



Plenary and National Meetings of the Inter Faith Network for the UK

1987–1998

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Inter Faith Network for the UK
1987 – 1998**



Content of this compilation

This compilation includes reports on Plenary and National Meetings of the Inter Faith Network for the UK (IFN) between the year of foundation in 1987 and 1998.

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Copies of National Meeting Reports from 1996 onwards were published with ISBN numbers, and hard copies were provided to the British Library and the other legal deposit libraries. Reports on National Meetings from 1999 to 2023 are also separately available as digital documents on the IFN website at www.interfaith.org.uk.

IFN's member body meetings

The first meetings of the IFN which brought together all its member bodies for discussion were called simply 'meetings'. From Autumn 1990, the term 'plenary meeting' was used for such meetings, and from 1994 onwards 'national meeting'.

The meetings featured presentations and discussion on particular topics. They were often, but not always, held on the same day as Annual General Meetings of the charity. In some years, more than one such meeting was held.

The Inter Faith Network closed in April 2024, and this compilation of early reports was published ahead of closure to ensure that the material in them remained available to the public, to inter faith practitioners, and to scholars after IFN's closure.

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About the Inter Faith Network for the UK

The Inter Faith Network for the UK was a charity founded in 1987 to “advance public knowledge and mutual understanding of the teachings, traditions and practices of the different faith communities in Britain including awareness both of their distinctive features and their common ground and to promote good relations between persons of different faiths”.

IFN was, from the start, a membership organisation, linking: national faith community representative bodies, national, regional and local inter faith organisations, and educational and academic bodies with a focus on inter faith or multi faith issues.

Across its 37 years, IFN worked with its member bodies and others including Government, and other statutory agencies and many other types of body towards: “a society where there is understanding of the diversity and richness of the faith communities in the UK and the contribution that they make; and where we live and work together with mutual respect and shared commitment to the common good”.

In addition to National Meetings, it also regularly held linking meetings for its different categories of membership, including for local groups in different regions. IFN also established national Inter Faith Week in England, Northern Ireland and Wales in 2009, drawing on the positive example of Scottish Interfaith Week, which had been led by Interfaith Scotland since 2004.

More about its wider work can be seen in its Annual Reviews and other publications which are available at <https://www.interfaith.org.uk/resources/publications>.

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NB: Only a summary of the 1993 meeting could be found on file at the time of scanning.

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Tolerance and Acceptance in a Religiously Plural Society

NOTE OF MEETING OF
THE INTER FAITH NETWORK FOR THE UNITED KINGDOM
ON MONDAY 23rd NOVEMBER 1987
HELD AT THE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS HOUSE,
229 GREAT PORTLAND STREET, LONDON W1

Welcome

1. Bishop Jim Thompson (Co-Chairman of the Network), (in the chair for the morning session) welcomed those attending the meeting on behalf of affiliated organisations, and in particular those for whom this was their first plenary Network meeting.

Appointment of Treasurer

2. Rabbi Hugo Gryn (Co-Chairman of the Network), on behalf of the Executive Committee, proposed the appointment as Treasurer for the Network of Mr Kantilal Shah, a Jain and a member of a firm of accountants in central London. Unfortunately, because of an unavoidable business commitment, Mr Shah was unable to be present but in the light of their earlier conversation together Rabbi Gryn could testify to Mr Shah's commitment to the Network's aims. His financial expertise would be of great value to the Network in the role of Treasurer and the Executive Committee was grateful for his readiness to make his services available in this way.

3. The meeting unanimously agreed to the Executive Committee's recommendation and approved the appointment of Mr Kantilal Shah as Treasurer for the Network.

4. At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr Brian Pearce (Secretary to the Network), reported on developments since the meeting on 9th March when the Constitution and the Resolution formally establishing the Network had been adopted. Following that meeting, 60 organisations and groups involved in the planning of the Network had affiliated to it as founder members. In the case of the Religious Education Council (which like the Network links a range of organisations) it had been agreed by the Executive Committee that mutual affiliation would be appropriate. The Network had been granted charitable status by the Charity Commissioners in late May and was publicly launched at a Press Conference, held through the kindness of Sir Sigmund Sternberg at the Reform Club in London, on 30th June.

5. The Executive Committee elected on 9th March had met on 13th May and on 16th September and was due to meet again on 18th January. Mr Charles MacDonald and Rev Kenneth Cracknell had resigned from the Committee. Following the retirement of Mr MacDonald as Secretary General of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahai's of the United Kingdom, his successor, Mr Hugh Adamson, had been co-opted to the Committee, as had Rev Clinton Bennett, who had succeeded Rev Kenneth Cracknell as Secretary of the British Council of Churches Committee on Relations with People of Other Faiths. It was with regret that news had been received of the death in Pakistan of Maulana Naqvi of the World Ahl ul-Bayt Islamic League (UK) who had been a member of the Committee.

6. It had been the aim to raise the sum of £150,000 to provide for an annual budget for the Network of around £50,000 for an initial period of three years. At the March meeting it had been reported that a little over £40,000 had been promised towards that figure and that some of this amount was dependent on the overall target being achieved. It could now be reported that a little over £130,000 had been pledged, leaving a gap of around £20,000 to be bridged. This was good news, but of this £130,000 only about £10,000 had come from the affiliated organisations themselves, whether by subscription or donation. Most of the funding had come from trusts and individual donors as pump priming for this new initiative. It would clearly be necessary to look very closely at the question of greater financial support from within the Network in the longer term if it was to continue its work beyond the initial three year period.

7. At its meeting on 13th May the Executive Committee had asked Mr Pearce to serve as Secretary to the Network for the time being and he had been very ready to agree to help in this way. At its meeting on 16th September the Committee agreed to seek a suitable candidate for the post of Resources Officer, and a notice had been circulated with the mailing distributed by the SHAP Working Party on World Religions in Education (a group affiliated to the Network) which went to some 3,000 addressees. Copies of the notice had also been sent to all affiliated organisations and groups, and a small advertisement had been placed in The Guardian. So far about 65 requests for application forms had been received. It was intended to interview shortlisted candidates in mid January. No office had yet been found for the Network located with a mutually compatible institution but one or two possibilities were still being explored. Any further suggestions would be very welcome. A decision about securing an office through commercial channels could be considered, if necessary, once the successful candidate for the Resources Officer post had been chosen.

8. Over the last months ten meetings in all had been held in different parts of Britain for representatives of local inter faith groups, both those affiliated to the Network and others which were less well established or less structured. These meetings had been held in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Leeds, Manchester, Wolverhampton, Leicester, Cardiff and London. As a result, informal links had been established between groups in Scotland; in Northern England; in the Midlands; and in the South Wales/Bristol area. A linkage for London and South East England would be discussed at a meeting towards the end of January. The Wolverhampton Inter Faith Group had hosted a most successful gathering of Midlands groups on 14th November attended by a number of Network members, including two of its vice chairmen. Further meetings of the informal link groups had been arranged for the first half of 1988. A number of people had been in touch with the Network about the possibility of establishing new local inter faith groups in their areas.

9. In concluding his report, Mr Pearce said that while in the Network we were only at the start of our journey together, the first important stage of establishing this new initiative in the consciousness of people interested in inter faith relations had gone well, and a solid beginning had been made. Today's meeting marked the start of the Network's substantive plenary meetings, and it was encouraging that so many people were attending it from across the range of its affiliated organisations and groups.

10. Bishop Jim Thompson, in thanking the Secretary for this report, said that he and his co-chairman, Rabbi Hugo Gryn, thought that it would be desirable to take steps to formalise Mr Pearce's position. He suggested that the Executive Committee should be invited to consider a more appropriate title (possibly Director) and engaging him formally on a half time basis with corresponding salary and expenses. While Mr Pearce had been reluctant to contemplate receiving any payment for his services, which would no doubt continue to be available to the Network on a virtually full time basis, it was important for the Network to establish itself from the outset on a realistic footing rather than accustoming itself to reliance on voluntary administrative support which would leave it in a potentially vulnerable situation. The meeting agreed to ask the Executive Committee to make mutually acceptable arrangements with Mr. Pearce on this basis.

11. There was no further Network business to be transacted before the main part of the day's conference began.

12. At this point Bishop Jim Thompson invited those present to share in a period of silence. There could be difficulties in using spoken words in shared reflection or prayer in a way which was adequately sensitive to differences in religious vocabularies. But it was possible to share in silence, in remembrance and in reverence for life. He invited those present to remember Maulana Naqvi, whose death in Pakistan had been reported; Bill Simpson, who had served as General Secretary for the Council of Christians and Jews for some thirty years and who had died recently; and the victims of the tragic fire at Kings Cross underground station, together with the injured and the families of the bereaved.

13. Bishop Jim Thompson then invited the meeting to turn to the theme for the day's discussion of "Tolerance and Acceptance in a Religiously Plural Society". Initially it had been planned to invite an outside speaker to give a key note address, but it had not been possible to arrange this so instead a panel of speakers with links with the Network had been invited to help launch the discussion. In many ways he welcomed this opportunity to make use of the Network's own domestic resources in this way. The four speakers would be addressing the theme from within their own religious traditions but would naturally not be claiming to speak on behalf of their communities as a whole. Rather they would offer some personal observations in the light of their own experience and reflection. It had been necessary to be selective in inviting speakers to take part in the panel, and not all the religious traditions represented in the Network were reflected in the panel itself. But there would be plenty of opportunity for other contributions during the day and on other occasions other religious traditions would no doubt be represented among the main speakers. The day's theme was an important one: there were at present tendencies in British society towards a more intolerant attitude towards minorities and it was important to find ways of articulating and proclaiming a vision of life together within a pluralist society. The discussion might help to identify particular issues which it would be useful for the Network to explore in more detail on future occasions.

14. Rev Roger Hooker (British Council of Churches Committee on Relations With People of Other Faiths) said that he spoke as a priest in the Church of England working in a multi faith community. This Church had for many centuries been deeply involved with the life of the nation. Twelve senior bishops sat in the House of Lords; before the House of Commons began its business each day prayers were said by its Anglican Chaplain; the nation's monarchs were crowned in Westminster Abbey by the Archbishop of Canterbury. In a number of ways, the links between the State and the established Church had become weaker in recent times. But the Church of England had held a dominating position over the centuries in national life and such a position could lead to a lack of understanding of what was being done from this dominating position to minorities. The time that he had spent with his family in India some years ago had helped to show him what it was to be a member of a minority for a change and had helped him to see the concerns of minorities in this country in a different way.

15. The values of the Judaeo-Christian tradition had been absorbed to a degree in this country and manifested themselves, for example, in the welfare state and the care of the poor and needy. Christians were sometimes too slow to recognise the extent to which their values did in fact derive from the Jewish stream within their heritage. Anglicans had also too often in the past denied "space" to minorities to be themselves. This was true not just of other faith traditions but also of other churches, whether Nonconformist or Roman Catholic, and members of those churches had suffered from various disadvantages in terms of public life, although most of those penalties and barriers had now been removed. There had in the past been an unthinking equation between the established church and public life.

16. It would be too patronising to suggest that the role of the Church of England today was itself to provide "space" for other religious communities: but it should be its role to do its utmost to see that that "space" was provided. We had to discover the riches of what we could offer one another within our national community. We had to be ready to "move our fences" to accommodate one another. This was not easy, because our fences were markers of our identity as we understood this within ourselves.

17. It was necessary also to be open about the fact that in its origins and in its teaching Christianity was a missionary religion. There was a great question for Christians today about the way in which they should discharge their missionary role. Some held to the traditional understanding of this; others, having looked at the way in which the power of Christians had been abused over the centuries in imposing the Christian faith on others, argued that the missionary role of the church should in effect be abandoned. A third group argued that it was necessary now to reinterpret this role in less threatening ways and to see it as requiring a mutual openness between Christians and people of other faiths as they pursued their religious journeys together. This internal Christian debate would no doubt continue, but it was a sign that the Church was struggling with the implications of its life within a world of different religious faiths and within a multi faith community in this country.

18. Rabbi Jeremy Rosen (Rabbi, Western Synagogue) said that in many ways he lived a life of two cultures which were often in conflict with each other. He was an Orthodox Jew who had received a liberal, secular education. He observed the requirements of his Sabbath scrupulously, with no travelling, no television, no electric light. Yet, when it came to the issue of Sunday trading laws he was in favour of total liberalisation, leaving it to individual choice without State interference. He held strong views on abortion but here too believed that individuals should be free to follow the dictates of their conscience. In his view the less the State interfered with individual lives, the healthier the position would be for minorities within a society.

