issue of conversion, but at the same time you ended by speaking about coming to dialogue with an open mind. I think you are absolutely right. I also think you and other speakers are right in saying that we in Britain cannot escape what happens in places like

India or Gaza. My question is particularly on this issue of conversion and the sensitivity of dealing with the Hindu community and other communities who have this similar issue. In the United Kingdom where inter faith dialogue is at a somewhat more advanced stage, this particular issue of conversion is very much on the back burner. In countries such as India, however, this issue is not only a concern for the Christian community and the Hindu community, (which I think is in a sense a remnant of the legacy of Francis Xavier rather than Apostle Thomas), but also for the Muslim community. Is this because a country like India has a different type of plurality, whereby this particular issue of conversion is seen as being about the converting of Hindus, while in a country like the United Kingdom this issue is not quite the same because of the strides that have been made here in inter faith dialogue?

**Dr Bhan:** You ask me to comment on this issue in the context of the Indian sub-continent. People there by and large are deeply spiritual and spirituality, or faith, does not relate just to the individual but also to the family and the community so acts of conversion impact on both the family and the community. Disturbances that take place there can emanate partly from those acts. It is also true to say – and this is not true for most, but there are those who indulge in vilification in the process of converting, which upsets people so that disturbances do take place.

I was recently at a conference in Oslo where there was discussion on the need to have a code of ethics for those who undertake missionary activities. In the discussion people said, “It is all right for you to agree to that, but what do you do with those who do not come to these conferences and who will go on continuing to act as they do, bringing a bad name to those who do it in good faith and with good practice. So the problem remains.”

I do not think that it is true to say that it is in the front line there and it is on the back burner here. If we all agree to give each other the space that I think I need to have, then the

need to do anything in an active, aggressive manner should not be there.

As Dr Sharma mentioned earlier – and I think the Archbishop also made a similar point – there has to be freedom of belief, freedom of expression and freedom of worship. This is enshrined in human rights and everybody has agreed to that. From that also comes that if, after deep reflection, you decide to change your faith, that is your prerogative. But there is a grey area when someone else comes in and takes it on himself to convert you out of your faith. There are concerns there. It is a topic for further discussion some other time but there is a difference between a person converting of his or her own accord after personal deep reflection, and a person being converted by someone else. In India there is a cauldron of sub-cultures and a politicisation of faith, with the economic and other benefits that you can get from your religious identity. So it is a very complex issue and there are factors in India that are not relevant to this country, I grant you.

**Bishop Tom Butler:** This is obviously a very sensitive issue and it may be one that comes up in one or two of the working groups which will now be taking place.

# Working groups

## Bishop Tom Butler

Welcome to those who have now joined us. We have had a very good morning session in which we were focusing on bilateral dialogue at national level. This afternoon we should have feedback from the working groups which met before lunch. Then we will be focusing on the great importance of training. After that, we will be hearing from several people about local dialogues. First of all, feedback of the key points from the working groups.

### WORKING GROUP 1:

What are the ingredients of successful bilateral dialogues?

**Rapporteur: Prof David Thomas, University of Birmingham**

We want to share with the meeting points of practice and of principle. Firstly, the practical points concern obvious issues, such as the need to agree what it is that a dialogue is to be about; having a memorandum of understanding; the importance of facilitation; and being aware that a dialogue is not just for one evening, but for the long haul.

Secondly, (and we would have benefited from having more time to tease this one out), it is learning to recognise and respect 'the other' as they actually are – not so much recognising what we see that is familiar to us in the other, but maybe also the foreign and even alien character of the other. That requires, by no means compromises, but being prepared to explore shared silence, exploring one another's character in the silence and, of course, being prepared to listen before we are prepared to speak to one another. These are matters that require a huge amount of preparation. We want to include, within that, learning to respect one another, learning to discover the intellectual and spiritual depth that the other can give, that the other holds and which is precious and informative and that the other can share.

### WORKING GROUP 2:

Developing a strong pattern of bilateral dialogues at national and local level.

**Rapporteur: Anjum Anwar, Blackburn Cathedral**

Whilst we recognised that all bilateral dialogues are enormously important, it is vital to develop more dialogue between those traditions which are not Abrahamic and between Abrahamic faiths and non-Abrahamic faiths. It is a challenge to develop bilateral dialogues for many reasons and let us not forget that having the resources for it is a very big issue. Our diaries are overloaded because we tend to ask the same people to attend several meetings in a day, because different local initiatives have to be supported.

It is important to be very clear what we understand by dialogue. Dialogue may mean different things to different people. Academia may have a different version of dialogue from that which people at the grassroots have.

We want to underline the importance of widening the number of people from each community who are involved in dialogue. We cannot have just one person representing a faith – it does not work. I can only give an example from my own community. Have you ever tried to get one Muslim to represent the whole Muslim community? It does not work.

So we need more people to be on board. We need many different strategies for developing dialogue amongst and between communities, not only over food, meeting people, creating relationships – working with neighbours, talking to neighbours and, more importantly, to have that lived experience of encounter. That is the starting point of dialogue.

### **WORKING GROUP 3:**

How do/should bilateral, trilateral and multilateral initiatives relate to each other, particularly at local level?

**Rapporteur : Yann Lovelock, Network of Buddhist Organisations**

One of our points was a question, ‘How do you identify the networker or the catalyst that can make things happen within the local community?’ It is not groups that matter so much as the people that get the groups going, get them working and get them talking to each other.

The next point is that the context must govern what is most appropriate to happen within a particular local scene. You cannot prescribe until you have seen the symptoms, and not even then, always. Then, almost growing out of that, it is really important not to be governed by presuppositions of what dialogue is and the shape of dialogue. What is important is a local dynamic, not what everybody thinks they should be doing. It is what you can do and what you feel is appropriate for your own circumstances.

### **WORKING GROUP 4:**

Particular challenges of sustaining bilateral work

**Rapporteur: Phil Rosenberg, Board of Deputies of British Jews**

It may not surprise any of you that it was agreed that more funding would be appreciated, but actually that did not dominate the discussion, as we moved on to other points too. We challenged the second question put to us about continuing to engage relevant communities by saying that we need to go beyond that. There is a lot of good work being done in bilateral dialogue and it is too little known. The work needs to be broadened and people generally should have a better understanding of the constructive activities which are in place. We thought that education should address relations between different faiths as well as teaching pupils about the different faiths themselves.

The issue of the impact on faith communities of the international conflicts and international issues was one which had the greatest interest for the participants of this group. It was felt that in bilateral dialogue it was very important to acknowledge those conflicts and to discuss them, but a good foundation needs to be laid down first, which includes looking at the shared humanitarian aspects of these situations which can unite faith communities, rather than at the political aspects which can divide us. Once we have a common understanding and appreciation of our shared humanitarian values, then we can begin to have a more sober discussion of the political aspects. We also felt that it was important not to just push to one side the fact of religious divides but for faith communities to engage with them.

## WORKING GROUP 5:

### Bilateral dialogue and engagement involving women and young people

**Rapporteur: Chris Farge, Council of Christians and Jews**

There are two of us here because we had two issues: women and young people. In every type of project, for young people in every community, a great deal of spadework and investment is required, probably more than in any other sphere. You cannot suddenly go into a community and start to run youth projects, as a lot of funders expect you to do, because you have first got to invest a lot of time and energy into working with the young people in a community. You have got to have the necessary understanding and information about a community. You have got to work with the teachers, you have got to work with the imams and other religious authorities, but most of all, you have to work with parents to build up their trust and to understand what a community's needs are.

We looked as well at the positive side of working with young people. We felt that the most creative projects, which have yielded really good results, are ones that have built on the common interests of young people. We mentioned sports, such as football, and also a theatre group involving two communities. Because that is the basis on which a lot of young people are connected and it is there one can break through the divide between communities. Once you have that uniting interest, then you can start to engage with young people and the dialogue can start to happen. Our key point is that working with young people takes the investment of a great deal of time.

**Sughra Ahmed, Islamic Foundation:** We all use phrases such as 'women's issues' or 'gender issues'. But women are not an issue! Our group thought that the most important dimension of working with women in

bilateral inter faith dialogue is that they must seek to speak to different groups in a language they understand, to put it in words that they understand. So the way in which we engage with mixed dialogue groups is a way that works in many parts of the country. But when we work with young people we have to change the way we speak – the language we use – so that they understand what it is that we are trying to say.

In the same way, we need to change the way we speak when we talk to women of whatever faith or no faith. In that context we talked about the need to be open and honest. Transparency in the process of engaging women, at the very outset of, say, developing an inter faith group, requires openness and honesty, because women tend to work on trust. If they feel they can trust someone, then they will work with them. If there is something niggling at them so that they are thinking, 'I am not quite sure about where you are coming from,' they tend not to be as trusting. So women rely on their feelings and these feelings tend to be instinctive which means there is a need for genuineness in the engagement. This needs to be followed by effective communications in the group context where you inculcate a culture of transparency and a culture of honesty, especially where there are two faith communities that may be meeting each other in a structured way for the first time. So creating an atmosphere of authenticity and genuineness is very important.

**Bishop Tom Butler:** Thank you very much for those reports which give a very good idea of what you have been discussing in the various groups.

# Education for dialogue

## **Dr Ed Kessler**, *Director, Woolf Institute of Abrahamic Faiths, Cambridge*

**Bishop Tom Butler:** We have heard from one or two contributors this morning about the importance of education and training. We thought it would be helpful at this stage in the afternoon to focus on the subject of education for dialogue, and Dr Ed Kessler, from the Woolf Institute of Abrahamic Faiths in Cambridge, will now explore the importance of providing training for clergy and lay people in inter faith engagement, and for academic as well as grass roots dialogue.

**Dr Ed Kessler:** I am going to share with you some research we undertook last year on the training that takes place in Jewish, Christian and Muslim seminaries.

The encouraging aspect of this was that all the seminaries we visited – whether they were Muslim seminaries, Christian seminaries or Jewish colleges – realised that understanding and engaging in inter faith relations is necessary. That is the good news. The bad news is that very little training is going on.

If we take the 26 or so Muslim seminaries in this country, very little if anything is happening in terms of trying to understand different faith traditions. This is perhaps linked to the fact that many of the texts that are studied are, of course, medieval ones, and they are not necessarily studied in the context where inter faith issues are addressed. There are exceptions – I think, in particular, of Markfield College in Leicester and some others. But for the most part, it is not a very encouraging story. In the Christian seminaries, whilst there is more of a willingness and a desire to teach about other faith traditions, for the most part it remains a desire which is not actually acted upon. Even at the Cambridge Theological Federation, which I represent, the curriculum is packed because

priests have to be trained in two years and come out with an understanding of pastoral theology, Christian formation, Christian doctrine, Christian history and so on. This means that there is very little in terms of engaging and encountering other faiths. There are exceptions among Christian seminaries, where there is good work, but there is a long way to go.