19. The Jewish community had been expelled in 1290 by Edward I (who was not particularly friendly towards the Scots either!). Jews were not formally readmitted until the time of Oliver Cromwell. By the mid 19th Century there were some 40,000 in this country. Between 1850 and 1890 the number rose to 300,000 as a result of immigration, mainly from Eastern Europe. These immigrants suffered discrimination not only more generally but also at the hands of those Jews already here who had been assimilated to English society. The aim of the new immigrants was to seek the same assimilation as an escape from prejudice. But this attempt to submerge their true identity had been damaging to their integrity. By contrast, following the Hungarian Revolution in 1956 there was an influx of pious Hasidic Jews who were unashamedly themselves and made no attempt to hide their identity, for example by changing their style of dress.

20. Regardless of one's attitude to the state of Israel (and there were differences among Jewish people in their views on Israeli Government policies) its establishment following the horrors of the Holocaust, had helped to heal the wounds in the Jewish psyche and was a vital source for Jewish people of a renewed self confidence. Furthermore, the influx of other minorities into this country in the 1950s and 1960s taken together with the more general breakdown in cultural conformity had provided a context in which there was greater encouragement for Jews to live out their own identity within a more plural society.

21. One result of this greater self confidence within the Jewish community had been a shift in its attitude to education. In the 1950s only some 10% of Jewish children went to separate Jewish schools; the figure was now over 50%. It had been argued in the past that separate Jewish education would make it more difficult for its products to mix widely in society but in practice this had not proved to be the case. Indeed, separate Jewish schools often had more social contact with other schools in their area than there was between, for example, Catholic and Protestant schools in Glasgow or in Northern Ireland.

22. In his view, if religious cultures wanted to preserve themselves then they could not do this half heartedly. It was important for the handing on of a religious tradition for children to receive an education permeated with that tradition rather than a secular education with RE forming part, and often a sub-standard part at that, of its curriculum. However, schools could only work successfully in partnership with their children's homes, and without this mutual support the tradition could not be successfully handed

on. In his view, the possibility of real dialogue between the different faith communities and the prospect of genuine integration within a single overall society had to be grounded in a self confidence on the part of the members of those communities. An education firmly based within their own religious cultural tradition could provide that self confidence. At the same time that education must encourage children to respect the wider society within which they found themselves and to be ready to contribute to it from their own confident sense of identity. If his analysis of Jewish experience was correct there were clearly implications here for the newer faith communities in this country.

23. Dr Saeed (Lecturer on Criminal Justice in the University of London) said that Britain was clearly moving in the direction of a pluralist society and there were pressing questions raised by the day's theme about the way in which the different faith communities within that society related to one another. Society as a whole could be seen as a huge circle within which there were "sub sets" with their own identity and interactions. At what point might a particular sub set be perceived as being "contra cultural" in terms of the predominant community and culture? Was tolerance of diversity to be seen as a necessary evil or a positive virtue? Sadly, history was strewn with examples of particular groups being victimised because they had been seen as posing a threat in some way to the position of the predominant culture. More than mere tolerance was needed. It was necessary to recognise the rights and obligations of all members of society, including those of the next generation. The destinies of young people from all the communities represented in the Network were now linked within this country's future.

24. It was clearly important for the family to provide a framework of security and identity from which young people could learn to cope with the wider society of which they formed a part. The faith of Islam provided resources for this for the Muslim community. Islam spoke of the spiritual equality of humankind as a single creation and made it clear that God had left no community without a Messenger. Among other references on this theme Quran spoke of the diversity of religious traditions as being "watered from the same water". Within Islam there were three important principles: the transcendence of God, the unity of all creation and the consciousness of our destiny in returning to God to account for the way we had lived our lives.

25. It was important for us to seek a unity within our diversity and to build on what we had in common. In her view the media often put obstacles in the way of this by encouraging misunderstanding through offering damaging portrayals which built up negative perceptions of a particular faith. A recent television programme about Islam in the modern world had concentrated on negative images concluding with an image of a sword smashing a globe into pieces. The perceptions of many people in this country were derived from programmes of this kind. It was one of the important tasks of the Network to find ways of presenting people with opportunities for an honest understanding of one another. It also had to be the task of each community to do all that it could to try to ensure that its faith was correctly portrayed and interpreted. There were, for example, suggestions which needed to be countered that any attempt by Muslim parents to maintain an Islamic identity for their children was in some way threatening to other people. This was not

to say that there were not difficult questions about the way in which Muslim children should be educated to take their place within the society at large or questions about family relationships within the Muslim as other communities. But it was clearly unhelpful and damaging if partial and negative images were projected of a community which was seeking to make its own contribution to the wider society of which it formed a part.

26. Mr Indarjit Singh (Sikh Committee for Inter Faith Relations) suggested that there was a natural tendency to close ranks against the stranger and then to offer only a grudging acceptance. Prejudice and intolerance sadly seemed to be almost intrinsic to human nature. While the worst aspects of racism could be curbed through legislation and the work of bodies like the Commission for Racial Equality, such measures could only tackle its more overt forms. There was still an enormous amount of work to be done in dealing with the subtler forms of racism where legislation was of little help. We had to find ways of moving beyond a grudging tolerance and acceptance and the media had an important role to play in this in their presentation of different religious traditions and communities. Too often the newer faith communities were presented as being in some way eccentric or quaint without any attempt being made to explain the real meaning of different aspects of their traditions. On the other hand, we had to acknowledge that in this country we enjoyed much greater freedom of speech and less abuse of minorities than was the case in many countries overseas. We were, however, a long way from the ideals of the ninth Sikh Guru, Guru Tegh Bahadur, who suffered martyrdom as a result of upholding the rights of the members of another religious faith to worship in their own way.

27. In a fog, even familiar localities and objects could appear threatening: in a fog of ignorance of other religious traditions these could assume a frightening aspect. There was a need for more dialogue between the different faiths to disperse that fog. We had so much in common and so much to offer both one another and the wider community. The Sikh community in Britain was going through a difficult and critical period because of its concern over what it saw as the persecution of Sikhs in India. It was the duty of all Sikhs to ensure that the tensions within their community over the appropriate response to this situation did not spill out into problems for the wider community here. But equally there was an obligation on those who did not belong to the Sikh community to show sympathy for this community's problems. It was not only the Sikh community which had similar concerns over overseas events with which to wrestle. We had to try to understand the concerns of all the different communities and to appreciate more fully the links between these and their religious traditions.

28. There were difficult questions in deciding on the appropriate framework for education and the extent to which children should, at least initially, be educated within their own communities. But the task for us all was to observe the words of Shakespeare: "To thine own self be true, and it must follow as the night the day, thou can'st not then be false to any man". If we maintained the integrity of our own religious traditions and followed them correctly then we would be able to make a better contribution as

citizens of this country. We had to discuss together within the Network the issues which divided us, as we worked together to create a society to bequeath to our children which would be based on mutual tolerance and understanding.

29. Bishop Jim Thompson thanked the four panel speakers most warmly for their contributions. These had been most valuable in helping to identify particular issues within the broad theme.

30. Mr Pounj (Vishwa Hindu Parishad (U.K.)) said that he had been concerned earlier at the fact that there was no Hindu member of the panel of speakers and he was grateful to the Chairman for his explanation of the basis on which the panel had been chosen. Turning to the day's theme, there did appear to be obstacles to tolerance and acceptance within British society. Recently, a Church of England clergyman [in a debate in the Leicester Diocesan Synod] had said that he would prefer to see abandoned churches destroyed rather than handed over to other religious faiths for their use as places of worship. Statements of this kind were most unfortunate since they could suggest that talk of tolerance was not genuine and was not matched by attitudes and action outside meetings of this kind.

31. Within the Hindu scriptures the story was told that when the holy river Ganges issued from the feet of Lord Vishnu, the flow of water was held within the locks of hair of Lord Shiva until the force of the current was calmer and then the sacred flow was released onto the surface of the earth for humanity's benefit. The meaning of this story was that the initial flow of cosmic energy was so powerful that it would be destructive unless it was tamed and harnessed so that it could then be a blessing for mankind. Our religious commitment might at first take the form of raw emotion but then needed to be tempered by reason: otherwise it could remain a destructive and disruptive force. In the soil of the heart religious commitment had to be fertilised by wisdom. We needed to open our minds to reason if we were to escape from the cocoon of a blind faith and discuss matters without prejudice on the basis of pride and preconditioning. Then one day we would be better able to understand each other's way of life and viewpoint and to establish that harmonious and loving family of humanity on earth which God and his prophets in each community had so desired. Finally, he felt that he must object to the references which Mr Indarjit Singh had made to the persecution of Sikhs in India. In his view, it was not right to introduce political issues of this kind into the meetings of the Network.

32. Bishop Jim Thompson said that we all carried with us the hurts and pains of our own communities, both here and in more distant countries. We needed to find ways in which we could receive one another and listen to one another as we spoke from the situation in which we found ourselves.

33. Mr Rashid Siddiqui (Council of Mosques: UK and Eire) said that we were all engaged in the process of learning more about each other and the Network was an important new development to help us to this. We had to go behind the symptoms of difficulties to establish the causes of them. We had to be both good listeners and good examples: this would take a great deal of

patience. But we must also move beyond words to action to improve relations between our communities. We had to show concern for those who found themselves under pressure in various ways, for example in difficulties over securing places of worship for their community.

34. Mr Puri (Arya Pratinidhi Sabha (U.K.)) stressed the positive role which the Network could play in making a practical contribution towards improving harmony between people of different faiths in this country. From this process there could come a genuine tolerance. There would be setbacks and problems and these would always be highlighted by the media. But we had to recognise that the newer communities were here to stay in this country and that they wanted to make their positive contribution to British society as a whole.

35. Bishop Jim Thompson, in closing the morning's session, thanked all those who had contributed to it. It was clear that the Network would need to search together for appropriate ways of handling the difficulties which existed between different communities. It was important to be open about these problems and not simply to hide them under the carpet. Where we were dealing with the effects of difficult political situations overseas, these in themselves clearly went beyond the scope of the Network, but must realistically have a bearing on its deliberations when they deeply affected communities here and their perceptions of one another. It would be unrealistic to think that the Network could hope to solve all these problems, but it could perhaps help in facing them and finding ways in which we could none the less move forward together.

36. After lunch, the meeting dispersed into smaller groups to discuss the central theme including the various issues raised during the morning session.

37. The meeting then reconvened under the chairmanship of Rabbi Hugo Gryn, who invited the rapporteurs for each of the four groups to give a short account of the topics which they had considered.

38. Professor Bharadwaj (Arya Pratinidhi Sabha (U.K.)) said that discussion in the first group had underlined the need for each individual to be true to his or her own religion while having tolerance and respect for that of others. Excessive loyalty to our own tradition could make us intolerant but we had to accept that diversity was within God's intentions. There had been discussion of the appropriate approach to religious education in schools. There was some concern that younger children who had a wide range of different religious viewpoints put before them within a relatively short timespan might become confused. Perhaps multifaith religious education had more of a place at secondary school level, when children had greater maturity. It was important to be more aware of each other's attitude towards prayer and to explore the role which shared meditation might be able to play. The group had also discussed the relationship between religion and politics. Some had argued that it was important not to mix these; while others had suggested that the two could not be disentangled.

39. Rabbi Hugo Gryn, mentioned that the RE Council, the Standing Conference on Inter Faith Dialogue in Education and the SHAP Working Party (all of which were affiliated to the Network) planned to explore the collation, in consultation with faith communities themselves, and perhaps with the help of the Network, of suitable materials for use in secondary school assemblies.

40. Rev Anne McClelland (Richmond Inter Faith Group) said that the second group had spent some time discussing the issues raised by Rabbi Rosen and whether it was desirable for different communities to have separate schools of their own. It was recognised that "plural" schools did not necessarily create tolerant attitudes and the quality of religious education in them was not always what it should be. Perhaps it would help if the different faith communities themselves were involved more in its provision. It was to be hoped that members of the different communities would come forward for training as RE teachers. There had been mention in the group of the "rights of children" who might not want to receive the education being provided for them within a particular community if they found this too restrictive. There was also the question of the form of education for those who had no faith background. There was general agreement that whether children were educated within separate schools or not, it was most important that they should not be cut off from the mainstream of society. Education should aim at combatting racism and should avoid inculcating feelings either of superiority or inferiority. Perhaps attitudes within society at large were more significant for the atmosphere in which children were educated. Indeed, there was a perennial debate as to whether schools shaped society or society shaped schools. Certainly there was a need for teachers of religious education to be better equipped and for more time to be provided for religious education. The case for multifaith religious education needed to be made to the Government in the context of the present debate on the future shape of our school system. There had been discussion on the need to differentiate between religion as a basis for personal identity and for a "tribal" loyalty which encouraged a hostile attitude to people of other traditions. It was important to avoid using religion as a defence mechanism. All schools should try to give their children a sense of identity and self confidence. There had been some discussion whether it was preferable to teach "morals" rather than "religion", but arguably morality was a secondary, rather than primary, element in religious faith. Nonetheless, it might be useful for the Network to examine the ways in which our morality sprang from roots in our different religious faiths and the extent to which they shared common moral precepts.