In the Jewish colleges, there is next to nothing. We no longer have an Orthodox seminary since Jews College transformed itself into an adult education centre. Orthodox Rabbis are no longer trained for ordination in the UK. Most Orthodox rabbis have had no training in the encounter with Christianity or Islam. Leo Baeck College, the main Reform Judaism seminary, is an exception and requires its rabbinical students to study Jewish-Christian and Jewish-Muslim Relations. It also has a twinning programme with the Muslim College in London.

So that, if you like, is a very brief summary of the state of play in the country. We have made several recommendations. One is to twin seminaries – whether it is Jewish and Christian or Jewish and Muslim, Christian and Muslim – and to foster greater interaction between their students. This was pioneered by Leo Baeck College under Rabbi Jonathan Magonet for over 30 years, and it is encouraging to see, for instance, in Cambridge, that Al Azhar sent over a couple of students from Cairo and Ridley Hall sent a couple of students to Cairo. So there are some encouraging signs, but it would be good to see the leaders of the faith communities actually encouraging this sort of twinning. I know Phil Rosenberg of the Board of Deputies, who is here, has had some discussions with the Jewish community about doing this. But there



is very little of it going on at the moment.

The second recommendation we make – and it is very encouraging to see that in Cambridge a new Cambridge Muslim College will be starting up this autumn – is that it is very important for Muslim academic institutions to support the training of Muslim leaders. The late Dr Zaki Badawi, whom many of you knew, and who died a few years ago, talked about creating ‘British Islam’. I know this is close to many Muslim hearts, and I have had some discussions with Tariq Ramadan about this. Muslim educational institutions have a significant contribution to make in the training of Muslim leaders.

The third topic – and the one on which I want to focus – is the most controversial: what is taught in the seminaries. A revised curriculum is needed so that Anglican ministers who receive training at Westcott House, for example, possess a minimum level of understanding of Judaism and Islam. Now recognising the fact that there is very little room in the curriculum, what is that minimum level? On the final page you have one or two suggestions. We should have minimum levels of faith literacy for our ministers of religion – and I mean ministers of religion in the broadest possible sense. It should not be possible any longer for a Christian minister of religion, for example, to graduate with no understanding of Judaism, not recognising that Jesus was a Jew and – as I occasionally have to remind my Catholic students – nor thinking his mother was a Catholic!

My own particular interest is Bible. I studied the famous story – familiar to Jews, Christians and Muslims – of how Abraham was called to sacrifice his long-awaited, beloved son (who for Jews and Christians is Isaac and for Muslims, traditionally, Ishmael). It was clear to me that a Jewish reader of that text needs to be aware of the Christian context of some of the Jewish interpretations. In a fifth century Palestinian *midrash*, or rabbinic text, talking about Abraham placing the wood upon Isaac his son, the rabbinic author – not a church

father but a rabbi – comments ‘like a man carrying his cross’ (Genesis Rabbah 55:5). This is in a traditional, mainstream Jewish exegesis and is clearly influenced by Christianity. It is simply not possible to read traditional rabbinic writings, without an awareness of their Christian context. The Christians amongst us are aware, I think, of the influence of Judaism on Christianity, but are not so aware of the influence of Christianity on Judaism. Going back to the sacrifice story, it is interesting that in Islamic tradition Isaac is sometimes identified as the son, not always Ishmael. Some of the stories in the *hadith* are the same as stories in the *midrash*. How is this possible? Because the vast majority of Jewish discourse took place in a Muslim culture. When we read our interpretations, when we read some of the most important Rabbis, and when we look at Jewish liturgy, we have to recognise that much of it developed in a Muslim world context. We Jews need to be aware of that, as do our Muslim brothers and sisters. That can play out, not only in terms of the academic studies, but in practical outreach work, whether it is overcoming the racism and the phobias we face, be it Islamophobia or anti-Semitism or Christian bigotry for that matter. We are running a conference in June looking at Jews in Arab culture, and the contribution of Jewish authors to Arab culture, to remind not just Jews and Muslims but everybody, of that rich heritage.

The fourth point to note is that this was only a pilot survey. We spent six or seven months reviewing the curriculum, visiting individual seminaries, meeting individual teachers, but this is not enough. So we are going to seek funding to make a full blown study of what is actually taught in these seminaries and how it is taught. So, for example, if a Christian seminary claims to teach Judaism because it teaches Old Testament – that is not good enough.

I would like to end with one final thought. The worry is not that, in our seminaries, we teach and use ancient texts, whether they be 2,000 or 1,400 years old or medieval. It is *how*

we teach those texts. It is our failure to contextualise them (and by our failure, I mean my failure too, as a teacher) and to teach our students to ask the difficult questions about those texts that need to be asked.

There is a Jewish Nobel prizewinner called Isidore Isaac Rabi who received the Nobel prize for physics. He was asked “What was it that got you interested in science?” and he said the answer was very easy – it was his mother. Unlike most mothers who would ask their children when they came back from school, “What did you learn? Did you have a good day?” his mother would say, “Izzy, did you ask a good question?” If there is one thing I want to teach my students – and I would hope that you would do so too in the work that you do – it is to ask the difficult questions. Are we going to ask the difficult questions, or are we just going to carry on as we were before?

**Rt Rev Richard Cheetham, Vice-Chair, Christian Muslim Forum and Christian Bishop of Kingston:** I am very encouraged to hear you talking about the importance of ministerial training. I would like to make two comments, which I think are closely related. Firstly, I can understand how difficult it is to pack everything into initial education. One of my other ‘hats’ in the Church of England is continuing ministerial education and I would certainly want to see a lot of this material built into that whole concept of life long learning, and very much take a front stage place in that. That is quite closely related to the importance of context, because clearly the place in which you find yourself will affect the way in which you engage with these extremely important issues. I would be interested to hear your comments on those.

**Dr Kessler:** You are quite right about the importance of inter faith issues in continuing ministerial education. It is something that Canon Guy Wilkinson, myself and others have looked at – how we can actually make more courses available. Six years ago we created a new collection of courses, which I think Guy

advertised to Church of England dioceses, but we did not receive the interest we had hoped. We are currently preparing, ready for delivery in the next academic year (2010/11), courses in religion, memory and identity. These are particularly aimed at those who are working, not just as ministers of religion, but in a whole variety of different vocations.

**Andrew Smith, Christian Muslim Forum and Scripture Union:** It is just a plea, really, rather than a question. In terms of your next study, although ministers of religion have a certain influence, many young people are influenced more by youth workers. So perhaps you could also do a study in relation to the increasing number of youth work degree courses and training that goes on around the country. The majority of these would be Christian, but there are a growing number of Muslim ones too.

**Dr Kessler:** That is a really good point. I do not think there is much work being done on it at the moment. I was involved in teaching youth workers at Ridley Hall in a special youth working training programme and it would be very interesting to include that in the curriculum. It depends, of course, on how much time, resources and funding we receive it. But you are right because local authorities have delegated much youth work responsibility, partly to save money, and the Churches and the Muslim communities are stepping in and have a vital role. So the resourcing of that role is very important.

**Prof David Thomas, Department of Theology, University of Birmingham:** I entirely endorse and support what you say. I would just like to amplify it by saying that it is may be worth thinking also about theological departments in universities. As you know, in the Islamic community it is not only the religious functionaries but others as well that are leaders – and religious leaders as well. Every year, I have between 50 and 70 students sitting in my History of Christian and Muslim Relations lectures. More than half of them are Muslim and more than half of those are young women. So it might be interesting for



you to see not only what provision is being given in seminaries, but also in the higher education sector as well.

**Dr Kessler:** I think you are right. Your course in Birmingham is unusual in terms of the level of actual encounter. Father Michael Barnes at Heythrop College in London teaches inter religious dialogue but on the whole there are few courses looking specifically at the Christian/Muslim encounter. So it would be useful to include that.

**Sughra Ahmed, Islamic Foundation:** What are your thoughts on some think tanks, such as the Policy Exchange, publishing reports on education through seminaries and general Islamic education? How might this impact on some of the work that you do and the relationships that you may seek to establish?

**Dr Kessler:** I have a concern about one or two of these think tanks, like the one you mentioned, because they have a certain political agenda and do not necessarily pursue research for research's sake. For instance, the number of reports about Muslim education. Some of these are written for, and within, the Muslim community to encourage a certain position. Others are written outside the Muslim community to encourage a different position and, whilst they need to be taken into account, they do come from a certain perspective, which is not one that is truly balanced. I think it is really important that the researchers involved come from a *bona fide* academic environment and not from an NGO, which may have a particular political or apologetic end.

**Rabbi Alan Plancey, Office of the Chief**

**Rabbi:** You have been speaking just now about the Christian/Muslim/Jewish relationship. What about the other religions? As an Orthodox rabbi, I went to an Orthodox *yeshiva*. I did not get any education about other faiths. I have had to learn myself a little about the Sikh, Hindu and Baha'i faiths. It seems to be limiting our focus unduly if we concentrate only on Islamic, Jewish and Christian relationships and forget about the

other dialogues. Could you tell me what you intend to do about them?

**Dr Kessler:** If I can answer you with a story, Rabbi, (though it should be you telling the story rather than me!): An elderly couple went to the rabbi because they were going to get divorced. The rabbi said, "Let me speak to you. Let me see if we can have a conversation separately. Let us see if we can sort this out." The husband came in and said, "Rabbi, I can no longer live with my wife. She does not look after the house. She does not look after the children. I have got to get divorced." The Rabbi said, "You are right". Then the wife comes in and says to the Rabbi, "Rabbi, my husband does not give me any money to look after the house. He abuses me. It is a terrible situation. I have to get divorced," and the Rabbi says, "You are right". So he goes home to his wife and tells her the story, and she says, "So, how can they both be right?" He said, "You are right". The point is, you are right! You are absolutely right that it is not an either/or. But I cannot speak beyond what I know and what I do know is a fair amount about Jewish/Christian relations, a lesser amount about Jewish/Muslim relations. I am not in a position to speak at all coherently about encounters with other faith communities, other than in terms of the personal friendships that I have with some Sikhs and Hindus who live in Cambridge. But you are absolutely right. There needs to be a whole range of different conversations and they need to run in parallel with those bilateral conversations which we are already have.

# Local bilateral dialogues; creating long term relationships of trust and understanding:

## 1. Between Christian and Muslim Women in Leicester *Sughra Ahmed, Policy Research Centre, Islamic Foundation*

**Bishop Tom Butler:** We shall now be looking at some examples of local bilateral dialogues and are going to hear from two of our cities, from Leicester and from Manchester. I am conscious of the fact that there are people from all over the UK here today; we could have asked people from Huddersfield or Dewsbury or indeed from Scotland or Wales to offer presentations. But we are focusing on Leicester and Manchester. First of all, Sughra Ahmed from the Islamic Foundation, who is one of the Network's Trustees and from whose wisdom we benefit in that regard, will speak about the dialogue in Leicester between Christian and Muslim Women.

**Sughra Ahmed:** Leicester, as you will all know, has a very unique demographic in that it is set to become the first city in the UK where the ethnic minority population will exceed 50%. It has a very unique composition with a real eclectic mix of cultures and religions – and the non-religious are very important too – nearly all of whom work, live and play together. This presents a very interesting challenge and opportunity for inter faith dialogue in Leicester. I know that within the city we have one or two very well known individuals who say, "Leicester is doing really well – it is fantastic on its inter faith work and we have built really strong community relations." Then internally you hear some people say, "Well, no. I am not involved and I know others who are not involved and do not want to be involved in this field." When you

ask them why that is, why they do not want to be involved, people talk about what they perceive inter faith dialogue to be, at times without really getting to know what inter faith activity is all about. So they may think that it is just a bunch of old people who sit together and talk about matters that are not really that important. The perception is that inter faith is boring and uninteresting, although for those who have actually engaged in inter faith dialogue, it may seem to be the opposite. Once you have actually experienced it, you can realise the benefits of how well it works and what you can reap from it when it is done effectively.

There is a lot of dialogue taking place in Leicester. I know my colleagues will talk more specifically about particular faith communities, there is Abrahamic dialogue and there is dialogue involving Hindus and Sikhs as well and other communities too.

Bilateral dialogue is particularly important in demystifying the 'other' in a safe and secure environment where there is an understanding that everyone around you has a thick, armadillo-like skin, and that nobody is going to be offended if you are nervous about political correctness. Nobody will hold this against you. It creates that safe space needed for meaningful conversations. In the outside world, stereotypes exist of different communities – whether you are a community from overseas, whether you are a faith

community, whether you are a young community. How do you remove these misconceptions? Bilateral dialogue that is done in an honest way is one way of doing this and we practise this in the Christian / Muslim Women's dialogue group, which creates an atmosphere of developing and nurturing human relationships.

Earlier today a taxi driver said, "Where do you want to go, love?". I told him "Lambeth Palace, please," and, as he was driving, he became curious as to my reason for coming here today. I explained broadly the details of our seminar here. He then replied, "Don't mind my saying this, but you don't look like the kind of person who should be going to Lambeth Palace. I think what I am trying to say is that you are wearing a scarf, and are obviously a Muslim". I had forgotten that I was wearing a scarf and that perhaps people would see me as Muslim first. As we got into conversation he said, "I'm Jewish and I've been to Lambeth Palace three times". It was a really good opportunity to create a genuine human relationship through everyday interaction. But I could have sat in that taxi and neither of us have talked. He would get me to my destination and we would then part company. But my life would have been the poorer without that conversation.

So dialogue creates human relationships. Inter faith dialogue may start from an artificial situation but then allows natural human relationships to flourish. We have seen that in our women's dialogue group. For example, the mother of one of our members was seriously ill for a long time and recently passed away. Because her mother's illness lasted a long time, this lady and her husband had to live their normal lives, which meant going away at times, so she was unable to visit her mum regularly, which really worried her. A couple of the Muslim ladies, without telling her, went to the hospital and just sat with her mother – who was not conscious – knowing that some kind of company there would bring some peace to their friend and also that, if her mother woke up she would know that she was not alone. That is true friendship. They

didn't do it because they knew they were going to see their friend six weeks later in the dialogue group and that she might think that they were bad people because they didn't visit. It was about friendship, which is what human relationships are all about. When there has been a death affecting a member of the group, Muslims will find themselves attending Christian funerals which often surprises the wider congregation as they look very different in appearance to others at the funeral.

The group also acts to normalise faith in what is seen to be an increasingly secular world. We have a six weekly meeting within a very comfortable environment, and every now and again, about three or four times a year, we will go to another institution, such as the University of Leicester, De Montfort University, or another community's place of worship, so that we take our dialogue to them.

I just want to share one or two final points with you. In terms of developing friendships, I heard this morning somebody talking about developing dialogue in order to pre-empt some difficult situation in the future against faith or faith communities. Our dialogue group started on the basis of friendship. Several years ago two ladies started it all off, because they happened to meet and started to bump into each other regularly. One was a Muslim lady, the other was a Christian. They started asking each other questions about their background, "Who are you and what do you do in your work life?" Then they invited another couple of people just by chance and suddenly, before they knew it, they had a dialogue group. From that small beginning, many friendships have been built. For example, girls ring each other up and say, "I have had a really hard time this month. Do you fancy going for a coffee and a chat?" Or those of us who live in the country rather than the city can feel a bit isolated sometimes because everybody seems to be 'city-centric'. So we will call each other up and will go round to each other's homes. If I visit somebody's house, their neighbours may be thinking, "What is she doing here?" given that

it is not a very mixed community and I look unusual there. So questions are prompted for these neighbours too.

The idea that women are in conversation together without other members of their community present, whether men or young people, means that they often feel more at ease to speak openly and freely about subjects that may otherwise be sensitive for them. The group creates the freedom to talk about anything they want, and to go deeper than they perhaps normally would. Therefore what may have been a traditionally superficial conversation can turn out to be quite a thought provoking discussion, at times challenging for the Chair to manage. Because people want to talk about how they feel, or how their neighbours, friends or family might feel about a topic, it is a very honest conversation. Sometimes it can be quite difficult, but that is good, that is honest. When people are being honest, it can get difficult, and at first I used to find myself feeling uncomfortable, I particularly recall one discussion on the role of women and the concept of the *imam* (leader). Shaykh Mogra mentioned this morning that in the Muslim community there are no female imams. The Christian women can find that very difficult when, if they are Anglicans, they have struggled through a sense of oppression by men and think Muslim women must do the same. But the Muslim women have looked at them and thought, 'We do not work like that,' and nor can they understand where the other members of the group are coming from. The Christian women may be thinking, 'Why do they not want to break free from this cycle and become religious leaders like many of us?' The discussion was really interesting, if quite nerve-wracking at points! We should be having more discussions both within and across our faith communities with a deep sense of respect and integrity for open and honest dialogue

**Bishop Tom Butler:** Thank you Sughra. Does the work that you do with the Islamic Foundation have any connection with what we heard earlier about Birmingham

University and the Islamic students there? Is there a connection between the two? Do you encourage young people to probe further into their faith?

**Sughra Ahmed:** Often international – or indeed national – events can lead to a lot of young people, of faith and otherwise, to think more about the role of religion in our society. Some would argue that it has no place in our society. Others may argue that this is too simplistic an understanding of what faith can bring to the world. Many young Muslims have been pushed, quite unfairly I think, into having to explain why people want to do the kind of horrible things that they do in the world. Many young Muslims are like young people everywhere and may be unaware of the details and depth of their faith, particularly theology. These pressures have pushed young people to explore what it is that their faith and other faiths have to say, so that they can at least try to engage in some kind of dialogue. This pressure is creating some kind of an identity crisis among young Muslims. But the converse of that is that those who are driven and inspired to find out more about their faith, may enquire of places like the University of Birmingham or the Markfield Institute of Higher Education, where there is a safe academic space that Britain has created for them to be able to explore not only their own faith, but also the history of their faith's relationship with other faith communities. There needs to be much more of this.

# Local bilateral dialogues; creating long term relationships of trust and understanding

## 2. Between Christians and Sikhs in Leicester Resham Singh Sandhu MBE *and* Jaspreet Kaur

**Bishop Tom Butler:** Staying with Leicester, we turn to the dialogue between Christians and Sikhs and have a joint presentation from Resham Singh Sandhu and Jaspreet Kaur.

**Resham Singh Sandhu:** Before I start on the dialogue in Leicester between Christians and Sikhs, I would like to offer you a story. About 25 to 30 years ago my house was the only Asian house in the road. Over a weekend, as you know, an Asian family always expects some guests to come unexpectedly. So you prepare food for them. My wife used to cook the food, opening the kitchen window, which faced the road. I used to see quite a number of people passing by and some of them making faces. The smell of the food was hitting those people very hard and they did not know what we were cooking. Then, after a few years, when people started going into Indian restaurants and eating this kind of food, those same people started coming near to the kitchen window, and asking, 'Surinder, what are you cooking? What a lovely smell!' That strange smell had become a very lovely one.

This is how the Christian and Sikh dialogue started in Leicester. One or two Christian friends and I used to get together over a cup of tea and started talking about Sikhs – why we wear a turban, why we take our shoes off when we go into the prayer hall and why do other people have to cover their heads there? In order to have some clarification, Canon

Andrew Wingate, who was very popular among people of other faiths, and I started this dialogue. Then we expanded it and started to study our scriptures together. We invited educated lay people from among the Sikhs and from the Christian side. We wanted lay Christians rather than clergy to participate in the dialogue. These were people who had never been to a *gurdwara* but started coming to it, eating the food, understanding why we respect the scriptures in certain ways, why we have to cover our heads, why we have to take our shoes off. From there, the dialogue group started.

Then we came to the point where there was a Leicester Council of Faiths of which I was chair for about ten years. People started asking whether there was a need to have a separate Christian–Sikh dialogue. There are other councils of faiths now in other cities and we are all members of the Inter Faith Network for the UK. In those organisations, a number of faiths are members and they do not have as much time to become really close to one another. In my view the deepest dialogue is between two individuals or two faith organisations. So we decided that there is a need for another dialogue and the Christian–Sikh dialogue group was started. The Leicester Council of Faiths remains a very strong body and is doing an excellent job and works with a range of other organisations. But our Sikh–Christian dialogue group started with just a few people who were very active. After nearly

two years, we had covered some of the issues between the two faiths and then we stopped because some of those people who had been more active in the dialogue group no longer came. They had got caught up in their business or had gone abroad. But now we have launched it again. This was because there were a number of issues which we wanted to cover; for example, according to the Sikh religion, what is a woman's place, and what is the nature of the marriage ceremony and the cremation ceremony. The Christians wanted to know about them from Sikhs and we wanted to learn from the Christians as well.

We have also started a Muslim–Sikh group, at the suggestion of Dr Ataullah Siddiqui, who is Director of the Institute of Islamic Studies. He came to me and said, 'There is a history of some bitterness between Sikhs and Muslims. Why is this and what can we do about it?' So we started that dialogue group too, though it is not very active at the moment and, as I was mentioning to Shaykh Ibrahim Mogra this afternoon, we should relaunch that again.

Then to the surprise of many people, we started a Jewish–Sikh dialogue group as well, with both Orthodox and Progressive Jews involved in it. We had two or three meetings, which went very well, but because of other commitments on the part of our Jewish members, we are at the moment not functioning. We are going to relaunch that group too.

It is all about knowing and understanding one another – coming closer to each other and working together as brothers and sisters, not picking up faults on each side. That is how we can make progress – otherwise we will fail. We Sikhs do not have any trouble with the other main religions at all. People say to us, "Why is it that the Christians, Muslims and Jews are talking to each other all the time and not including the other faiths? It is because other faiths do not see you as troublemakers. They see you as good people and can work with you if you invite us to do so."

**Jaspreet Kaur Toor:** I shall make only a brief contribution this afternoon but I am going to try to answer two questions that I was asked to address. The first is why the Sikh–Christian dialogue group is so important. If you were to ask anyone in general what their biggest fear is in life, the general consensus would, I think, be fear of the unknown. So I believe that ultimately the most important reason for having a Sikh–Christian dialogue, and other dialogue groups as well, is to dispel fear, anxiety and doubt about the unknown. It is also an opportunity for building friendship, for building bridges, having that respect for one another, finding a common language and having an opportunity for learning as well. It is also about finding some common ground and purpose. Ultimately, it is about building trust and understanding between one another and learning to work with one another.