41. Rabbi Hugo Gryn said that a delegation from the Religious Education Council would be meeting the Secretary of State for Education in a few days' time and would be able to emphasise the need for an adequate place to be given for religious education and the need to relate this to the requirements of a multi faith society.

42. Mr Rashid Siddiqui said that there had been a lively discussion in the third group on ways of contributing to an atmosphere of religious tolerance and acceptance in this country. One issue which had been raised was the difficulty which faith communities experienced in some cases in establishing places of worship with obstacles in terms of planning regulations and also local prejudice. It was important to tackle these

problems. The leaders of the different faith communities perhaps did not do enough to encourage less divisive attitudes at lower levels. Mutual ignorance between the different faiths was an obstacle to understanding and it was important for people to learn more about one another. The media had an important role here: too often there were deliberately distorted presentations for the sake of sensationalism rather than acceptance of a need to promote harmony. Perhaps the Network could help through contacts with the media in various ways. There was a need to strengthen relationships at the social level with more interchange and friendship between people of different faiths. It was important for the Network to be able to make available basic information on the different faiths and the different faith communities to help this process of contact and mutual understanding. The Network might perhaps also carry out case studies of areas of dispute between different faiths and could encourage the work of local inter faith groups. The need was for action and not just words.

43. Father Gordian Marshall (Standing Conference of Jews, Christians and Muslims in Europe) said that in the fourth group there had been some discussion on how far those present at the meeting were truly "representative" of their faith communities. They were there as representatives of affiliated organisations and groups but clearly could not, as individuals, reflect the full spectrum of opinion within the different faiths. Those who were committed to dialogue and who saw value in a pluralist society were to some extent themselves a minority and it was important for those involved in meetings of this kind to help feed back into their communities and organisations the kind of sensitivities which they were helped to develop. It was necessary to work at two levels, building mutual trust between the different faith communities and working within them at changing attitudes and encouraging more openness. This required a high level of commitment on a personal basis. There was a need to foster situations where we could explore relationships in a loving and accepting way and to search for a basis on which we could be ourselves without detriment to others. We carried a great deal of "baggage" with us and certainly there was a good deal of intolerance within the "baggage" of Christians. It might perhaps be worth exploring the drawing up of some "code of conduct" for inter faith relations.

44. The group had looked at the difficulties which could be caused as a result of the links between communities here and other communities overseas within the same religious tradition. These links established expectations and obligations. Quite often the same events would be reported very differently in different countries and misunderstanding and misinformation could spread as a result. It seemed to be most important to tackle those areas where we could give or take offence. Quite often we were not aware of the impact on other people of what we were saying and doing. In an organisation like the Network it was important to be ready to point out to others when offence was being given, as this was part of the learning process. It would be more honest and helpful for us to bring problems to the surface rather than hiding them. Perhaps it would be possible within the Network to do some work on the causes of offence including, for example, stereotyping which was hurtful as well as inaccurate. But we also had to be conscious that we could be too defensive and too ready to take offence. Many people held back from becoming involved in interfaith relations for fear of making mistakes and we had to support one another in a caring way. We had to be aware of each other's

sensitivities. This was true, for example, in the problems over the transfer of abandoned churches, where there could be a sense of failure on the part of the local church community which was intensified if another community took over the building from them. More generally, the Network could do a great deal to help in promoting patient dialogue and increased understanding.

45. Rabbi Hugo Gryn thanked the four rapporteurs for their accounts of the discussion in their groups. A significant number of themes had emerged which could be pursued within the Network and it would be necessary to establish priorities. He suggested that the Executive Committee should be invited to look at this. It was also clear that there was material which the Network should start to produce when the Resources Officer was in post. The Network might also have a role in inviting member bodies to tackle specific needs in their areas of interest. He invited further discussion in the time remaining within the closing session.

46. Mr John Hay (Nottingham Inter Faith Council) said that he was a Roman Catholic and a school teacher now working in a multi faith school, although he sent his own children to a Catholic school. He hoped that his grandchildren would go to a pluriform school. He therefore understood in a personal way the tension between the desire for the security of separate schooling and the promise which a common educational framework offered. He knew that in his own area, if separate Muslim schools were established and Muslim children were withdrawn from his school, that school would be sadly impoverished as a result through the loss of the contribution which they were making to the life of the school. We perhaps needed to gain the confidence to move away from separate educational provision. Arguably the problems in Northern Ireland had been exacerbated by separate schooling. However, within a common educational framework, religious education had to be taught on the basis of providing information and helping to dispel prejudices rather than on a confessional basis. It was most important that religious education was not marginalised within our educational system.

47. Father Gordian Marshall said that his own experience within the Roman Catholic community suggested that the experience of separate schools was a mixed blessing. There was a risk that religious education could become a cinderella subject within a faith community school because of the stress on the academic side in an attempt to demonstrate its educational credentials.

48. Mr Vashist (Vishwa Hindu Parishad (U.K.)) said that we all came to meetings of this kind with preconditioned views. We needed to escape from our cocoons and be open to truth from all quarters. Rabbi Hugo Gryn observed that we were inevitably creatures of our home, our education, our country, and our background: we should not attempt to shed our own identity so much as learn to listen to others and hear what they were saying, and to appreciate the depth of feeling, of passion and sometimes of hurt which lay behind this. We needed to develop a heightened sensitivity in our dealings with one another.

49. Mrs Ivy Gutridge (Wolverhampton Inter Faith Group) said that she heartily endorsed this. She knew how easy it was for us to hurt one another, not only in what we said but in the "body language" which we used. We could use expressions thoughtlessly which hurt other people, without reflecting on what we were saying and there were sad instances in the media of this.

50. Bishop Jim Thompson said that we must bear in mind that a voice which had not been heard in our discussions was that of those within the host community who felt their identity threatened by the concept of a pluralist society and feared that it put their own heritage at risk. We had to listen to these concerns and to respond to them in a caring and sensitive way by demonstrating the richness which could come from acceptance of the place and role of the different communities within British society today.

51. Rabbi Hugo Gryn, in closing the meeting, thanked all those who had taken part in it and particularly the panel speakers and rapporteurs and those who had planned and organised the day. We had gathered a rich harvest of experience, ideas and suggestions on which to reflect. The success with which the Network was able to tackle the tasks in front of it would be directly proportionate to the degree of trust which it was possible to build up over time between its members.

52. It was agreed, after discussion, that it would be appropriate to convene two plenary meetings of the Network in the course of the year and that the Executive Committee should be invited to arrange the next meeting for a date in the early summer of 1988.

1988 (Summer)

The Concept of Inter Faith Dialogue

NOTE OF MEETING OF THE INTER FAITH NETWORK FOR THE UNITED KINGDOM

ON THURSDAY 26th MAY 1988

HELD AT THE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS HOUSE

229 GREAT PORTLAND STREET, LONDON W1

Welcome

1. At the start of the plenary meeting which followed on from the Annual General Meeting of the Council of the Network, Rabbi Hugo Gryn welcomed as guest speaker Professor Bhikhu Parekh, formerly Vice Chancellor of the University of Baroda, India and currently Professor of Political Theory at the University of Hull and Deputy Chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality. He said that in this last capacity the different minority communities of this country in particular owed Professor Parekh a great deal for his work on their behalf.

Address by Professor Bhikhu Parekh

2. Professor Bhikhu Parekh has prepared an edited and revised text to stand as the written record of his address and it is this, rather than a transcript of it as delivered which is attached at Annex A.

Discussion

3. Rabbi Hugo Gryn expressed warm appreciation to Professor Parekh for his address and for sharing his convictions so clearly and invited questions and comments.

4. Mr Hayim Pinner referred to the Christian-Jewish disputations in the Middle Ages as an interesting parallel with those between the Christian missionaries and the Hindu pandits which Professor Parekh had described. It seemed to him that it was right for us to ask our own questions where these related to our own concerns providing that we recognised at the same time that others had different questions. As has been said, what hurts others also hurts us. He underlined from his own experience the need for different faith communities to make their views known to Government and more widely. Silence might be taken to imply consent: democracy is about majorities and minorities and the counting of votes. It was important for communities to make representations where they had concerns: politicians were affected by the weight of their post bag on particular issues. He referred to the concern of the Jewish community over the limitations of the 1976 Race Relations Act in dealing with instances of "group libel".

5. Professor Bhikhu Parekh said that he agreed that it was mutual exchange and mutual respect that lay at the heart of inter faith dialogue: we would often want to reformulate each others questions to relate them to our own categories of thought and experience. He referred to the recent invitation by the National Council of Gujurati Organisations to a representative of the Board of Deputies to speak to them about Jewish experience in this country as a useful occasion for the exchange of experience between different communities. The CRE were at present examining further the issue of group libel.

6. Sri Akhandhadhi das drew attention to the debates which had taken place within the Hindu tradition itself and the extent to which different strands within it had different concepts. A monotheistic concept of God has existed within the Vaisnava tradition of Hinduism from time immemorial. It is not a recent derivation. In some ways the Vaishnava tradition had more in common with Christianity than those strands of the Hindu tradition which Professor Parekh had stressed in his presentation. He drew attention to the concern of some people at the suggestion that dialogue seemed to necessarily involve transformation or an evolution of one's ideology and asked what advice he could give to those who were apprehensive of interfaith dialogue for fear that their own faith would be undermined.

7. Professor Bhikhu Parekh agreed that as in other traditions there were different strands in the Hindu tradition: he had focussed on the content of dialogues which took place with the Christian missionaries. It was possible to restrict dialogue to the exchange of information without undertaking the creative experience of trying to enrich and deepen one's own tradition in the light of the experience and insights of others. But in his view, every great religious leader had taken this risk and their greatness lay in the new insights which they had gained as a result of their transforming experiences and their being open to the insights of others. However, it was important for dialogue to take place on the basis of an equality of respect and there were difficulties in this if the relationship was one of domination of one party by the other. True dialogue required both parties being ready to relax with one another, offering each other autonomous space to be themselves and a dominant culture had to be generous and allow other traditions room to develop. He instanced the dialogue of Islam in Persia with other cultures. It was, however, always possible to break off dialogue at a point where we found ourselves threatened if, for example, the dominant culture were not prepared to respect one's autonomy.

8. In response to other questions, Professor Parekh suggested that "isms" did not appear until the early 19th century and marked a shift to seeing religions as ideologies and sets of beliefs. The early Christians simply thought of themselves as followers of Christ rather than as believers in something called "Christianity". Some religious traditions had an ethnic base (eg. Judaism, Hinduism); while others which had moved out from their original community base to proselytise (eg. Christianity, Islam), did so on the basis of abstract universal principles which they expected everyone to share. For ethnic religions it was not a question of changing one's beliefs but of changing one's community. There could be an element too of cultural aggrandisement in "missionary" situations. He welcomed the dialogue in this country which the Network sought to foster and which could prove a very creative one.

9. Rabbi Hugo Gryn thanked Professor Bhikhu Parekh once more for his contribution to the morning session and said that it had underlined the need for mutual trust and for a relationship in which participants in dialogue did not seek to score points off one another. One could take risks with people one trusted. While the Network itself was not a statement making body, it was important for the faith communities represented at the meeting to heed Professor Bhiku Parekh's invitation to them to make their contributions to public debate on the issues before our society. In an open and plural society silence was not as good a policy as considered response to issues of concern to us. He looked forward to a creative and continuing relationship between Professor Parekh and his work at the CRE and the development of the Network's role.

10. After lunch, the meeting dispersed into smaller groups to discuss themes from the presentation in the morning session.

11. When the meeting then reconvened under the chairmanship of Bishop Jim Thompson, he invited the rapporteurs for each of the three groups to give a short account of the topics which they had considered.

12. Mr Om Parkash Sharma said that the first group had examined the question of representations to central government and other public authorities by the Network. It had concluded that the policy should remain one of not making public policy pronouncements, but rather that individual affiliated bodies should seek support from one another through the links and guidance which the Network could provide in putting forward their concerns. The group had also looked at the role of the media and the need to find ways of bringing influence to bear on the way in which the different faith communities were presented. There was a need for the Network to look at its own communications and the ways in which its activities were made known, both within affiliated organisations and more widely. The talk by Professor Bhikhu Parekh had been much appreciated and it was hoped to have addresses by speakers of comparable quality on future occasions.