The second question is why I am interested in the group, and why I am involved. Our tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, left Sikhs a very clear message: 'Let us recognise the human race as one.' That really speaks for today's whole purpose of being together – recognising the human race as one. Also, to live as a practising Sikh – and I am one – living with full devotion and belief in the Guru Granth Sahib is paramount. The Guru Granth Sahib, our holy scripture, is itself a perfect example of inter faith dialogue, as it is a compilation of many contributions of people from different faiths. Its central message is of contributing in a common language and for a common purpose. The Guru Granth Sahib is a compilation of Sikhs, of the Sikh Gurus and non-Sikhs alike, whose ultimate goal is to meet with God in a total and pure relationship. It sets aside labels, titles, hierarchy, where you have come from, what you have inherited, where you are going, why are you here, why are you not here. So it puts everything aside and just looks ultimately at just one relationship – that is, the ultimate relationship with God.

From a personal perspective, I do not think I have ever been in a situation in my life, from

a very young age, where I have not encountered an inter faith setting. I have been very fortunate to be brought up in Leicester, which is very diverse. All my friends, even my family, have been mixed, so I cannot remember a time when I have not mixed with those of other faiths. So I count myself very lucky. I have not always been a practising Sikh either but I have had to learn this way of life very slowly. As a British born Sikh in a typical Sikh Punjabi family, this came very gradually and it has been a very personal journey for me as well.



# Local bilateral dialogues; creating long term relationships of trust and understanding

## 3. Manchester Jewish Muslim Forum

**Mr Jonny Wineberg and Councillor Afzal Khan CBE,**  
*Manchester Jewish Muslim Forum*

**Bishop Tom Butler:** Now we go across the Pennines to Manchester and Jonny Wineberg and Councillor Afzal Khan of the Manchester Jewish-Muslim Forum will talk about the work of that Forum and the lessons that might be learned from this.

**Councillor Afzal Khan:** As you know, we are from Greater Manchester and Manchester, we always say, is the centre of the universe! It is a very diverse city and excellent multi faith activities go on there but we felt there was an important need for developing a bilateral relationship, in particular, the Muslim– Jewish one. The first question is why a Muslim-Jewish Forum was developed in Greater Manchester. It was started by myself and the other co-founder, who was the late Henry Guterman. Henry was a Holocaust survivor who grew up here in Britain as a young person and dedicated all his life to this sort of work. He was a great person.

We decided that Manchester would be a suitable geographical area for this initiative. We were aware that there has been a long history of relations between the Muslims and the Jewish community, almost from the very first days of Islam, and that there have been ups and downs, in particular in the international situation that exists today.

**Jonny Wineberg:** In terms of our purpose, we exist particularly to strengthen cultural and

social ties, but the educational element is also important. This obviously will be familiar because this, presumably, is pretty much what all inter faith dialogue is about. But we do have that common Abrahamic tradition. I am often quoted as saying that 95% of what Jews and Muslims do is very similar, be it about food or be it about birth or death. So we educate people about those similarities and promote better understanding in the wider community so that those outside the two faiths will also understand more about them.

**Councillor Afzal Khan:** How did we come about in a practical sense? We were lucky to have a progressive local authority in Manchester which was happy to assist us by providing some of the facilities, including the venue, which we still use. We also then got together a number of prominent Muslim and Jewish people, talked about the idea and shared with them our vision. That led to the next stage of having a Steering Committee, made up of six from each community, and then that developed the Forum.

**Jonny Wineberg:** In terms of how the Forum works, we meet every six to eight weeks as an executive, but we do open it up to all of our membership and have several hundred on our mailing list. We have about twelve events a year. We surprise ourselves with the fact that we average one a month, which is quite an achievement. But when we look at all our



different activities, it becomes less surprising because we have women's activities, youth activities and accountants' and lawyers' sections. We are planning to develop a business group and there are also activities that are for everybody. In the longer term we do recognise that bringing theologians together is quite important. We know this has been tried in Manchester in the past and we will try again. There are some difficulties. We know some of the clergy are not looking for that sort of dialogue, as we heard before. But we do recognise it is an area we need to tackle.

In terms of youth activity, one of the first steps we took was an essay-writing and multi media competition for Year 9 and Year 10 young people – 14-15-year-olds. From that we had two winners from the Muslim community and two from the Jewish community and they came to the Town Hall to be presented with their prizes. We again got funding from the city council for that.

In memory of the late Henry Guterman we had a six-a-side football competition. Henry's son, Mark, kindly sponsored it. Again, we mixed the sides so that Muslim and Jews were playing together, not just against each other. It was immensely positive. It was held at the Jewish sports centre which some of those young Muslims sometimes use, so they now see people who they know and can say hello. Again that is a social link there for the longer term. We have also had other sports activities. We had a football match between a Maccabi team and a team from the Al Farghana Institute, a Muslim institute in Manchester, and also had a cricket match. This is quite easy for me to arrange because I happen to chair the Jewish cricket league as well. We set this up for the under-14-year-olds, and again it is about developing ties between the young people and allowing them a place to have some conversations as well.

**Councillor Afzal Khan:** The other key point is that we know that 50-52% of the world are women, so how do we make sure they are involved? They are actually very active and

they organise excellent activities. One of these is discussions. A large number of them come together and have tea and biscuits and get on with their discussion. They also regularly do outreach events. The last one was International Women's Day, in the Town Hall. Again, joint activities went on. I hope that you are now getting the picture that this Forum really is very much operating at grassroots level and is very much based on activities to get people involved.

This brings us on to a number of ways in which we have developed. One, as Jonny has mentioned, is to have sections for lawyers and accountants. Manchester is a big city with lots of different professional people, so we brought these groups together, to look at some areas of commonality on a professional level. We have discussed topics such as 'How do you feel about wealth?', business ethics, banking and other matters. Other events and topics have included medical ethics and transplants (a key issue from the faith point of view) and also *Eid*, Passover, *Hannukah*, visiting Beth Shalom and then regular afternoon tea sessions, a comedy dinner and a party in the park, in the summer. You probably think it rains all the time in Manchester but in Heaton Park we do have lovely weather as well! We meet regularly and here we also bring together the Christian Forum and the Muslim Forum and the Jewish Forum – just the Abrahamic faiths at this stage but hopefully we can open up our events, including the annual dinner, to other faiths. A number of us have a dialoguing idea for one Muslim and one Jew to go around in different areas, talking and sharing in schools and other places.

There are a number of partnerships which we are trying to develop and are working on, where we can bring the benefit and understanding of one of us. The first one of these is supporting the Jewish Representative Council in its Education Project that is going into schools and community groups. Then there are a range of sports and arts events in 2007–08 which we are involved with. In Manchester there is an annual event called

Adam Day in which we take part. Then there is also the Henry Guterman Memorial Lecture. Lord Janner was the speaker at the first one.

Last Christmas-Hannukah we had a joint event with the Council of Christians and Jews and Christian Muslim Forum. About 160 people attended including the Secretary of State for Community Relations, Hazel Blears, who spoke at it. But then, of course, the Gaza situation came along and that was very difficult. We decided that one of the key ideas of this inter faith dialogue is that you build on your relationship, and strengthen it, so that, hopefully, you can take on some of the difficult issues as well. We attempted to bring twelve people from the Jewish side and twelve from the Muslim side to talk honestly about how we felt as individuals about the situation and to listen to others doing so. The key idea is that you should listen to others.

**Jonny Wineberg:** Which brings us neatly to the challenges that we face. There are political challenges. Do we come together to find out about our similarities and what we have in common or should we do more to explore our differences? Do we look at the political situation, for example, in the Middle East? Should we have more discussion? We have different views about that and discuss whether or not we should be doing it. How do we challenge extremism within our own communities? Then there is the rise of the British National Party in the North West and the possibility that at the European elections, they might get a seat. Hopefully, we shall have a discussion tomorrow night about getting involved in that campaign in order to get as many people as possible to turn out and vote for mainstream parties because that is of great concern to all of us.

Then, gaining influence both locally and regionally. How do we go about making sure that our voice is heard with politicians, with the local authority and with regional government as well. So those are our political challenges.

There are also challenges about resourcing.

We run the Forum on an incredibly small budget. We are not a registered charity at the present mainly because our last accounts show us having a turnover of less than £5,000. We would very much like to have more because then we could do more. But how much time should we then spend applying for funding rather than getting on with what we do? So that is quite challenging. We know that, if we had more funds, we could do more, especially in terms of young people's events.

Finally, how much should we try and grow? Do we really want to be a huge organisation with staff and so on? Or are we better off as we are, starting to make those social networks work?

**Yann Lovelock, Network of Buddhist**

**Organisations:** We have a problem in Birmingham because we have a very secularist-minded local authority that really does not want to know our inter faith organisation very much. They do put money into some initiatives but it seems that there is greater enthusiasm in Manchester for inter faith dialogue and so I am surprised that you are scrabbling around for money.

**Jonny Wineberg:** We did get some initial funding from the Commission for Racial Equality. But we actually do quite well without funding because a lot of what we do can be done without it. People will set up a small event by themselves. We have a small membership fee and do actually manage on our small budget. We know that if we wanted to grow there are funds out there that we could get. But do we really want to do so? There is a question about the investment of time which is involved in that, as a voluntary organisation. We do not have any staff at present. We are looking at the possibility of making funding applications and we hope to grow slowly but surely. We have just received another small amount of funding to employ some women workers to help with the women's events. That was from the Manchester local authority. So we do apply for some funding.

**Dr Phil Lewis, Diocese of Bradford:** Do you relate to Manchester University? I have heard that sometimes there are issues between the Jewish and Muslim student groups there. Are you a resource to begin to engage with those difficult issues on campus?

**Jonny Wineberg:** The situation is a particularly difficult one. The Islamic Society and the Jewish Society take opposing counter views on many issues and have clashed politically because there are general student meetings there in which resolutions can be passed. We have offered to help; so far the students have declined our offer but we will continue to make it because we think it could be helpful.

**Phil Rosenberg, Board of Deputies of British Jews:** Are you approaching the Presidents of the national Islamic and Jewish student societies? Sometimes local views may be more entrenched than those of people who are less directly involved but may be better disposed.

**Councillor Afzal Khan:** Whilst we recognise the difficulties, we also know a good deal of positive work is going on between the different faiths at Manchester University and in other local educational establishments. So we are aware there many people who do want to get on and do good work of this kind.

**Jonny Wineberg:** We have run a dialoguing event at the university, where some students came along. But when the leadership of their organisation says, 'No, thank you,' it is very difficult then for us to put on an event against their wishes.

# Plenary discussion

**Bishop Tom Butler:** We are now getting towards the end of the day when four contributors have been invited to reflect on what we have discussed and then the Archbishop will be coming back to offer some closing words. We now have a little time in which anybody who has been burning to say something during the day can do so.

**Alan Rainer, London Society of Jews and Christians:** I am doing a doctoral thesis at Derby University with Professor Paul Weller. Father Bede Griffiths, just before he died, said in a dialogue with me at the Christian Meditation Centre, that what he felt was really important should be done – and he did not see that it had been done – is people going into each other's communities to become at one with them over a period of time. So that is what I have done. I have been involved in a Sufi group for four years and at the same time attended a Hindu Swaminarayan temple and an Orthodox synagogue. I think there is wisdom in listening to the elders, who have a time span of thinking over the whole of their lives. Fr Griffiths spent years in India living with Hindus and trying to uncover the unity between the faiths. So given this experience that I have had, I would like to encourage you all to go into the temples, synagogues and the *gurdwaras* and be at one with the people there. You will be amazed how delighted they are to receive you and how encouraging they are. That allows you to meet with the different groups and to share experiences with them and with their young people. That experience leads you to realise that there is a unity behind all things. Searching for what there is in common with others is so exciting and enriching. Your own faith will grow in a way you had never imagined. I owe so much to Fr Griffiths for that insight.

**Hardeep Singh, Network of Sikh Organisations:** Last year I attended a conflict resolution mapping exercise in Corrymeela between the Muslim and Sikh communities, based on concern in those communities and

on the part of local government about the way tension has flared up into violence between young people in the two communities in Britain. I am encouraged that there are a lot of voices here today which are discussing bilateral dialogue between Abrahamic and non-Abrahamic faiths. It is certainly a step in the right direction. I think it is really important to develop these links not only in pursuing a community cohesion agenda, which is obviously a governmental one, but also for us to learn about each other's faiths and avoid the myths which are perpetuated in the media and sensationalised in certain weekly Asian newspapers. I am really encouraged by being here today to represent the Network of Sikh Organisations and am grateful for the opportunity to do so.

**Bishop Tom Butler:** Your mentioning Corrymeela brings to mind a sad story from 40 years ago, when I was a university chaplain, and a bus load of Protestant and Catholic children went to Corrymeela. They went on the same bus and they had an absolutely wonderful time. On the way back, they unloaded those from whichever community it was when they returned and those who got off the bus then stoned it. That illustrates the problems which can occur in one faith, so it is not surprising when we are sharing together and trying to build up the common good, that we do get setbacks as well as glimpses of encouragement. There is a need to keep working at it, and eventually progress comes.

**Brian Pearce, Inter Faith Network for the UK:** I just wanted to comment on your story about Corrymeela. I heard it said some years ago that the reason why the children who got off the bus first threw stones at it, was to send a signal to their own community that they had not 'gone over' to the other side. For me that brings out a point which has not been mentioned, which is the tension and difficulty that people can sometimes experience in working in the inter faith field, in terms of

their relationships with other people within their own community who are doubtful about what they are engaged in.

**Hon Barnabas Leith, National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the UK:** For me, it brings to mind an inter faith conference in Northern Ireland some years ago that I was involved in helping to organise. It was looking at the conflict situation there and bringing people together from different inter-religious conflict situations around the world, to explore together with people in Northern Ireland, how these arise and what could be done to overcome the conflict there. In organising it, the very activity that we would take for granted, such as the ability to sit together in silence, was in those days regarded as being completely 'off the map'. You could not sit together with people of different faiths even in silence. We have moved on in a very encouraging way. We do suffer setbacks but at the same time we have seen some extraordinary progress in this very important field. I, for one, think, today has been an excellent conference and a wonderfully encouraging exploration of the power of bilateral dialogue.

**Yann Lovelock, Network of Buddhist Organisations:** We have heard a number of stories today but we have not spoken about the value of humour as part of the dialogue process. I think we all need to bring that to the table. All of our religious founders had a sense of humour, used it a lot in their teaching, and we serious people who follow them either do not notice the humour or play it down. If our founders were humorous and the religion is still persisting, it is surely partly because they were men of humour. So let us use that as much as possible. Let us laugh together, which is a good way of building trust as well.

**Jonny Wineberg, Muslim Jewish Forum Greater Manchester:** I think it goes beyond laughter. You are absolutely right, but it is about building relationships. One of our members passed away. We have the practice of *Shiv'ah* in the Jewish religion; this is a time

of mourning for a person who has died. I am very proud that Muslim members of our Forum came to a house to pay their respects during *Shiv'ah*. Even more extraordinary is that we recently had a Zionist Central Council event in Manchester when three Muslim members of our executive group felt that they could come along. You can see that because we are able to dialogue we are able to build trust. That gets us to the point where we can start to engage with the more difficult issues. For me it is about starting from our similarities – it has taken us four years to get to that point and, as we said before, it takes a long time with young people – and with adults too. What we need is for more people to have commitment to these encounters so that we can grow even further.

**Bishop Tom Butler:** My experience about telling jokes is that it is OK to tell jokes about your own faith but it is a bit dangerous telling jokes about other people's faiths!

**Chris Myant, Equality and Human Rights Commission:** We have now got a panoply of laws around equality, part of which puts a duty on the Equality and Human Rights Commission to promote good relations. Part of that promotion of good relations covers relations between people of different faiths. Parliament is going to be debating further legislation soon which will put the duty to promote good relations not just on us as a Commission but also on local authorities, schools and so on. This conference has come at a very helpful moment because I sense a degree of confidence, interest and potential for taking this work forward. I was particularly struck by the presentation from Manchester. It seems to me that the core of this work on good inter faith relations has got to come from within individuals and within organisations on the ground, rather than simply waiting for Government or some other public body to provide funding. Although this duty will lie on public bodies, we need to enable developments to come up from below, rather than thinking that the way to make progress is simply by throwing money at this work. In my experience over the last forty

years of trying to encourage good relations between different groups when you do that you actually do not help a great deal. The risk is that you create structures and organisations, but not relationships.

**Bishop Tom Butler:** Certainly, you pay a price for getting organised. It is an interesting time in our society where there is a very strong emphasis on individual human rights and a strong emphasis on society but less emphasis on the rights of intermediate bodies, including religious ones. Trying to explain the importance of that aspect to some of our political masters can be a struggle. But we need to do so, because religious groups have legitimate sensitivities too.

# Closing reflections

## Brief observations on some of the issues which emerged in the course of the day and on gaps and possibilities for future dialogues

**Bishop Tom Butler:** We now move on to reflections from our four panellists. The first of these is Father Michael Barnes, who is a member of the Roman Catholic Committee for Other Faiths. He is a theological consultant to the ecumenical Churches' Council on Inter Faith Relations and a senior tutor at Heythrop College and he taught Buddhism at the Pontifical Gregorian University.

**Dr Michael Barnes, Centre for Christianity and Interreligious Dialogue, Heythrop College, University of London:** This has been an enormously stimulating day which has found me scribbling down all sorts of reactions and reflections. I hope this brief comment will be reasonably coherent. I want to focus on just one point. One of the primary issues which has come up for me is how we go about forming people with the sort of values which will energise interreligious relations. I am always concerned not so much for religious literacy – I take that for granted – but more specifically for *interreligious* literacy, being able to reflect *intelligently and affectively*, to use the Archbishop's words, on the religious reality of our society today. Sometimes, as I think we noticed this morning, there is an insistence on what we hold in common; sometimes people shift attention to the differences, the more difficult issues which keep us apart. Both are important and have their place in any dialogue, but I would want to suggest that we need to concentrate more precisely on how the commonalities are configured in any particular situation.

Let me explain what I mean. What we share in common is faith – which I define simply as the 'conviction of meaning', that ultimately

life does make sense. That, I suggest, is a quality what makes us most deeply human. But we all configure that conviction in different ways – according to certain deep themes and values and symbols which, in an important sense, are cross-religious.

I give you just two examples. A course I have been running at Heythrop, a sort of glorified inter-faith discussion group, begins with three major themes – sacred places, sacred texts and sacred actions. We've made little films out of these discussions for wider distribution because – I think – they are good examples of how we can pierce behind the particularities of faith and share something at a deeper level.

My second example is a bit more theoretical. I owe it to a conversation held in the back of a bus travelling from Qom to Tehran. I was with my good friend Mohammad Shomali and he was trying to explain to me – as the bus screamed along the motorway narrowly averting disaster at various points – that Shi'a Islam is based on three main principles: rationality, spirituality and justice. Whether that is an adequate account of the Shi'a tradition I do not know. But it struck me at the time that the integration of those three principles gave a pretty good account of my own Christian faith. And maybe some version of it is to be found in other traditions.

Now I am not saying that such combinations, whatever their number, – and you will forgive a solidly Trinitarian Catholic like myself for thinking in triads – replace or exhaust our particular religious traditions. All I am saying is that such 'deep themes' are present in some way in all of them – and they can provide the



basis for meeting and reflection. As people of faith we need to find ways of listening for the resonances and echoes of the familiar, what we know, in the world of the unfamiliar.

The Jewish philosopher, Franz Rosenzweig, said that ideas always need to be translated, to find a home in another cultural world. Certainly I find that to be true of my own Christianity – that it only comes alive when it is communicated. Of course, communication is not just a matter of using words; it's about presence and example too. Whether we are concerned with multilateral or bilateral dialogues, we have to find ways of somehow piercing behind the familiar to speak about what is most important to us – and what we most desire to share.

**Bishop Tom Butler:** Now we will hear from Ramesh Pattni, who carries the brief for work on inter faith relations for the Hindu Forum of Britain. As part of his inter faith work, the Forum has been in discussion about the possible development of a Hindu Muslim dialogue in the United Kingdom.

**Ramesh Pattni, Chair, Inter Faith Committee, Hindu Forum of Britain:** I would like to offer a few perspectives. One is a personal perspective on my own experience in terms of inter faith encounter at the table of the Hindu Christian Forum which perhaps will give a sense of what I think is important in terms of inter faith dialogue.

Professor Rambachan came to lecture here, in this very room, I think, a year or so ago. I had a long chat with him about inter faith dialogue and one point he made is the importance in all inter faith dialogue of not forgetting the inner inspiration – what the Archbishop talked about as 'energy'. I think that energy is really about the inner inspiration we have which is rooted in our faith. The second point for me is the need for congruence of my faith and the expression of that faith when I talk with my neighbour or I talk at a meeting of the Forum. Am I being consistent in what I am saying and in what I am experiencing as my own personal faith?

The third point, which has been touched on in various different ways today by different speakers, is about the need for the courage to work at the edges of our discomfort. In dialogue there is going to be discomfort and tension. There is going to be anxiety. Am I willing to work with that tension and work at that edge which has been brought up in the inter faith dialogue? The fourth point is the capacity to hold a difference. In all types of encounters there will be difference, difference in terms of experience, in terms of thinking, in terms of feeling and in terms of action. Have I developed enough capacity to hold that difference so I can begin then to dialogue with it in an effective, creative and productive way?

So those are the four points, which I think from a personal perspective are important in terms of inter faith dialogue. I think it was Martin Buber who said that dialogue begins with two people having an open heart. That particular perspective is very important to bear in mind as well – having an openness of the heart and a willingness to listen and to be with the other in a right relationship, which is the only starting point for dialogue.