13. Sister Daphne said that the second group had begun with a series of personal introductions and had shared reactions to the morning session which had been very positive. The group considered that we needed to pursue our own questions but also to recognise that others had different questions. The process of dialogue helped us to see how we were perceived by others and to learn more about ourselves. We must not make assumptions about other people and other traditions too quickly: we needed time to get to know one another. It was important not only to be aware of differences but also to focus on common ground. Inter faith work demanded both mutual trust and time. The group hoped that the Network would encourage more coming together between people of different faiths and greater mutual understanding and knowledge. There was scope for published material and for seminars. There was a role for experts and leaders in dialogue, but it was also important that "ordinary people" met to share their faith and there was a need for a

more women and younger people in the Network. The role of local inter faith groups was most important, for example in exploring common symbolism in relation to water and light. There was concern about the compatibility of efforts at conversion with genuine respect for each other's faith. The Network was at an early stage and it was important to begin by building mutual trust so that it was possible to draw more people into its work and also to make it possible to tackle more delicate issues. Religion and politics could not easily be separated and it would be important to have an open agenda for the Network's own discussions although the question of precisely what kind of public role it might play needed further thought.

14. Mr Mohsin Jaffer said that his group had noted the limited range of participation at present in local inter faith groups, perhaps because people feared that their faith might be compromised if they got too deeply involved in dialogue. It was important to involve more religious leaders in inter faith relations, so that others within their communities would be encouraged to take part themselves. There was often a language problem, because some leaders were not fluent in English, but it should be possible to help them take part with assistance from others from within their communities. It was important to find ways of involving the different faith communities more in the life of society. But the Network should guard against undermining inter faith relations through attempting to take up collective positions on difficult political questions, although political disagreements should be acknowledged in Network meetings and not hidden. The Network could perhaps publish or identify material helping people to understand each other's faiths. Although differences had to be respected the stress should rather be on the degree of common ground between the faiths.

15. Bishop Jim Thompson said that a number of themes had emerged from these presentations. The first was the whole question of the role of the Network in relation to political issues and the way in which conflict between the different faith communities (and within them) was to be handled. It was important for the Network not to be too "cosy" but to face reality and not to limit its agenda to the easy items. A second theme was the need to emphasise the positive aspects of inter faith relationships in looking for common ground and stressing the contributions which the different faith communities could make to society. A third theme was the area of communications and the need to examine how to use the limited resources of the Network to best effect to meet the considerable expectations of it.

16. In discussion, the following points were made:

- (a) The Network could discuss social and other issues while leaving it free to individual affiliated organisations how they wished to pursue them subsequently, having had the benefit of that discussion together. An attempt to achieve a single voice on specific issues could be counter productive and damaging to the Network's capacity to play its role in building bridges between the different communities;

- (b) There was a distinction between the agenda for the Network's own meetings and the extent to which it espoused a public role in relation to particular issues. It might be preferable for any public pronouncements by the Network to be confined to general principles such as the suggested "code of practice" on inter faith relations rather than attempting to tackle specific issues, but there was a difference, too, between an expression of concern and the commendation of a specific solution to a specific problem. It was important, however, for the Network not to claim to speak on behalf of others when it would be preferable for them to speak for themselves;
 - (c) There was a problem in tackling overseas issues, e.g. concern over reports of forced conversion to Christianity in Fiji. There were many different overseas situations in which the Network might in theory make representations. Its value could be lost if it tried to play the role of a pressure group and it could prove difficult for it to retain a wide range of affiliated organisations if it took up specific stances in particular cases.
 - (d) It might be helpful at plenary meetings to build in specific provision on each occasion for some reflective presentation from a particular faith perspective so that there was a sharing of the resources of the different faith traditions.
 - (e) It was important to share awareness of work which had already been done in the inter faith field and which might be built on more widely, e.g. the work of the Council of Christians and Jews. There was also relevant material from overseas, for example on Hindu/Muslim dialogue. It would be useful for the Network to build up a collection of resource material, although cost might prevent the establishment of a major library. It should at least be possible to prepare listings of relevant material which could be provided in the form of pamphlets. In any presentation of material on the different faiths themselves, there would be a problem in securing acceptance of these presentations by the communities themselves as a whole: but it was important that at least the mainstream of a community endorsed the picture that was given of it.
17. Bishop Jim Thompson, in closing the meeting, said that a number of useful points had been made which the Executive Committee would no doubt wish to examine. He thanked those present for their attendance.
18. The meeting closed at 4.15 pm.

THE CONCEPT OF INTER FAITH DIALOGUE

by Professor Bhikhu Parekh

Deputy Chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality
and Professor of Political Theory
at the University of Hull

A paper based on an address to a meeting of
The Inter Faith Network for the United Kingdom
on 26th May 1988

For a variety of reasons too complex to discuss here, our age is characterised by two contradictory religious tendencies. On the one hand there is the rise of religious fundamentalism, not only in the developing nations of the so-called Third World but also in the developed nations of the West including Britain and especially the United States. By religious fundamentalism I mean not a return to the fundamental or original principles of one's religion in order to draw inspiration and guidance in meeting the new challenges of one's society, a perfectly proper and understandable activity common to all religions in all ages, but uncritical adherence to, and intolerant imposition of, certain arbitrarily selected principles of one's religion on the society as a whole. At the same time there is also a refreshing attempt to enter into a dialogue with other religions in a spirit of humility and mutual respect. The dialogue is at present confined to small groups of well-meaning people and remains fragile and tentative. Since I greatly welcome it, I would like in this lecture to explore its nature and presuppositions and inquire what it means, how it is possible and why it is necessary.

A dialogue is only possible under three conditions. First, it presupposes that each participant recognises others as his equals, not in the substantive sense of being equally good but in the formal sense of being capable of contributing to and benefiting from a dialogue. Unless one admits that other religions are also religions, that is, not mere bundles of misguided superstitions but 'genuine' or 'proper' religions like one's own, one cannot take them seriously enough to wish to enter into a meaningful discussion with them. Second, dialogue presupposes a shared concern and a common language of discourse. Unless those involved are interested in asking common questions in a mutually comprehensible language, they cannot avoid talking past one another. It is, of course, true that dialogue deepens and expands the range of common concerns and helps evolve a shared vocabulary. However it can do so only if those involved inhabit a common intellectual universe and are interested in asking, and have the intellectual tools to ask, common questions. Third, dialogue presupposes that the participants are unique beings capable of forming their own thoughts based on their unique experiences and have something to say to each other. If they think exactly the same thoughts, each can only repeat and reinforce what the others say, and a dialogue between them is neither possible nor necessary. A dialogue therefore requires patience, an open mind, a willingness to listen and to suspend judgement until one has made every attempt to understand others in their own terms. Prejudice or prejudgement rules out exchange of arguments and views and forecloses dialogue.

A dialogue properly so-called is difficult even for open-minded individuals discussing mundane matters; it is especially so for organised religions or what are loosely called faiths. A religion claims finality and is ill at ease with others making similar claims. Being based on faith, it is also uncomfortable with the rational process of dialogue. Since it is generally self-contained and self-sufficient, it has answers to all its questions and is unwilling to entertain different answers let alone new questions. Not surprisingly interfaith dialogue has inherent limits. It is a dialogue between faiths not between theories, and cannot be a dialogue in the same sense as a scientific or a philosophical dialogue. It cannot be entirely open-ended, and is intended not so much to refute and convert as to explain and understand and hopefully to learn. To expect more of it is to misunderstand its nature.

I

I said earlier that a dialogue is only possible under certain conditions. In their absence there can only be an aggressive confrontation. This was clearly evident when Christian missionaries were given the freedom to propagate their faith in India in the third decade of the nineteenth century. Christianity had long known Judaism and Islam. Although critical and even tolerant of them, it had no difficulty accepting them as 'proper' religions. Hinduism was different. Missionaries were convinced that a religion properly so-called must have a monotheist conception of God, a prophet, a book revealing the will of God, a trained priesthood and an organised church. Since Hinduism did not satisfy any of these conditions, they insisted that it was not a religion at all and poured unmitigated scorn on it. It was, in their view, a crude mass of superstitions, polytheist, lacked 'refined religious sensibility', and deserved to be condemned and consigned to the growing dustbin of history. Missionary criticisms generated little-noticed public debates between Christians and Hindu pandits, from which the former earned little.

When the missionaries asked Hindu pandits if they believed in one God or many, the latter replied that the question was blasphemous and absurd. Even as colour, gender, height, size and such other qualities did not apply to God, the quantitative categories could not be applied either. He was both one and many, yet also neither. To insist that He must be one was to reduce Him to the limited proportions of the human mind and thus to detract from His dignity. Furthermore the question was predicated on the unsubstantiated assumption that God was a being or a person. If He was conceived instead as power or energy, the question made as much sense as whether air, energy or light was one or many. The Hindu pandits, many of whom were trained in the formidable Buddhist logic, went on to argue that since the entire universe was regulated and pervaded by God, everything in it was divine or God-like. There was therefore nothing improper in calling it a god, a limited manifestation of the supreme God, and using it as a way of reaching up to Him. Even the Christian view that the human soul represented a spark or a particle of God implied that every man was a god or god-like being.

When missionaries asked the Hindus to show them their Bible, the latter asked why divine self-revelation should be unique and exhaustive. Different historical epochs posed different problems and had different needs, and therefore God revealed Himself in each historical epoch in a manner suited to it. When asked to name their prophet, Hindus again rejoined that rather than send His son or representative, God periodically came down on earth Himself. When asked why they had no church, they again replied that religion was ultimately a matter between a believer and God and require no mediation, and that believers were free spontaneously to assemble to offer prayers without there being a formal church or trained priesthood.

Since the Hindus felt threatened by the proselytising Christianity backed up by the overwhelming secular might of the empire, they too took little interest in Christianity. They knew that any criticism they made of their religion or the slightest appreciation they showed of their ruler's religion would be used against them. While some were courageous enough to enter into a dialogue, others reciprocated missionary intolerance and arrogance. They rejected the Christian conception of God on the grounds that it was relativistic and blasphemous, the former because it defined Him from the narrow human point of view, the latter because it reduced Him to the proportions of the human mind, attributed human emotions to Him and detracted from His majesty. In their view the Hindu conception of the impersonal Brahman was free from these defects and infinitely superior.

Hindu critics were not much impressed with other aspects of Christian thought either. The concept of suffering God was unacceptably anthropomorphic and emotional. The doctrine of vicarious atonement violated the ideas of personal responsibility and just desert central to the Hindu doctrine of Karma. Crucifixion detracted from divine omnipotence and omniscience and involved an element of moral and religious blackmail. The concept of mediation between man and God was logically and morally unnecessary and a likely source of much religious corruption. The idea that Jesus was the sole mediator was arrogant and impertinent and the source of Christian intolerance. The figure of celibate, naturally innocent and unworldly Jesus bore no relation to the struggles of ordinary men and women and left them without a meaningful model. In this respect Rama and Krishna who led ordinary lives and showed how to cope with moral dilemmas and temptations were better. Being at the receiving end of imperialism, Hindu leaders could not avoid commenting on the political role of Christianity. They could not see how a religion of love and peace could acquiesce in acts of inhumanity and brutality, sanction wars, even offer prayers for the victory of the state and remain politically subservient.

Once the British consolidated their rule and used all the resources of the state to denigrate Hinduism, Hindus lost their self-confidence and many of them began to mimic Christianity. They turned Krishna into their equivalent of Christ, singled out the Gita as their Bible, defined Brahman as extra-cosmic God, defined it as a creator of the universe rather than an all-pervasive principle of intelligence inherent in the structure of the eternal universe, created church-like organisations in the form of the Ramakrishna Mission and Arya Samaj, and so on. Such Christianisation of Hinduism led to considerable distortion and destroyed its authenticity. Our concern here, however, is not to trace the changes Hinduism underwent under colonial pressure but to uncover the narrow assumptions underlying missionary criticisms. Missionaries approached Hinduism with a narrow and dogmatic conception of religion and were simply not prepared to admit that a religion could be structured differently. They mistook the familiar for the normal, and the latter for the natural, and made the all too familiar mistake of

absolutising their historically contingent form of religious consciousness. That is, they turned their facts into others' values. Furthermore they kept asking Hinduism their questions. And when they found that it had no or at any rate not easily intelligible answers, they dismissed it as intellectually shallow. They never had the patience and humility to listen to its questions and explore its answers to these. Not that they were wrong to ask questions developed within their religious tradition. Rather, they were wrong to think that these alone were worth asking. They were prepared to admit that their questions could have different answers, but not that other religions could ask different and equally legitimate questions. Such an approach foreclosed the possibility of a dialogue.

II

Interfaith dialogue might be inspired by two related but different impulses. First, it might spring from a desire to understand other religions, to explore how and why they arrive at their distinctive conceptions of God, religion, the universe, man and his duties, and to foster respect for them. Second, it might be inspired by a desire to learn for them, to acquire new insights, to deepen one's spirituality and enrich one's religious sensibility. Although the two approaches are related, for understanding and learning cannot be easily separated, they have different origins and consequences. In the first approach one seeks to understand others, but does not use that understanding better to understand and critically evaluate one's own religion. A dialogue in the second case has a different thrust. It springs from a search for critical self-understanding, from the recognition of the fact that no religion is perfect and represents total truth about the nature of the divine, from the realisation that self-understanding is inseparable from sympathetic understanding of others. In such a view others do not remain separate but become a part of oneself, and one's dialogue with them becomes an integral part of one's dialogue with oneself. In the first case interfaith dialogue springs from tolerance and mutual respect; in the second, a spirit of critical self-understanding and a willingness to look at oneself from the standpoint of others.

If I had to look for an example of a religious man genuinely engaged in the second kind of interfaith dialogue, I would point to Gandhi. I choose him not because he was the only man in history to engage in it, nor because he was the most sophisticated, for he was neither, but because he is known to most of us and I happen to know more about him than about the others. He struck up close friendships with Jews and Christians in South Africa, lived with them on his communal farm and made a close study of their scriptures. He went to South Africa to serve a Muslim patron and had close Muslim friends. And being a Hindu deeply influenced by the three great Indic religions, he had read widely in Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism.

For Gandhi every major religion articulated a unique vision of God and emphasised different features of the human condition. The idea of God as a loving Father was most fully developed in Christianity, and the emphasis on love and suffering was also unique to it. As he put it, "I cannot say that it is singular, or that it is not to be found in other religions. But the presentation is unique". Austere and rigorous monotheism and the spirit of equality were "most beautifully" articulated in and peculiar to Islam. The distinction between the impersonal and personal conceptions, of God, the

principle of the unity of all life and the doctrine of ahimsa were distinctive to Hinduism. For Gandhi every religion had a distinct moral and spiritual ethos and represented a wonderful and irreplaceable "spiritual composition". To a truly religious man all religions should be "equally dear".

Gandhi argued that since God was infinite and the limited human mind could grasp only a 'fragment' of Him, and that too inadequately, every religion was necessarily limited and partial. Even those claiming to be directly revealed by God were revealed to men with their fair share of inescapable human limitations and communicated by them in necessarily inadequate human languages. To claim that a particular religion offered an exhaustive or even definitive account of the nature of God was to imply both that some men were free from inescapable human limitations and that God was partial, and thus to be guilty of both spiritual arrogance and blasphemy. Since no religion was final and perfect, each greatly benefited from a dialogue with others. Gandhi did not think that the purpose of inter-religious dialogue was to distil their common or complementary insights and create a new and higher universal religion. Rather its purpose was threefold. First, it cultivated humility, enabled each religion to understand the others better, and encourage them to feel relaxed enough to assimilate from them whatever it found worth accepting. Second, it enabled each to understand itself better and to appreciate both its uniqueness and similarities with the others. Third, it lifted each religion above the superficial level of beliefs and rituals, deepened its spirituality and enabled it to catch a glimpse of the 'eternal religion' lying beyond all religions.

Since Gandhi believed that all religions charted the identical spiritual terrain from different directions, he thought that they had much to say to each other. Accordingly he made it a practice to read passages from different religions at his prayer meetings and encouraged his followers to make a 'reverential' study of their basic texts. When he was reading the New Testament with the students of Gujarat Vidyapith, there was a public protest. He replied:

I regard my study and reverence for the Bible, the Koran and the other scriptures to be wholly consistent with my claim to be a staunch sanatani Hindu ... My respectful study of other religions has not abated my reverence for and my faith in the Hindu scriptures. They have broadened my view of life. They have enabled me to understand more clearly many an obscure passage in the Hindu scriptures.

Gandhi found the idea of religious conversion profoundly irreligious and offensive. In his view it rested on three false assumptions. First, it assumed that a particular religion represented the final truth. We saw earlier why Gandhi considered such a view incoherent and blasphemous. Second, conversion consisted in changing a man's beliefs and assumed that religion was solely or primarily a matter of belief rather than conduct. Gandhi rejected this view of religion on the ground that God was interested in how a man lived and related to Him and other men, not in what he believed. Third, conversion assumed that all men had identical moral and emotional needs so that what was good for one was necessarily good for all. Gandhi thought that such an assumption violated the central fact of human uniqueness.

For Gandhi every man was born into a particular religion. Since no religion was wholly false, he should be able to work out his destiny in and through it. And if he felt attracted to some aspects of another religion, he should be at liberty to borrow them. Gandhi could not see why a man should ever need to give up his religion. That situation only arose when a religion was mistakenly understood, like the modern state in whose jealously guarded territory no-one may settle without first giving up his old citizenship and acquiring a new one. When Madeleine Slade wished to become a Hindu, Gandhi advised her against it. She should, he insisted, live by her own faith and absorb into it whatever she liked in Hinduism. Merely changing over to a new religion would not improve her conduct or way of life, the only thing that ultimately mattered. When they were overwhelmed with doubts, Gandhi encouraged his Christian friends to draw new inspiration and strength from their own religion. An American missionary, Stanley Jones, spoke for many of them when he said that Gandhi had reconverted him to Christianity. In a different context he told his Jewish friend, Mrs Polak, that she need not 'become' a Christian in order to 'be' one. She could draw inspiration from Jesus' life and teachings and live like a Christian without ceasing to be a Jew. Hinduism gives its adherents an amazing degree of freedom to believe what they like so long as they conduct themselves in a socially required manner. Since the connection between belief and conduct is therefore looser and logically different from that in almost all other religions, like most Hindus Gandhi had great difficulty understanding the phenomenon of religious conversion and the way changes in belief sometimes transformed conduct.

For Gandhi a truly religious man should aim to live at three levels, representing increasingly higher forms of spirituality. First, his own religion was his necessary starting point, and he should endeavour to live by its central values. Second, he should respect, enter into a dialogue with and assimilate from other religions whatever he found valuable. Third, he should eventually seek to go beyond all organised religions and practise the 'pure' religion in which prophets, priests, images, beliefs and rituals were all transcended. Gandhi's own religious evolution followed this pattern. He was born and for a time lived as a Hindu; he later generously borrowed from other religions and enriched his own; over time he evolved and practised a religion bearing a strong resemblance to what he called 'pure' religion. His first Christian biographer summed up his religious thought well:

A few days ago I was told that 'He is a Buddhist'. Not long since a Christian newspaper described him as a Christian Mohammadan, an extraordinary mixture indeed. His views are too closely allied to Christianity to be entirely Hindu, and his sympathies are so wide and catholic that one would imagine he has reached a point where the formulae of sects are meaningless.

Gandhi practised what he preached and evolved a religion of his own, which was Hindu in its inspiration and basis but borrowed many an insight of other religions. Like a multilingual novelist skillfully playing with words and images drawn from different languages, he borrowed ideas from different traditions, all of which he regarded as part of his common human heritage, and produced ingenious combinations, some unstable, some beautifully integrated, but all fascinating.

He took over the Hindu concept of non-violence, found it passive and negative and turned to the cognate Christian concept of love to help him understand and redefine it. He realised that being an emotion, love compromised the agent's autonomy and built up attachments to the world, and so he redefined it in the light of the Hindu concept of anasakti or detachment. Gandhi's double conversion, his Hinduisation of the Christianised Hindu concept, yielded the two fascinating concepts of a non-emotive, serene and detached but positive and active love, and a non-activist life of action. Although the concepts contained tensions, they were highly suggestive and beyond the reach of either tradition alone. Again, he took over the Christian concept of vicarious atonement, combined it with the Hindu practice of fasting as a penance and a form of moral pressure, and arrived at the profound notion of fasting as a form of voluntary crucifixion undertaken by a moral leader to atone for, redeem and uplift his temporarily deviant followers. Neither the Christian nor the Hindu tradition had or could by itself have developed such a concept. Gandhi did similar things with such concepts as the state, law, freedom, morality, action, property, nation, religion and rights. In each case he set up a creative dialogue and sometimes an imaginative confrontation between the relevant traditions, and not only combined what struck him as their valuable insights but also occasionally generated wholly new concepts. Even when his 'discoveries' were unconvincing, his intellectual and moral 'experiments' were invariably stimulating.

III

Interfaith dialogue represents an important step in the right direction. As of now it remains a fragile plant and could be easily snuffed out by the powerful forces of religious and political fundamentalism. It needs to be patiently nurtured, and that requires several things of which I wish to stress three. First, organisations like yours provide the necessary protective space for such a dialogue and need to become stronger and more widespread. Second, a new generation of men and women more hospitable to interfaith dialogue needs to be raised. This means that the spirit of interfaith dialogue should inform and permeate the teaching of religion in our schools. Third, interfaith dialogue remains abstract and formal unless constantly tested in and strengthened by concerted actions on common issues. There are many issues both in Britain and in the world at large on which no religious man can afford to remain silent. It is easy to get excited about such global issues as world peace and apartheid which require little sacrifice and courage. It is far more demanding to take a stand against our immigration policy, racial discrimination, social and economic inequalities and injustices and the pervasive spirit of selfishness and intellectual and moral intolerance that gravely damage the lives of thousands and about which one can really do something. The real test of the sincerity of interfaith dialogue lies in whether those belonging to privileged and dominant faiths are prepared to stand up, and, if necessary, sit down, on behalf of the less privileged 'children of God'.

1988 (Autumn)

Faith Communities and the Media

NOTE OF MEETING OF THE INTER FAITH NETWORK FOR THE UNITED KINGDOM

On Tuesday 22nd November 1988

Held at the International Students House,

229 Great Portland Street, London W1

Introduction

1. Rabbi Hugo Gryn (in the Chair) welcomed those present and invited them to observe a brief period of silence at the beginning of the meeting. At his invitation Mr Paul Weller (Resources Officer) drew attention to the sample copies of the nearly complete draft of "The Inter Faith Network Handbook": a copy of the final version would be sent to each affiliated organisation and additional copies could be ordered at £2.50 each. With only one or two exceptions the material for the handbook was now complete and he expressed his thanks to those who had supplied contributions for it.

The Faith Communities and the Media: The Press

2. Rabbi Hugo Gryn said that the purpose of the main programme for the day was to explore the way in which faith communities and their affairs were presented in the media, the expectations of the faith communities themselves in this respect and the difficulties which those involved in the media experienced in going about their task. It was most important for the faith communities to be able to communicate with the rest of society their aspirations and their vision. It was therefore good to have this opportunity to explore with representatives from the world of the press (and later of the world of broadcasting) a mutual exchange of concerns and experience and to understand more clearly the practicalities and constraints in this field. He welcomed warmly the four panel speakers.

3. Mr Andrew Brown (Religious Affairs Correspondent of the Independent) said that, apart from major stories and "scandal" items, coverage of religious news was mainly confined to the "quality" press. The subject matter of "religious" stories was often remote from the workaday interests of the news desk and it was not always easy to get space for them. It also had to be remembered that journalists frequently had to work to a tight timescale: a church document might take years in preparation but then have to be summarised in a couple of hours in 500 words. There was an unbridgeable ideological divide between the secular press and the positions of fundamentalist religious groups who would therefore not find their affairs reported on the basis of shared assumptions. Moreover, when "religion" got into the papers it was often in terms of religious conflict in different parts of the world so perhaps the less that "religion" was reported the better! From the point of view of the press (as distinct from the point of view of the theologian) God was of interest because people were interested in Him. The principle of selection at work was therefore in strict terms "irreligious": it was based on a secular rather than a theological perspective. The kind of assumptions which operated would be clear in terms of the handling of an issue like abortion. An individual who believed that abortion was murder might well feel justified in taking even violent steps against abortion clinics and might be surprised that the press would deal so calmly with

the deaths of so many foetuses each year. Yet it would be a commonplace assumption in the press that any changes in the abortion laws had to be pursued within the normal political process and there would be little sympathy shown for any one who took violent steps in pursuit of their anti-abortion beliefs. It was perhaps right to assume that the press was on the whole antithetical to specifically religious viewpoints: it operated within a secular framework. The task of a religious affairs correspondent lay in seeking to "translate" the concerns and aspirations of faith communities for the benefit of a largely secular readership. If faith communities were concerned about the way in which their affairs were presented in the press, it was important for them to realise that personal contact and a willingness to be open in an honest way were important in securing proper reporting. But it was not possible to bridge the gap completely between the world of the press and the world of the faith communities and indeed it was perhaps as well that the press should maintain a detailed and critical stance.