Let me offer some more general observations too on what we have been talking about and, in particular, from a Hindu perspective. The key challenge for any type of inter faith encounter is building trust and creating a safe space in which to engage in the dialogue, because, as the Archbishop mentioned, there is a tension between taking the risk of saying what I need to say and being able to confront what is going to be said. This can only work within a safe place and when the trust is there as a kind of container within which this dialogue can take place. Hindus involved in dialogue are all volunteers and so for us capacity building is one really important aspect of developing the dialogue, in the sense of building the capacity for it within the constraints of the organisational resources that are available. We need to take that into account. Someone mentioned one person going to seven meetings – we are really stretched in terms of what we have to do.



There is no doubt at all that there is a huge commitment by Hindus to dialogue. We have made a good beginning with the Hindu Christian Forum. It has had its ups and downs and we are learning through that process, but we have now started moving in the right direction, with the right kind of feelings about this initiative. As far as other faiths are concerned, we have begun a conversation with the Muslims, which we hope is going to lead to a formalisation of the process of having a Hindu Muslim dialogue. We also have had discussions about the idea of a *dharmic* traditions forum. Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs and Jains all have a *dharmic* orientation. We feel that it could be helpful if the *dharmic* faiths could come together and have a forum which could then begin to link with other faiths and organisations.

**Bishop Tom Butler:** Now I invite Ciara Wells, the Deputy Director of the Cohesion Faiths Division of the Department for Communities and Local Government, to offer her contribution. As you know, the Department published last July the document *Face to Face and Side by Side: A Framework for Partnership in our Multi Faith Society*. Many of our Inter Faith Network member bodies helped to shape that and it is of great significance now in shaping work on inter faith issues, particularly in England.

**Ciara Wells, Deputy Director, Cohesion and Faiths Division, Department for Communities and Local Government:** First of all, thank you for having Government represented here at this event. The inter faith framework that we published last year was a first foray into this territory for central government. We hope it has been a reasonable first step.

I would like to set out some reflections on how far central Government really does understand inter faith dialogue and the role of bilateral dialogue in particular.

The first point I have understood better from today is the value of the role of the national as well as the local. One of the accusations

addressed to the department which I represent, which is Communities and Local Government, is that we are ‘über-localist’ in our approach – that we understand communities through their local setting but perhaps do not always think about the wider national perspective and the role of national organisations as part of that. I have come away from today with a much clearer sense of that in my own mind.

Secondly, I have come away with a far greater appreciation of the role of bilateral dialogue as part of our wider inter faith dialogue and its uniqueness in enabling a more profound dialogue than is usually possible in a multi faith setting where dialogue can become little more than the lowest common denominator.

Thirdly, today has been a reminder for me that while, of course, religious organisations engage with each other institutionally, *dialogue* is essentially between individuals and collections of individuals and not between organisations, not between whole communities. Government has a tendency to speak in sweeping terms but we need to remember that when it comes to people sitting around a table, it is just that – it is individuals.

Finally, I understand more the importance of longevity in achieving meaningful inter faith relationships and meaningful bilateral dialogue. The best outcomes are not achieved in a moment, but require a long period of time and commitment.

One additional reflection is that Government funding mechanisms may not have always fully taken into account all that is needed to achieve depth in inter faith relationships. We have had a particular focus recently towards the local and towards multilateral rather than bilateral engagement. Also a lot of the time Government money, when it does arrive, tends to be available for a short time only. We are not going to fix all this overnight but I do recognise the weaknesses in what we do and the need to learn continually. I am very grateful to Chris Myant for pointing out that

actually funding is not everything. But it does, of course, matter to handle funding issues as effectively and appropriately as possible.

My final point relates to the Archbishop's comment that we must not forget that the central motivation for these relationships and these dialogues does not come from Government. You do not need Government to create the impulse for these activities. That does not mean that the Government does not have a role and a place in creating helpful conditions, through providing resources, including funding. But, ultimately, today is an important reminder to me that bilateral dialogue is not an instrument of social policy, but a process that comes out of faith communities themselves.

**Bishop Tom Butler:** Thank you very much. We would like you also, as Ministers come and go, to remind each new one that faith communities have been doing inter faith dialogue long before they arrived! Now, finally, Harriet Crabtree, the Inter Faith Network's Director.

**Harriet Crabtree, Director, Inter Faith Network for the UK:** I would like to take just a few minutes, first of all to say something about the Inter Faith Network's role in relation to today's topic of bilateral dialogue and, secondly, to offer some reflections on the discussions that we have had today.

The Inter Faith Network is a body which links a range of faith and educational and academic bodies and inter faith bodies and works with them to promote good inter faith relations. One of the ways that this happens is through programmes such as the 'Soundings' programme, looking at current issues in inter faith dialogue. Today's seminar is the first event in this programme and it offers a chance for an important corrective to the over-emphasis in a lot of public policy discourse on the multilateral. Multilateral engagement and dialogue are very important but the voice also needs to be heard of bilateral organisations, which are doing vital work in deepening understanding between

people of different faith traditions.

IFN has a particular role in helping people share good practice, lifting up the excellent work that people are already doing and helping people look for the gaps in this and to try to work even better together. The report on today's event will be widely circulated and not just to those who have come here. The points from it will help inform policy and thinking both within faith communities and in other organisations and I was delighted that the Equalities and Human Rights Commission were able to be represented here today, alongside Communities and Local Government and a range of other bodies.

I would like to reflect on some of the points that have come up today which have struck me. They are about bilateral dialogue and why it is so important. It is important, as has been emphasised by a number of speakers, because it is where people can have the deepest of the conversations. Deep conversation can happen in multi faith conversations too, but bilateral dialogues which are sustained and ongoing and well resourced are powerful tools for engaging people in a dialogue that can transform their lives and the life of their communities. In bilateral dialogue past and present problems can be tackled – not resolved necessarily – but at least discussed. We have heard this touched on a number of times today. Picking up the point that Sughra Ahmed made, they are also a place where people can develop real trust and friendships and that is significant in itself. But I would like to underline that I think it is not either/or – either bilateral or multilateral – nor is it either Abrahamic or Indic/Dharmic. We need a whole range of initiatives, just as are actually developing in Britain today.

I would like to touch briefly on some of the difficulties we face. A very basic one, mentioned earlier, is diary overload. The same people are called on to participate in ever greater numbers of inter faith projects and meetings. Most of you here can probably testify to this. You may be involved in Christian Muslim dialogue; you may be

simultaneously the person who has just started the Muslim Hindu dialogue in your city; and on top of that you may run a women's group. At the risk of seeming rather simplistic about this, could I ask people who are involved in at least three dialogues just briefly to raise their hand [*here about two thirds of participants raised their hands*]. That proves my point and probably many of you are involved in more than three. That is indicative of the fact that a great contribution is being made by people individually, but there is a challenge to widen the numbers of people involved.

I also would also like to touch on the vexed question of competition for funding. An issue which has not been spoken about today is the limited funding available in a context where there are quite a number of new initiatives as well as longstanding ones – all of which are looking for support for their important work. Sometimes one can find oneself in a situation where bilateral and multilateral initiatives are, locally at any rate, pitching for the same support. Or at national level, you can have several different types of bilateral initiative, all of which are going to be seeking similar types of funding from similar funders. There is a difficult issue here. I do not have an answer for this but I wanted to touch on the fact that we need to reflect on how this can accidentally sour relationships between people who are all of excellent intent and good will. We all of us work hard but sometimes circumstances can make us feel rather constrained. I do not want to appear too much concerned with the negatives but they need to be acknowledged and discussed.

Another issue is that of whether new initiatives are always what are needed. Yes, we need to encourage more bilateral dialogues. At the same time, one needs to bear in mind the complementarity of initiatives as well as the diary point I made earlier. Take, for example, a city like Leicester and consider the number of different permutations that one could have. If, for the sake of argument, you take nine faiths and you consider a two-way dialogue between each of them and what it

would take to orchestrate these – and to orchestrate multi faith engagement as well, you can see the challenges that can arise. I think there is a real need to reflect, in each city and town and at national level, how the different initiatives can best fit together.

It is also important to bear in mind those who feel left out of the party. I have also heard on the margins of today, as well as in the plenary and group discussions, a number of remarks along the lines of, "I feel that bilateral dialogue is hugely important. But let me tell you there is a bilateral dialogue in which we are not involved and they spend their whole time talking to each other. They should be talking with us too". That is putting the point in shorthand. The danger is that one develops accidentally what is seen by others as a set of exclusive friendships. I do not think that is the intention at all and I do not want to undercut the importance of bilateral dialogue, but I think we need to be mindful of this feeling of some being left out. Somebody made the interesting suggestion in the group I was in that there is perhaps a case to be made for all bilateral groups having occasional 'break out' or 'break in' sessions, where they invite somebody from another tradition in order to have those cross-cutting engagements to avoid bilateral dialogues leading people to operate in a sort of silo, spending their time principally on one joint bilateral relationship to the exclusion of others.

Those are some of the challenges. But I would like to return very strongly to the positives because I do believe that is in the two-way bilateral conversations that people develop over a long period of time that there is the space to develop an understanding of each other's traditions and to get the depth of engagement that leads people to be able to move towards much greater understanding. That came out for me today through the very powerful presentations made by people both in terms of national and local initiatives.

Practically speaking, given the significance of this area of work, which is enormous, how is one going to make it happen? We need to

think about increasing opportunities for bilateral learning and dialogue at all levels. as today's excellent presentations have indicated. We need to think about training for dialogue, training for bilateral engagement. When students go to university, are they getting the opportunities to get this training? If somebody goes to a theological training college, or an equivalent in a different tradition, how are they going to be trained?

There is a need to think about different schemes that can help bring people together at every age. Faith groups, clearly, have a key role to play. And schools are a good place for this encounter, through learning in school and in exchange visits. Also, there are issues about making the media more aware of the good stories of engagement between different traditions. To put in a plug here for Inter Faith Week, which is happening in England and Wales from 15 to 21 November (Scottish Inter Faith Week is the following week) – that will be a time for people to open their doors and a good place to begin new bilateral dialogues.

Lastly, coming back to the role of the Inter Faith Network. I hope that the wide circulation of the report from today will encourage further discussion, regionally and locally, and that there will be many new enthusiasts for bilateral dialogue, who will join those of you here today who are making such an enormous contribution to inter faith understanding through this vital route.

**Bishop Tom Butler:** Before the Archbishop offers his closing reflections, we have the opportunity for just a few questions to our panel.

**Prof Brian Gates, RE Council:** I think this is a question for all of them. It is a question for myself also. How do we make the 13 men on the wall laugh? [*The portraits of former Archbishops over the centuries hanging around the walls.*] That is the beginning of the question, prompted by Yann Lovelock's remark earlier today about the importance of humour. The rather solemn impression given by the portraits is sometimes the image that is

given by our faith communities to folks outside them. But we need to have an interplay and conversation, (with humour) both between religious people and with folks outside faith communities. Once upon a time, there was dialogue with Humanists but that has dwindled. I wonder whether we should not be bringing it back into the frame of bilateral conversations. There are, after all, many people who call themselves non-religious, but still live by a faith, albeit a secular one. I do believe that is an area that we neglect at our own peril, because it leads to the view that "religious folks are oddballs".