4. Mr C.B. Patel (Editor and Publisher of New Life Publications) said that, as a Hindu born in India and living in England, he could not be entirely objective in his view of the way in which the press treated the newer faith communities in this country. For example, one national daily recently chose as its offering on a large Muslim prayer meeting a photograph of a little boy yawning. Did this really provide its readers with an adequate sense of this event? Other papers had managed to convey this much better through a less perverse choice of photograph. Had the press generally reported adequately the current difficulties over planning permission for the Hindu Temple at Letchmore Heath? Was it not about time that Hansard reporters and journalists in this country knew how to spell Diwali? At New Life staff from different faiths were employed and it was important to have a balanced reporting team. The Asian community had made a real contribution in recent years to life in this country and Mr Enoch Powell's dire predictions of the 1960s had been proved wrong. It was important that the press dealt sensitively with issues of concern to the Asian community. The aim of the tabloid press was to sell as many copies as possible but this was a short sighted goal in terms of society as a whole. While the tabloids would often be unhelpful the quality press could well do more to influence those who were opinion formers and who carried authority within society. It was important for it to speak up on the side of tolerance and fairness. He pointed to the degree of tolerance in India which, for example, had no record of anti semitism although there had been synagogues there for two thousand years; where out of 35 cabinet members, 5 were Christians; and where festivals of different religious faiths were observed as national holidays. In Britain there were many areas of concern to the different faith communities ranging from problems of planning permission for places of worship to the framework for religious education and for education more generally. The development of multi-faith syllabuses in schools could do a lot to help in promoting mutual understanding: it was sad that negative stories about this development received more coverage than positive accounts of what was being done in this respect. It was most important for the press to avoid stereotyping people of different faiths and cultural backgrounds: too often, for example, Islam was presented only in terms of Middle Eastern politics. It was important for the press to do all that it could to promote respect for all religious traditions in this country.

5. Mr Lawrie Simpkin (until recently Executive Editor of the Leicester Mercury) spoke about the work of the provincial and local press. He took pride in his profession, certainly in its work outside London, even if he might have less pride in working in some areas of Fleet Street and Wapping. Clearly there was a distinction to be drawn between serious journalism and newspapers which were primarily in the "entertainment" business. But the public, as had been said, tended to get the press that it deserved. Religion was often seen as being divisive rather than a force for good and there was a reluctance in some quarters to acknowledge the contribution which the newer communities in this country had made and were making to its life. The different faiths had good products but were poor salesmen. It was important to pay attention to the kind of image which was offered. Any organisation would take time over the appointment of a chairman, secretary and treasurer but would neglect the need for it to have someone of competence carrying responsibility for public relations and communications. If public relations were to be handled satisfactorily it was necessary to appoint someone to undertake this task who was not too busy with other matters; was sufficiently senior to have access to people at the top of the organisation, particularly in handling any emergency; and was therefore able to speak with authority and promptly before any particular story got out of hand. It took time and resources to get over stories which the media could and would use: the material had to be simple and well presented. At local level many newspapers were very ready to make use of good stories if these were offered to them and it was important to build up contacts with the local press so that there was a fund of good will which could be drawn upon if and when problems arose. It was important to develop an understanding of how the media worked and of what material was wanted and when: as in other areas it was impossible to overemphasise the value of good personal relationships. There were journalists within the different faith communities whose experience should be invaluable if it was properly used in helping the communities present themselves properly to the outside world. If the faith communities wanted a better press then they themselves had to work at this in a determined and professional way.

6. Mr Kenneth Morgan (Director of the Press Council) emphasised that at present the role of the Press Council was a purely voluntary one. Its task was to try to harmonise in practice the legitimate demand for a responsible press with the desire for a free press and this was not always an easy balance to strike. The Press Council operated in the uncertain terrain between law and freedom: what you should do but were not obliged to do. In other words it was concerned with ethics rather than law and did not have sanctions at its disposal. The membership of the Press Council was drawn equally from the world of the press (editors, proprietors and journalists) and from the general public. Six new appointments from the general public would be announced the following week: over 1000 nominations had been received from which this half dozen had been chosen. As it happened, two of these came from ethnic minorities, one from the Asian community and one from the Afro Caribbean community. At present, broadcasting was conducted under licence from the State but the press was not a licenced press and there was relatively little special "press law". There were statutory Press Councils in other countries. It would be interesting to see how matters developed here, although it was difficult to see how workable sanctions could be applied by law whether in terms of fines (which might have little effect) or of periods of suspension (which could be a dangerous slippery slope towards press censorship). At present an implicit deal was struck under which

there was a free press and the price paid for this was some degree of irresponsibility. But as the degree of irresponsibility increased then the price of freedom might begin to look too high. In dealing with complaints, there were five "I's" of concern to the Council. First was inaccuracy. This was still the most frequent complaint and the Council distinguished between deliberate and malicious inaccuracy which was inexcusable; reckless inaccuracy where there was inadequate care taken to check the story: and other cases (which were the most common) where the paper had tried to provide an accurate report but had made errors unintentionally in which case there was no sin unless the paper refused to correct its mistake. The second was irrelevancy which included, for example, the use of references to colour or race in a prejudicial context where this was not directly relevant to the story. This was a particular area of difficulty in terms of the perpetuation of stereotypes both in the written word and in cartoons and it was an area where there had been particular difficulty in terms of friction between the Press Council and journalists. The third area was inflammatory reporting. There was no requirement (as with the broadcasting authorities) to maintain an overall impartiality or neutrality. Newspapers were often highly partial: when did this partiality become inflammatory? The fourth area was intrusion into people's private lives. There was no law of privacy so individuals could not sue over intrusion but the Press Council believed that privacy should be expected except where private actions affected an individual's suitability for their public role and were therefore a matter of legitimate press interest. The fifth area was of investigative journalism. Instances here might include a story about a new religious movement which might feel that an investigative report had dealt with it unfairly. Here the remedy might be to require a newspaper to provide an opportunity for reply, but this was not always easily arranged. The worlds of the tabloid and of the quality press were different and some of the "rougher" tabloids presented the most frequent problems. But it had to be noted that they were the papers which sold far more than the others. So, for society as a whole to be hypercritical of them involved a degree of hypocrisy: as long as particular styles of paper sold there would be people to produce them.

7. Rabbi Hugo Gryn thanked the four panel members for their lively and informative contributions. He was well aware of the problems of dealing with the more irresponsible press. A malicious story could cause pain to an individual, his family and his community, even if it was inaccurate, and any legal process against a newspaper was long and costly, and the newspapers themselves had insurance policies to cover their costs. Not only did many people buy the tabloid press, but many respectable firms advertised there! He invited comments and questions.

8. In the subsequent discussion:-

(a) Mr Puri (Arya Pratinidhi Sabha) spoke of the need to counter the impression that religion was in essence a negative force and a source of conflict rather than being concerned with the fostering of harmonious relations. He asked about the way in which communities could deal with reports which brought them into disrepute. Mr Simpkin said that it was important to act promptly over any inaccurate or unfair story and ask to see a senior representative of the paper quickly with a request that the report should be corrected. At local level at least, newspapers

wanted their reports to be accurate. One role of a public relations officer could be to monitor the media, including local correspondence columns and phone-in radio programmes with a team on which he could draw for contributions, responses and rebuttals where necessary. Mr Morgan said that it was always desirable in the first instance to take an issue up with the newspaper concerned and to turn to the Press Council only if this failed to produce satisfaction. He drew attention to the problems which could arise in the handling by the press of disputes within a community and in adjudicating on complaints arising from these.

(b) Mr Walter Schwarz (Religious Affairs Correspondent of the Guardian) underlined the difficulties of securing coverage for "straightforward" religious stories; not surprisingly the press, like its readership, became more interested when differences and confrontation were involved. In addition, the news desk was more likely to focus on stories involving the more "established" Christian and Jewish traditions. It was important for religious leaders in other communities to speak out about religious, and not merely civic, issues if they wanted to be reported in these terms. There also seemed to be an unwillingness on the part of some religious leaders to be critical of their own communities: a greater willingness to be self critical would lead to their contributions being taken more seriously.

(c) Mr Eric Moonman (Board of Deputies of British Jews) said that it was clear that it was too much to hope for adequate and thoughtful reporting of religious affairs in the tabloid press, but that was no reason for not complaining when they overstepped the mark. The local provincial and evening press were much more willing to play a positive role and it was also important to look at ways of developing and improving the journals and other publications of the faith communities themselves. Perhaps there was room for an inter faith publication with a wider circulation aimed at countering the prevailing negative images of the faith communities and relationships between them.

(d) Mrs Jessamine Hoskins (Richmond Inter Faith Group) asked about the extent of feedback on articles and stories. Mr Brown said that he had only a very limited picture of the responses of his own readership through a limited number of letters and telephone calls. Perhaps more feedback would be helpful. Mr Indarjit Singh (Sikh Committee for Inter Faith Relations) suggested that what were often described by the media as religious wars resulted from the misuse of religious traditions as a source of conflict: religion at its best did not teach enmity. While India had been quoted as a tolerant society, it had to be borne in mind that there were problems there as well, for example in relation to mosques and gudwaras if not synagogues. Perhaps just as the public got the press it deserved, religion got the image it deserved. Too often religious communities did seem to be obsessed by internal bickering and conflict and paid insufficient attention to the kind of positive image which they needed to project. Unfortunately, in the face of a free press, the rich could protect themselves against misrepresentation much better than could the poor. Perhaps some more significant sanctions were needed to enforce higher standards. Mr Morgan said that it was important to pursue justified complaints. At the same time a complainant should always be ready

to reflect on whether he or she might be mistaken. It was perhaps some comfort that critical stories about religious communities and leading members of them were at least often predicated on the unspoken assumption that the ideals of those communities required better behaviour from them than did the standards of the secular world.

9. Rabbi Hugo Gryn said that it had been most valuable to have this opportunity for shared reflection on the reporting of the faith communities and their affairs in the press and a good deal of useful practical advice had been offered. There might be issues which could usefully be further explored by the Executive Committee and it was no doubt a topic which would remain on the Network's agenda. Meanwhile, he thanked the members of the panel for taking time from their busy lives to be present on this occasion, for which the membership of the Network was most grateful.

10. The meeting then adjourned for lunch.

The Faith Communities and the Media: Radio and Television

11. Introducing the afternoon session, Bishop Jim Thompson (in the Chair) said that at a time when the recent White Paper had proposed far reaching changes in the structure of broadcasting in this country it was most helpful to have a chance to share with a distinguished panel from the world of radio and television their reflections on the role of broadcasting in relation to the faith communities and their affairs.

12. Rev John Newbury (BBC Radio: Editor Religious Programmes) (who had kindly substituted at relatively short notice for Rev David Winter, the BBC's Head of Religious Broadcasting) referred to the three aims of the BBC's religious broadcasting. These were:

- (i) to seek to reflect the worship, thought and action of the principal religious traditions represented in the UK, recognising that those traditions are mainly, though not exclusively, Christian;
- (ii) to seek to present to viewers and listeners those beliefs, ideas, issues and experiences in the contemporary world which are evidently related to a religious interpretation or dimension of life; and
- (iii) to seek also to meet the religious interests, concerns and needs of those on the fringe of, or outside, the organised life of the religious bodies.

The first aim had originally referred only to "the churches" and had been broadened at the request of the BBC's Central Religious Advisory Committee, reflecting a growing awareness of the multi faith dimension of British society. In the BBC's radio output there was a distinction between "committed" and other material. Broadcast worship fell into the first category. There was no question of prayers or sermons being "impartial" or "neutral". Broadcast worship came mainly from the Christian tradition and he was not aware of any desire on the part of the Jewish community for broadcast public acts of worship: there was

no tradition in Judaism of "vicarious" worship. In the case of other traditions there were difficulties when their worship was not conducted in English, which would drastically reduce the range of listeners who could relate to the content of a radio broadcast. In general, he was not aware of pressure for broadcast worship to be other than broadly Christian. Other religious programmes did, however, seek to reflect the diversity of other faiths to be found in this country. This had affected the contents of, for example, both "Sunday" and "Soundings". It was important to avoid a patronising presentation of faiths with which most listeners would be unfamiliar and any sense of peering in from outside through the "shop window" or focussing simply on the curiosity value rather than the deeper significance and meaning of other traditions. There was a constant effort to broaden the range of backgrounds of those contributing to "Pause for Thought", "Prayer for the Day" and "Thought for the Day" but it had not been easy to find individuals of other faiths who could cope with the broadcasting technique required. For example, in the case of "Thought for the Day" contributors had to work within the brief under which a link needed to be made between their reflections and the wider agenda of society with which the rest of "Today" was concerned so that it fitted in as an integral part of the programme. There was also a shortage of black Christian contributors. He would welcome help in finding genuinely suitable people to broaden the range of perspectives being presented.

13. Dr Robert Towler (Channel 4 Commissioning Editor for Religious Programmes) referred to the significant changes in the framework for broadcasting which the recent White Paper envisaged. The process of deregulation and the auctioning of ITV franchises could well produce significant changes in programming policy. Thames TV had already announced its intention to cut back on religious programmes and the outlook for these generally under the new regime was not an encouraging one. There were problems also facing the BBC. It was perhaps ominous that there was no reference in the White Paper to arrangements for the future public funding of radio. However, the White Paper did envisage that Channel 4 should continue its role as a complementary and innovative commercial channel. Channel 4 did not have a specific "God slot" but scheduled programmes and series with a religious theme at different times as seemed appropriate for these. For example, a new weekly religious magazine "Not on Sunday" was being launched the following Thursday afternoon. His concern was with "religious programmes" in the sense of material which aimed to feed and nourish the spiritual aspirations of the viewer, rather than "programmes about religion" which came into the field of documentaries and current affairs. Channel 4 tried to provide space for programmes which would not be seen on other channels. If the pattern envisaged by the White Paper was implemented then this might mean that Channel 4 had an even larger task! Channel 4 did not make its own programmes but commissioned them from outside production companies. Its general policy was to look for programmes on faith communities from production companies which were using members of those faith communities so that they were programmes made from the "inside". He referred to a series of features of this kind which had been launched by a programme on "The Sabbath" made by Rabbi Hugo Gryn's daughter and one was nearly completed on Sikh festivals; further programmes would come from the Hindu and Muslim traditions. A programme was in development on the Zoroastrian tradition and also a series of three programmes on the Rastafarians. A series of interpreters of "The East" to "The West" focussing, for example, on Father Bede Griffiths and Father Thomas Merton would include a programme by a western disciple of Dr Ambedkar.

He was also interested in encouraging the exploration of "crossovers" where contributors reflected on another tradition: for example, Rabbi Lionel Blue was undertaking a series on Christian spirituality "In Search of Holy England". There was also to be a series on the treatment of women in different religious traditions under the title "Unclean Women". He hoped that Channel 4's contribution to religious programming would continue to be challenging and innovative, providing interesting and varied material.

14. Rosemary Hartill (until recently BBC Religious Affairs Correspondent) said that she agreed with Dr Towler that there were too many "programmes about religion" rather than "religious programmes". Recently there had been more programmes about the different faith communities but there was still room for improvement. She posed four questions. Firstly, did the faith communities really want to see more broadcasting about themselves and their faith? While there were often complaints about the lack of coverage of particular faith communities, they sometimes were in practice reluctant to accept more exposure. There was a reluctance to accept even well intentioned attempts to explore the issues exercising a particular community when to do so could present outsiders with a picture of division and disagreement. But these existed within all faith traditions and if communities were to avoid undue isolation within the life of the country as a whole, it was important for them to accept greater exposure in the media of their affairs. Secondly, did communities only want good publicity? There was often an unrealistic expectation about what, for example, a single programme could portray and how complete a picture it could provide. A radio or television programme would naturally be concerned to try to provide a fair and balanced picture of how things were rather than simply an idealistic picture of how things ought to be! While it was unrealistic to hope that all good publicity would be good publicity, at the same time communities had a right to expect sensitive and fair reporting. Thirdly, did faith communities think reporters were ignorant? It was important not to underestimate an audience's intelligence, nor its ignorance. She herself had grown up through childhood and adolescence in a country with a population of nearly half a million Jews without having consciously met a single Jewish person. Many people knew so little about faiths other than their own (and in the context of this country other than the Christian faith) that they were often afraid to ask even basic questions in case the questions themselves were considered offensive. The development of multifaith religious education in schools was an important but relatively new factor and the lack of knowledge of many journalists only reflected the general level of ignorance within society. Journalists often had to work quickly, hoping that they were contacting the right people and consulting the right books, but it was often difficult for them to know who was speaking with authority within a community. The mistakes which they made were often due to ignorance rather than malice. Fourthly, against this background, what could the faith communities themselves do to help themselves? She was most grateful to all those within the different communities who had made her welcome and helped her to learn. It was valuable to get to know journalists who were reporting the affairs of your community and to understand the context in which they were working and what their interests and concerns were likely to be. She hoped that the faith communities would encourage their own members to go into journalism so that within the media there were those who knew the communities from the inside. It was important at local level to get to know the relevant staff of the local newspaper and the local radio station and for the newer faith communities particu-

larly to help those in the media who wanted to see their affairs reported properly. She had tried as BBC Religious Affairs Correspondent to develop links across the communities and to encourage a flow of information to her about their affairs, but it had been difficult to achieve this. She hoped that the faith communities would examine carefully what they could do to build better links with those reporting their affairs and also to be more aware of some of the practical aspects with which the media had to deal as they went about their work.

15. Mr Laurence Spicer (LBC: Religious Affairs) said that in general local radio stations had not served the faith communities well. In common with the BBC and independent broadcasting at national level, they had followed the process of creating "God slots" which put religious matters into a ghetto and in the case of local radio had often simply arranged for someone from the local churches to handle local religious broadcasting as a supplementary task. There had been an inadequate effort to evolve participation by people from other faith communities. With deregulation the position was likely to get even worse with no obligation on radio stations to provide a balanced service. In London the IBA had allowed Capital Radio to scrap its religious broadcasting; fortunately, when LBC had been planning to do the same there had been robust representations from faith communities and the IBA had stepped in to prevent this and there was now more religious broadcasting on LBC than there had been before. In his view, it was much more important for religious items to be included in the context of general news and comment in open competition with other news items, which was LBC's current approach. Independent local radio did not on the whole compete with the BBC in areas like broadcasting of services or reporting of events like the General Synod which were fields in which the BBC had more experience and resources. The job of independent local radio, as he saw it, was to focus on the life of local religious communities as part of the life of the local area as a whole. If some element of religious broadcasting was to be maintained and cruder financially based criteria were not to sweep this to one side, it would be most important for pressure to be put on the broadcasting authorities through lobbying and representations. It was important to offer encouragement to those in local radio trying to cover religious affairs by making contact with them, responding to their requests and providing them with the material which they needed. He had not found it at all easy to make contact outside the churches with other faiths. So there were two ways in which the faith communities could help: through support and encouragement at local level for the efforts of those handling religious affairs broadcasting and through representations at national level in favour of maintaining a framework which would secure some balance in the broadcasting output.

16. Bishop Jim Thompson thanked the four panel speakers for their contributions and invited comments and questions:-

(a) Professor Harmindar Singh (Sikh Committee for Inter Faith Relations) underlined the need for broadcasters (as well as the press) to ensure that their contacts were informed members of the faith communities and suggested that the Network might be able to help in this. Mr Om Parkash Sharma (National Council of Hindu Temples) mentioned some of the difficulties which could occur as a result of lack of sensitivity on the part of the media, for example, in relation to the kind of shots that they might seek

for television and the risk that the media looked for information to support the story line that they were pursuing and were not interested in material which did not fit with this. On some occasions, after stories had been provided at some inconvenience the material was then not in practice used. Rev John Newbury said that no one would wish to defend insensitive reporting; sometimes the broadcasters themselves had difficulty when an individual modified in an interview the strong clear cut views which he or she had been prepared to offer beforehand! Rosemary Hartill said that pressure on news space frequently meant that a number of items had to be dropped to accommodate some major new story. Laurence Spicer explained the need for communities to maintain their personal links with broadcasters and to keep on supplying material to them even if this could not always be used: personal contact and briefings were more effective than occasional more anonymous circularised notices and statements.

(b) Rev Desmond Pemberton (Afro West Indian United Council of Churches) said that it was a justified complaint that reporting often concentrated on the bad news about communities rather than more positive material. He also asked what steps could be taken to encourage the employment of more staff in broadcasting from within the minority communities. Rev John Newbury referred to the special efforts which had been made to recruit black reporters for both television and radio and to the training days which had been run in conjunction with the British Council of Churches for black church members. It remained true that there was a shortage of individuals with the right qualities to make good broadcasters.

(c) Mr Sethi (Nottingham Inter Faith Council) drew a distinction between the ritual and the theological side of religion: on the whole broadcasting seemed to concentrate on the former as being more colourful. But more needed to be done to get across the content of the different faith traditions and there must surely be individuals available who were capable of doing this. Rev Dr Christopher Lamb (Coventry Inter Faith Group) asked whether there always had to be "an angle" to a story: surely the aim should be to present a well rounded picture? Rev John Newbury said that the BBC tried to achieve a blend in its programming. There was a need to have a "focus" for a particular item and to have in mind the audience for which it was intended.

(d) Mr Hayim Pinner (Board of Deputies of British Jews) queried the absence of any specifically Jewish programme from the national broadcasting schedules. It was reasonable to expect space for a community both to be able to cover matters of interest to itself and to present itself, its traditions and its culture to a wider audience. Dr Robert Towler referred to some of the specific community programmes featured on Channel 4. He also pointed out that there had been successful broadcasts of the Roman Catholic mass at a time when this was said in Latin, thanks to a sensitive commentary by Father Agnelius Andrew: perhaps the same technique could be used for broadcasts of worship from faith communities who did not use English in all or part of this. Laurence Spicer suggested that with more "split programming" between two wave lengths allocated to a station, it might be possible to cater better for minority concerns. Rev John Newbury said that, apart from broadcast worship, other BBC religious programming was not

specifically "Christian" and he thought that on the whole more general programming of this kind was preferable to separate programmes for different communities.

(e) Mr Ayman Ahwal (Muslim World League) referred to the preoccupation of the media with "religious wars" and in this and other contexts the unfortunate degree of stereotyping which took place. Rabbi Guy Hall enquired about the scope for people from a faith community to make their own programmes. Rosemary Hartill referred to the Open Space series on BBC television and Dr Robert Towler referred to workshops sponsored by Channel 4 to help people to acquire their own skills in film and video production and to the interest of private production companies in developing good programme material. Mr Stephen Hodge (The Buddhist Society) referred to concern over the inaccuracy of some broadcast material, often in the case of television in the accompanying commentary. It would be helpful to have arrangements under which material of this kind could be vetted by experts before being transmitted.

(f) Rabbi Hugo Gryn spoke of the importance for the young people in the different faith communities of being able to see their traditions and their values given recognition and acceptance in the media: this was a powerful factor in making them feel "included" in the community as a whole.

17. Bishop Jim Thompson in closing the discussion, underlined the importance for the faith communities of familiarising themselves with the proposals in the recent White Paper on Broadcasting and making their views on these known: there were very radical changes in the shape of broadcasting in prospect if the present proposals were fully implemented. He thanked the panel speakers for their most stimulating and helpful contributions.

Network Business Meeting

18. In a brief business session, the meeting accepted the application for affiliation from the Tyne and Wear Community Relations Council Inter Faith Panel which had already been endorsed by the Executive Committee.

19. Mr Pearce said that the next plenary meeting, which would include the 1989 Network AGM, would be held in Birmingham, probably in June. The date of this would be notified as soon as possible.

20. Rabbi Hugo Gryn referred to the importance for the faith communities of the procedures for the appointment of school governors and of members of the Standing Advisory Conferences for Religious Education which had been given a statutory basis by the Education Reform Act 1988. The Standing Conference on Inter Faith Dialogue in Education was preparing a leaflet dealing with these two issues which it was hoped that faith communities would find helpful.

21. The meeting closed at 4.15 pm.

1989

“Birmingham:
A Multi Faith City”

NOTE OF MEETING OF THE INTER FAITH NETWORK FOR THE UNITED KINGDOM

at 11.45 am on Thursday 1st June 1989

in the Banqueting Suite of the Birmingham City Council House

"Birmingham: A Multi Faith City"

1. Rabbi Hugo Gryn (in the chair) at the outset of the plenary meeting (which followed the 1989 AGM) invited those present to observe a period of silence in memory of John Ferguson, the former President of the Selly Oak Colleges, who had contributed greatly to the development of inter faith understanding, particularly in the educational field. He had been the moving force behind the conference at Leicester some years ago which had led to the foundation of the Standing Conference on Inter Faith Dialogue in Education. He had died the previous week and his funeral was being held that afternoon.
2. Rabbi Gryn expressed the appreciation of the Network for the arrangements which had been made with the help of the Birmingham Inter Faiths Council for the meeting to be held in the splendid surroundings of the Banqueting Suite of the City Council House. It was an opportunity to celebrate the work of organisations and people in Birmingham seeking harmony between the different faith communities.
3. Mrs. Ruth Tetlow (Chair, Birmingham Inter Faiths Council) said that Birmingham at the present time was a good time and place to be: there were marvellous and challenging opportunities here in the building of a multi faith community. The Inter Faiths Council, which had been re-launched last summer, was a representative body. It was not the only inter faith enterprise in the city. The Birmingham Fellowship of Faiths provided a meeting place for members of different faith communities on a more personal and participative basis. Also there was Dr. Mary Hall's Multi Faith Centre, and the Centres for the Study of Islam and Christian/Muslim Relations and of Judaism and Jewish/ Christian Relations at the Selly Oak Colleges. All of these bodies were affiliated to the Network.
4. The chairing of the Inter Faiths Council rotated year by year: the Chair had come from the Buddhist tradition the previous year, so this year it was the turn of the Christians. In recent months the Council had sponsored a meeting to examine the implications of the 1988 Education Reform Act for education in Birmingham. It had also discussed "The Satanic Verses" controversy and had issued a statement along similar lines to that of the Network itself. During the recent visit of Archbishop Desmond Tutu to Birmingham there had been a meeting at his request with representatives of different faiths at which he had spoken most movingly of the common values for people of faith of peace, justice, compassion and love. It was a sign of hope if those values could inform the search for mutual understanding between the different faith communities.
5. Dr. Rao spoke of his involvement both with the Shri Gita Bhavan Mandir (of which Mr. Sharma, the Network Vice Chairman, was President) and with another project for the construction of a purpose-built temple in the Midlands area following the style of South Indian temple architecture. The Hindu tradition embraced people who came from a range of different regions in India, spoke different languages and followed different practices and rituals, but were all united within the same framework of faith. The main concern of the Hindu community of Birmingham (as elsewhere in Britain) was to ensure that their faith traditions and

cultural inheritance were handed on to their young people, who were growing up in a modern, multi cultural, multi faith, but also secular, society. Last year, a youth camp had been organised for Hindu young people from Birmingham, and this was to be repeated: it had provided a valuable opportunity to those who had attended it, for learning, for sharing, and for deepening their commitment to the Hindu faith. However, it was not easy to find suitable sites for camps of this kind. Perhaps the Network could be of help in this, and also in relation to planning permission for places of worship.