**Dr Harriet Crabtree:** The dialogue with Humanists is very important. It is not only bilateral inter faith dialogues that we should be looking at. The engagement of those of no religious belief by those of faith is very significant, and one of the Inter Faith Network's future 'Soundings' events will be looking at this. My colleague Brian Pearce, who is the Network's Adviser on Faith and Public Life, has particular responsibility for that area of our work. I would, though, somewhat resist the temptation just to limit this dialogue with 'non religious' people of belief and moral principle to Humanists, since that is the term given to those who self-identify as a particular grouping within the non-religious-belief strand. There is a broader question of the dialogue of people of faith, of religious people, with all those within society who do not hold religious beliefs.

**Sukhvinder Singh, Equality and Human**

**Rights Commission:** This links with the question which has just been put. The values of equality and human rights in terms of freedom, respect, equality and dignity, are ones to which everybody can sign up, religious organisations and non-religious ones. The important challenge is the application of those values in everyday life. It would be interesting to hear from the panel in terms of how they think we can move from signing up to those values to actually applying them in practice to help make society fairer. The Government talks about 'Britishness' and values. There are values, I think, that are

common to everyone, whether religious or not. But an important task for religious organisations is to take a lead on them.

**Dr Michael Barnes:** I do not have an answer to that one. What I am interested in is finding out where the values come from in the first place, because you do not have disembodied values. We need to explore the foundations of those values and what then gives people the energy which goes into their implementation. I think we are in danger, perhaps, of trying to sunder values, in the interests of trying to establish commonality, from the very specific ways of life, where they are lived out in practice. That is what we need to explore.

**Ciara Wells:** I think the application of those values is perhaps about creating space in which you can challenge those who you think are not doing this. This can only be done in safe settings that have been built up through long term quality dialogue between people of different faiths and people who have a religion and those who do not. You need to create a kind of setting in which the application of those values in difficult circumstances can be challenged and discussed in an open and frank way.

**James Kidner, Coexist Foundation:** I just want to pick up this point about the Humanists – and the Humourists, if you like. I think that we do ourselves a disservice if we underestimate the extent to which today's proceedings are a minority pursuit – indeed, almost a minority pursuit within a minority community. Because, first of all, as somebody said earlier, there is the challenge which comes to the building of bridges between faiths from those of your own faith who are nervous of such enterprises. There is also the wider problem, particularly in the UK, of building bridges between faith communities and secular society. I would ask the panel how big a challenge they see that as being. What is, if you like, the empirical data that they go on that tells them how big a chasm there is today between faith communities and the secular world?

**Ramesh Pattni:** Within the Hindu community, we find that there is a large proportion, especially of the younger generation, who may not be considered as practising Hindus. The relationship between the Hindus and the secular is a very important dialogue that needs to take place and some attention needs to be given to that.

**Ciara Wells:** I would claim that to some extent this is not an issue while in other places it is. What I am trying to do in my work with the Cohesion and Faiths Division in Communities and Local Government is to promote cohesion and good relations between everyone – those of different religious faiths, those of none, secular and non-secular. When you think about that in a local setting it makes a lot of sense, where those people live in the same community and share the institutions they use and the services that are provided for them. That provides a common ground for the debate about how we live together and what our shared values are. I think it gets more difficult when you move out of the local setting and talk about some of the issues that have come up today, which are involved in creating those relationships at national level, because there the question is, 'Who is the dialogue between?' and 'What is the bridge you are trying to cross?' The answer to engagement cannot always come back to the National Secular Society or the British Humanist Association, because they do not, in any meaningful sense, represent 'communities' of people in this country without religious belief.

**Dr Michael Barnes:** I was reading the other day about somebody who had visited this country and was surprised to find that people were talking about it as a secular society. He said, 'It is not a secular society, it is a pagan society'. That is a rather interesting observation – pagan in the sense that people have all sorts of belief systems, ideologies and cultures. How you deal with that is a very difficult question.

**Dr Harriet Crabtree:** This may be a minority pursuit within a kind of minority situation,

but that does not, as I am sure James Kidner was not implying, mean that it is unimportant. Today the focus has been very much on bilateral dialogues between faith communities and that is important in its own right. But I completely agree that one also has to be very conscious of the need to be in dialogue with people outside our faith communities. One cannot have a kind of digging of the ditch, as it were, between the 'holy' and the 'unholy'. That is not what these dialogues and these discussions are supposed to be implying. Therefore the questions are when, where and how does one build outwards to friendship and understanding between people who self define as religious and people who do not. Informally, it happens in society all the time through routes such as being at school together or in the same workplace. Formally, and in the context of dialogue, perhaps one needs to look at developing occasional and carefully focused dialogues with people who do not hold a religious faith – both on the part of particular faith groups and multilaterally. That is one reason that the Inter Faith Network is planning a 'Soundings' event on this. I think everybody here is aware of the importance of the issue. The question is how one actually begins such a dialogue and takes it forward when there is no institutional 'Church' of the non-religious. This takes us back to the Archbishop's point earlier that there are no exact equivalencies between the religious hierarchies. The same is true in the discussion with those who are, and are not, religious. This makes the dialogue more tricky, but it is ever more necessary, particularly given the increasingly aggressive rhetoric used, at times, in exchanges between the religious and non-religious.



# Closing reflections from Dr Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury

**Bishop Tom Butler:** During the day several people have quoted the Archbishop's opening remarks. Now it is time to benefit from his closing remarks. I remember, Archbishop, that when you were first appointed, you said that you hoped that we could find the words and images which would resonate with our society. That is not very different from what we have just been discussing. It will be very good to hear your closing reflections.

**Archbishop Rowan Williams:** I will just make one or two very brief observations, if I may, on those parts of the day's proceedings which I have heard. But let me say first of all that it has been a great privilege to sit in on this event and to have both public and private conversations during the day. I think it has been an important event and I am very glad indeed to have heard the comments that have been made in this final session so far. So let me just offer a thought about this last cluster of questions about our context that has come up. Secular or pagan? A very interesting question. One reason why I resist those who say "This is a secular society" is precisely the range of informal religious-related activity that still goes on around us. It finds it very difficult to find a home in classical, orthodox religious terms, but it is there, and I do not believe that we are, as a society, committed in the majority to a systematically non-religious view of the world. I just do not think that is true. It leaves us with all sorts of questions still open, but that is, I think, the truth of where we are.

This shows itself in other ways, of course, including the fact that people do still expect the classical religious communities to have something to say in public. People may not very much like it when those things are said,

but they nonetheless expect religious communities to be saying something, and this has come to the fore very much in the last few months in the context of the economic crisis. I was struck by one or two polls that suggested precisely that high level of expectation, and I think that is an implied recognition of a point which Michael Barnes raised in this last session, that values do not just exist in a vacuum. Values come out of traditions and communities, languages, affiliations, visions. They do not sit in mid air. In times of crisis, people sometimes become aware that they have perhaps been living off the fat of a heritage that they have not quite examined, and if they take certain things for granted about what justice, equity and welfare look like, and do not quite know why they are taking them for granted, there is at least something of a bridge, something of an open door through which all the classical historic religious communities can engage. I think we are actually at a very interesting moment in our cultural history, very interesting indeed.

I would want to underline the point about values. We hear a great deal about values and the values that we ought to adopt and the values that belong to being British. I have a slight inbuilt allergy to that language as it is frequently used, precisely because it is in danger of getting abstract and taking us away from communities of people who – verb not noun – value certain things, and give worth to certain kinds of behaviour, who have certain attitudes about human dignity and so forth. So there is a lot of conversation to open up there. How we find the contexts to do this is not always clear, but I would like to think that in the months and years ahead, our communities could, together, provide some kind of space for this to happen in localities



around the country. I think it is not an entirely idle dream to think of that.

I also want to go back to the question of what we need to do to make these faces round the walls laugh! I would venture a very bold proposal, which is that there is some intrinsic connection between religious commitment and a sense of humour. By this I mean that religious believers of whatever background and colouring have every reason to see themselves as absurd, in the light of a perspective so infinite, so overwhelming, so excessive and abundant and gracious that, in the light of that, anything we do and say and try to achieve becomes mildly ridiculous at best. I think that is a wonderfully liberating perspective. I think that a person of religious faith is at one level more wounded and engaged in the suffering and darkness of the world than many others are, and yet at the same time, more capable of living with a kind of freedom, and I wonder, in this age when we are looking at how we can escape from the various tyrannies of obsessiveness, acquisition and rivalry that dominate our world, if this is not a moment when people of religious conviction ought to be saying rather more than they have in the past, “Actually, it is possible to relax into the presence of the Divine”, not because the Divine is more soft and easy than anything else – quite the contrary, it is a terrible thing, says our scripture, to fall into the hands of the living God – and yet, to know to what one is committed, to whom one is committed, means not being vulnerable to the changes and chances of society or individual history and is to know the most important thing we can know about the Divine. That does convey, I think, in our society, a certain word of freedom, a certain word of the right kind of distance from the besetting, imprisoning anxieties that so many people inhabit. Maybe that is something we ought to be talking about a little bit more or maybe even demonstrating a little bit more.

So to go back to the very basis of our discussion today, the worst possible way in which we can approach inter faith dialogue is

anxiously. If we approach it hopefully and gratefully we shall be exhibiting, dare I say it, some of that ‘unbearable lightness of being’ which ought to belong to the person of religious conviction. All that has been said about the building of trust that goes on especially in bilateral dialogues, has quite a lot to do with that.

**Bishop Tom Butler:** I sometimes refer to a very long debate in the House of Lords when we were all wanting to go home and an elderly peer got up and said “Everything that could be said on this subject has already been said – but it has not yet been said by me!” You will be pleased to know that I am not going to fall into that temptation! Virtually everything that can be said on the subject of bilateral dialogue and how it fits with multilateral dialogue, and wider questions too, has been said in what has been a very rich and fruitful day. It just leaves it to me to give our thanks to the Archbishop for his two contributions (which drew on a good deal of reflection on these issues) and for making us so welcome here at his home; to all our speakers, workshop facilitators and participants; and to Harriet Crabtree and her Inter Faith Network colleagues for organising the day.

However much we involve ourselves in inter faith work, we get something fresh when we come to a day like this as I certainly have. So please, travel safely and travel well, and every blessing in your back home communities.

# Working group notes

**The following section records a range of points made in the course of the discussion in the five working groups.**

## Working Group 1

What are the ingredients of successful bilateral dialogues?  
How can existing bilateral bodies offer help/act as  
resources for new bilateral dialogues?

**Facilitator: Rev Peter Colwell, Executive Secretary for Church Life and Inter Faith Relations,  
Churches Together in Britain and Ireland**

In discussion the following points were made:

- In order to build good relations, it is important to learn to understand and respect the dialogue partner.
- Key principles that underlie successful dialogue are the importance of learning to respect the 'other' as they truly are and of seeking intellectual and spiritual depth and honesty.
- A 'dialogue with one's self' strengthens one's capacity to dialogue with others.
- Dialogue requires honesty and openness, which can lead to inner transformation.
- A tendency to excessive political correctness needs to be resisted in dialogue contexts where it can mean people are reluctant to ask the kind of questions which can lead to genuine learning.
- It is important to counter the over attention which is often given to negative developments in the faith and inter faith field.
- It is important to promote greater dialogue between those who have a religious faith and those who do not.
- Successful dialogue focuses strongly on common ground.
- Dialogue can be hampered when there is not a shared agreement about purpose and processes. It can be helpful to start out with a 'memorandum of understanding' or agreed guidelines within which the dialogue will take place.

## Working Group 2

Developing a strong pattern of bilateral dialogues at national and local level. Are new dialogues needed? What measures can be taken to encourage these? What may be the role of the Inter Faith Network and its member bodies in this?

**Facilitator: Hon Barnabas Leith, Director, Diplomatic Relations, Baha'i Community of the UK**

In discussion the following points were made:

- Bilateral dialogue is important, both for Abrahamic and non-Abrahamic faiths.
- The fruits of bilateral dialogue need to be shared with others and mainstreamed.
- There is a proper and helpful place for bilateral dialogue. But this can sometimes unintentionally lead to an 'exclusive' feel. Bilateral groups should have periodic 'break outs' – talking with other groups or inviting them to occasional meetings – to avoid freeze up.
- Groups involved with bilateral dialogues need to continue to play a whole hearted and effective role within their multilateral local inter faith structures where these exist.
- It is important to maintain continuity in dialogue in order to be able to build on what has gone before. This requires smaller and more committed dialogue groups.
- Dialogue is a process – not a product. It involves building up relationships. That is why projects like one bringing together imams and clergy in North Kirklees several times a year have particular value.
- Not all dialogue is the same – dialogue between academics or between local people in a particular neighbourhood are different in character.
- In a one to one conversation, it is possible to dig much deeper than in a larger group.
- It often is the same people who are involved in a range of dialogues. This can be overwhelming in terms of their diaries and it can also lead to a lack of new people becoming involved. There is a need to widen the circle of those involved in dialogue.
- Often, those involved in dialogue do not manage to convey effectively to their wider community what is happening in dialogue.
- There are issues of accountability to their communities of those involved in dialogue. How do participants in bilateral or multilateral dialogue feed back to their communities or draw new members into the dialogue?
- In some towns, there are effectively two major faith communities. There are usually also a number of other very much smaller faith groups. The latter are naturally involved in multilateral inter faith initiatives. But it can be artificial and unhelpful if every dialogue is seen as needing to include them. There will be issues which the two major communities need to discuss together on a bilateral basis.
- It would be helpful to carry out a 'mini audit' of what is needed in terms of dialogue in a particular area, in terms of both purpose and format.

- A positive outcome of dialogue is to identify dialogue which can be transferred elsewhere. It would be helpful for the Inter Faith Network to share experience of effective dialogue models.
- It can be valuable to have issue-based dialogue, but there can be problems where an agenda focuses heavily and repeatedly on contentious and difficult issues.
- There is a need to encourage 'neighbourliness' or informal dialogue between individuals.
- Conversation over a shared meal can be a fruitful format.
- People often feel more comfortable meeting in the context of a community centre, rather than inviting 'strangers' into their own home.
- The role of women in fostering dialogue is important.
- More attention needs to be paid to the dialogue between people who have religious faith and those who do not.
- The media have a tendency to see the 'Asian' community as a homogenous group rather than reflecting the distinctiveness of different strands.

## Working Group 3

### How do/should bilateral, trilateral and multilateral initiatives relate to each other, particularly at local level?

**Facilitator: Yann Lovelock, Inter-Faith Coordinator, Network of Buddhist Organisations and Birmingham Council of Faiths**

In discussion the following points were made:

- In a large city, there can be a range of different dialogue groups. It is important for people to know what options there are, and to share good practice. Multilateral activity can itself help to facilitate bilateral dialogue.
- Multilateral and bilateral dialogue (or dialogue between groupings with a shared heritage, eg Abrahamic or Dharmic) dialogue can complement each other, meeting different needs and being relevant at different points. It is not 'either/or' but 'both/and'.
- Even where there are strong multi-faith bodies in existence, there is often a need to supplement them with specific bilateral dialogue, whether on an ad hoc or continuing basis.
- There is a need to encourage more bilateral initiatives. It is not always the case that a dialogue needs to be multilateral. The need for a multilateral basis needs to be justified just as much as does a bilateral or trilateral approach.
- It is important to develop bilateral dialogue not only at national but also at local level. There are around 250 local inter faith groups on a multilateral basis, but only a handful of local bilateral organisations.
- With any dialogue there can be problems in maintaining momentum.
- The different purposes of engagement together, whether to explore the spiritual dimension of different traditions or to engage with public square issues, need to be borne in mind.
- It is important not to assume that one particular mode of dialogue is the only legitimate one.
- There is a need to have an appropriate organisational framework for the particular task in hand.
- Bilateral dialogue can create a sense of exclusion on the part of others, and it is important for those involved in bilateral dialogue to remain aware of the need to build good relations on a multilateral basis as well.
- Where bilateral or trilateral organisations invite people of 'other' faiths to be involved, this can be experienced in a negative way as ownership of the process is not shared.
- There is an important role for dialogue between the 'Dharmic' traditions of Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism and Sikhism.
- There can be problems when Government changes its approach to funding inter faith initiatives, particularly where there is less support for bilateral as distinct from multilateral initiatives.
- The funding process has been skewed by the emphasis on 'preventing violent extremism'.

- Government is not currently funding sufficiently bilateral, trilateral and issue focused national inter faith organisations. Relatively little is going their way in terms of resources compared with funding of local inter faith groups and regional faith forums through programmes like 'Faith in Action'.



## Working Group 4

Particular challenges of sustaining bilateral work, such as funding; continuing to engage relevant communities well; and handling the impact of social and political factors overseas and in the UK

**Facilitator: Brian Pearce, Adviser, Faith and Public Life, Inter Faith Network**

In discussion the following points were made:

- The impact of overseas events on relations in the UK has been an important factor for a significant number of inter faith organisations. The existence of long standing dialogue frameworks is of great value when there is a crisis.
- It is important for the potential impact on community relations in the UK to be considered when the Government is addressing foreign policy issues.
- The Government may be more influenced by an approach by communities acting together. But it may well be difficult to achieve a consensus across different faith communities. Indeed it may be difficult to secure a consensus within a single community. There is a need to be open about differences of view. It is important to recognise that individual faith communities are themselves not homogenous.
- Bilateral organisations cannot avoid the ‘political’ issues which affect relationships between two communities alongside encounter at a personal level. It is important to be honest about issues which are a crucial part of our identity, for example the commitment to Israel on the part of the Jewish community.
- It is essential to recognise what is important to your dialogue partner and where they are starting from in terms of both national and global issues.
- It is important at the outset to establish common ground, but there is also a need to identify what it is that divides us and to work on these issues too.
- It is important to start from talking about more straightforward issues and possible commonalities on topics such as environment or employment or international development before tackling more sensitive issues.
- There is a need to discuss openly issues surrounding questions of mission, proselytism and conversion and to recognise that conversion can create tension within inter faith contexts. For example, the baptism by the Pope of a Muslim convert caused damage to Christian-Muslim relations.
- It is sometimes not clear whether Government at national or local level wants to engage with faith communities because of the large number of people belonging to them, or because of the significance for society of the content of their religious traditions.
- Faith communities can help to raise consciousness on international issues. For example, in the context of the Jubilee 2000 campaign, they were able to harness energy from their worldwide contacts and awareness.

## Working Group 5

### Bilateral dialogue and engagement involving women and young people.

**Facilitator: Chris Farge, Council of Christians and Jews**

In discussion the following points were made:

- It is important to consider specifically inter faith activity involving women and young people. There is a risk that – in the absence of activities focusing on their involvement – they will feel marginalised.
- Those who feel marginalised need a space where they can come together. They can then more easily find their way into mainstream dialogue.
- In the case of dialogue involving young people or involving women, it is particularly important that the participants themselves have a sense of ownership of the initiative.
- Work with young people requires investment of energy and resources.
- There is a need to realise that youth work is done differently in different communities. There are not exact equivalencies – for example, within the Muslim community there are not equivalents to Christian youth groups. So participants in youth inter faith projects have to be identified via varying routes.
- Inter faith dialogue can help young people learn about their own identity.
- There is a need for a range of activities which bring together young people from different faith communities. It is often important to pave the way for these in conversation with parents and faith community leaders.
- Faith community leaders may be unwilling to give freedom to their young people to express interpretations of their faith which are seen as inadequately orthodox.
- There may be practical reasons for focusing on work with young people, for example, disturbances in Bradford some years ago underlined the sense of alienation on the part of young Pakistani men.
- In cases such as recent conflicts between Muslim and Sikh young men over allegations of attempts by Muslim youths to convert Sikh young women it may be that people are not ready or willing to take part in dialogue. It will take extra care and energy to open up conversations.
- Faith schools can be reluctant to promote exchange and dialogue between their pupils, although some are very committed to this.
- Good Religious Education has an important part to play in helping youth people grow in mutual understanding and schools can also have a valuable wider role in bringing young people together.
- The ways in which youth work is undertaken in the context of Christian churches and the Muslim community are different.
- Material on the internet exercises a great deal of influence on young people, sometimes with damaging consequences.

- Young people are often more interested in playing five a side football together or becoming involved in a theatre project than sitting down for earnest dialogue conversations.
- Dialogue needs to be project led, with concrete outcomes relevant to the contextual situation. It cannot just be an intellectual activity.
- Most members of faith community congregations are not interested in becoming involved in inter faith dialogue. It is important to find ways to get across to them the need for this. In the case of work with young people and women, this requires young people and women who are able to put across this message to their peers.
- Women's dialogue groups have an important role in developing human relationships, building up friendship and trust in ways which can be of value beyond the group.
- Initiatives with women can focus on common issues which unite women of different communities.
- With women it is about finding the time, language and confidence.
- Women's dialogues are often rooted in very direct human encounter – for example visiting each other at times of need or sharing stories of their lives.
- In all inter faith dialogue initiatives, there is a need for open, honest, trustworthy and transparent communication in order to create an atmosphere of authenticity and genuineness.

# Participant list

<i>Name</i>	<i>Organisation</i>
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<b>Mr William Chapman CVO</b>	Tony Blair Faith Foundation
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<b>Canon Dr Philip Lewis</b>	Diocese of Bradford
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<b>Mr Brian Pearce OBE</b>	Inter Faith Network for the UK
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<b>Moulana M Shahid Raza OBE</b>	Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board
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<b>Mr Andrew Smith</b>	Scripture Union and Christian Muslim Forum
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