6. In the 1960s the community had bought halls, cinemas and old churches to convert into Hindu centres of worship. The community now wanted to be able to build temples in the tradition of Indian architecture. There was a need for central facilities where an institute of Hindu learning could be established, where Sanskrit would be taught, where aspects of Hindu culture could be explored, and where retreats and meditations could be held with facilities also for sport and recreation. There could be liaison between the centre and universities and places of higher education as a focus for Hindu studies. The community was looking for an appropriate site in the Midlands area within easy reach of the motorway network: it had been hoped that a suitable site had been secured near the M42 exit 9, but there had been objections from local residents to the plan to build a temple there. There was a need for active support from the Network and its affiliated organisations for faith communities in their efforts to pursue projects of this kind.
7. He would also like to see the development of more effective inter faith programmes for young people, perhaps sponsoring multi faith youth camps on a regional basis with speakers to help young people understand the bases of different religious traditions and learn more about each other. This would be a valuable way of supplementing the work of religious education in schools, and the educational programmes of faith communities themselves. The inter faith movement could help strengthen those great common human values which all religious traditions upheld.
8. In closing, he read the following words from Sathya Sai Baba:

Let the different faiths exist. Let them flourish and let the
Glory of God be sung in all the languages and in a variety of
tunes. That should be the ideal. Respect the differences
between the faiths and recognise them as valid as long as they
do not extinguish the Flame of Unity.

9. Mr. Bahadar Singh began with verses composed by Guru Gobind Singh:

Grant me this boon
O, God, from Thy Greatness

May I never refrain
From righteous acts;

May I fight without fear
All foes in life's battle,

With confident courage
Claiming the victory!

May Thy glory be
Grained in my mind,

And my highest ambition be
Singing Thy praises;

When this mortal life
Reaches its limits,

May I die fighting
With limitless courage!

10. He said that although he was a civil engineer by profession, and had worked in this capacity both in India and in this country, he now devoted himself to work with handicapped people and was at present working on a project at the Birmingham Rathbone Society which provided help to young people between the ages of 16 and 22 who had learning difficulties. Over the past years he had seen progress in many ways with increased inter faith understanding and a greater awareness of the customs and practices of different faith communities. But only recently he had been stopped from entering the local court building because he was wearing the Sikh kirpan (or small ceremonial sword). He was shocked that this misunderstanding could still arise in a multi faith city. Also recently, in talking to a group of Sikh children, he had been distressed to learn that they were being required to remove the Sikh kara (or wrist bangle) in order to do physical education. When he had approached the school authorities, they had been ready to agree to children retaining their bangles, worn with elastic bands over them to meet safety requirements.
11. It was now some years since the House of Lords had ruled in Mandla v. Dowell Lee that a school could not require a Sikh child to remove his turban. But there was still no directive issued from the Department of Education and Science to schools making clear that this was a legal entitlement. Although exemption for Sikhs from wearing motorcycle crash helmets had been won, Sikhs still had difficulty with safety helmet regulations in the construction industry. These were just some illustrations of the time which it was taking for the ground rules for a multi cultural, multi faith society to be worked out in practice.
12. He agreed with the observations of Dr. Rao about the importance of the next generation and ensuring that they grew up with a proper understanding of their traditions. There was a need for more money to be spent on education in inner city areas: the figures showed that in Birmingham less was spent per head in the inner city than outside it. It was clear that the provisions of the 1988 Education Reform Act were causing concern and confusion and he hoped that the local SACREs would be able to help in this. This was another area in which there was obviously still some way to go in creating the appropriate framework for a multi faith society.
13. Rabbi Hugo Gryn, commenting on this last point stressed the importance of representatives of faith communities serving on the SACREs (which all LEAs now had to appoint) and also serving as school governors.
14. Dr. Mary Hall said that she had been asked twelve years ago by the Roman Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales to establish a research programme which would provide an opportunity for exploring ways in which people from different faith communities could be brought together. Over a three-year period she worked with nine different Christian groups as well as Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and Sikh communities, involving over 150 people. The groups were composed of lay people so that they could articulate for themselves and not rely on clergy or religious "leaders". Initially, the groups met separately to define themselves in terms of their own religious and cultural identity; this was by no means an easy task and all the groups had found it challenging. But it was a necessary prior step before they were in a position to transmit an understanding of themselves to others. Subsequently the participants

worked in mixed groups to analyse common problems: the transmission of religious values; education in the current social context; attitudes to marriage; housing problems; and the elderly. The research material has yet to be written up because, to her surprise, those involved in the project wished to continue learning together. This led to the establishment of the Multi Faith Centre (initially Resource Unit) on the campus of the Selly Oak Colleges.

15. From the start it was clear that this must be a collaborative venture run on a multi-faith basis. For a period of two years the Unit worked at developing educational programmes in conjunction with the University Extra Mural Department. A film about the centre made by ITV produced a large response and requests from people in different parts of the country for help in initiating inter faith work in their own area. Subsequently, other faith communities (Anglican, Quaker and Baptist) requested to join the project and were trained in the methodology for this purpose. Weekend workshops were developed, along with programmes for teachers, prison chaplains, social workers and health workers grappling with inter faith issues in their professional work. When the ITV film was shown in Europe this led to international interest in the work of the Unit. A team of speakers and resource persons from the communities were to become more confident in communicating their traditions and cultures. Parallel with educational programmes, various research projects were launched, for example, a study of permitted foods in the different faith communities. In September 1985 the Multi Faith Centre moved to Harborne Hall - a beautiful property set in seven acres of garden with full conference facilities. This move represented a great challenge but offered opportunities for the development of the Centre's work.
16. Those involved in inter faith work need to develop within themselves a deep respect for the religious traditions of other people. They need an opportunity for quiet reflection and there is a meditation room at the Centre for this purpose. They need to learn how to relate to other people within a team and to be sensitive to each other, for example, when one member is fasting. Over the years she had learnt of the joyful generous hospitality of other communities and the rich rewards in sharing with one another. She was now convinced the spoken word was the last resort in human communication: even more important were the unspoken signals in our inter personal relationships. There were deep, personal and social issues involved in religion and ethnicity and we had to deal with both of these if we were to develop a multi cultural and multi faith society. We had to recognise the need for multi cultural institutions if we were to make our pluralist world work: the sharing together of our different religious traditions was a crucial element in the building of human solidarity. We needed in particular to find ways of involving more young people in inter faith programmes.
17. Finally, she shared the interpretation of the familiar Indian gesture of greeting, Namaste: the hands brought together in front of the face in greeting:

I honour the place in you where the entire universe resides.
I honour the place in you,
where, if you are at that place in you,
and I am at that place in me,
there is only one of us.
Namaste.

18. Rabbi Hugo Gryn expressed the appreciation of the meeting for the contributions during the morning session. They had conveyed the heart and the spirit of the sharing of concerns between people of different

faiths, and had raised a range of significant questions about the handing on of religious traditions to the younger generation; the kind of educational programmes which were needed; the support that was necessary in finding sites for community centres and places of worship; and the need for society to adapt in many different ways to meet the challenges of creating a genuinely multi faith community both in Birmingham and in the country as a whole.

19. After the break for a buffet lunch, Mr. Maurice Hobbs spoke about education in a multi faith Birmingham. For some years, he had taught multi cultural education at Birmingham Polytechnic and was currently Chair of the Education Panel of the Birmingham Community Relations Council. He said that he had returned from Tanzania in 1967 having been "Africanised" there. He used to say that he was a follower of Jesus and Julius Nyerere in that order! He came from an Evangelical Christian background, but hoped that he had ceased to be an "imperialist" Christian. He recalled that when he began work at college, on his return to this country, his Principal had said to him that he could deal with the children of other faiths and newer communities because, as he had served in Africa, he knew about "them". The Rampton Report on 1967 had spoken about "West Indian children in our schools". The social context in the mid-1960s was a perception that the schools of the country belonged to "us": the problem was how to deal with "them": the new immigrants were seen as intruders into British society. Thankfully attitudes had changed a good deal since then but more work was still needed on them. Only last year some Christian parents had complained because their children had been present at a celebration of Diwali at their local school. But the newer faith communities paid their taxes, fulfilled their obligations as British citizens and had every right to have their religious traditions acknowledged in the country's schools. He referred to the resources which had been made available under Section 11 for the funding of projects to fund community education and language centres and facilities for what the Home Office still called "immigrant communities". The level and character of support for these kind of developments was very much subject to review at the present time and their future was uncertain and the appropriate handling of mother tongue teaching was itself a subject of great debate.
20. In May 1988 Birmingham City Council Education Committee had produced a report on "Delivering the post-11 Curriculum" which had looked at the institutional framework for secondary education. There was a great deal of reorganisation and amalgamation of schools in prospect in Birmingham and it was clear that the proportion of children from the newer communities would be rising significantly in future years given the trends in birth rates. The report in question had nonetheless adopted a colour blind approach: it had looked at questions of gender but not of ethnicity. But the realities of the situation and its future requirements needed to be assessed properly. Implicit in the report was an assimilationist approach to these institutional questions. On the other hand, a report on "Education for Our Multi Cultural Society" also produced by the Birmingham Education Authority had taken a more wide-ranging and perceptive approach to the issues involved. This draft document had been based on consultation with schools but was withdrawn in 1987 for further consideration and had never been ratified as Birmingham City policy. It had adopted the same approach basically as that of the Swann Report which had called for "education for all". The Birmingham statement had called for an educational approach based on a commitment to racial equality and justice. It required schools to be aware of the need to counter racism; to be aware of, and to provide for, the particular needs of people of different racial, ethnic, cultural, religious and social backgrounds; and to prepare all Birmingham pupils for life in a multi cultural society and to build on

the strengths of Birmingham's cultural diversity. It did not appear that many schools had, in fact, gone on to produce their own policy statements within this framework as they had been requested to do. But the document had examined in a methodical way the kind of educational issues which Birmingham faced, and which now had to be tackled within the framework of the 1988 Education Reform Act.

21. Mr. Fazlun Khalid said that he was a Muslim from Sri Lanka who served as Principal Regional Officer of the Commission for Racial Equality. He would speak as a Muslim and as someone concerned about issues of community, equality and justice. Against that background, he thought that it would be appropriate at the present time to offer some reflections on "The Satanic Verses" controversy which had been a profound experience for the Muslim community in Britain and had had a significant impact on relations between them and the rest of British society. To Muslims, the course of the debate suggested that there was a new religion of "liberal secularism" born in the period of the Enlightenment with many of its own "prophets", which had been eating away corrosively at the roots of religious faith. In the secular West a secular framework for education had been established with consumerism as its objective. Secular liberalism had a simple but disarming dogma: total freedom for the individual within the law. It did not recognise the dimension of the sacred in life, and it claimed the right to encroach on the values of others and their communities in the name of personal freedom. It sought no balance between liberty and social responsibility and provided no basis for distinguishing between the sacred and the profane. It would not occur to any of those who worked within a body like the Network to launch attacks on the basic beliefs of another person. Yet secular writers believed that they had an inalienable right to do so. But if there was to be an adequate basis for a peaceful and truly multi cultural society, there was a need to discover and to respect one another's value systems. Although the ultimate objective of secularism was to hand over unadulterated freedom to the individual, in practice the individual had not profited from that freedom: as people became more "free" and society more complex, individuals in practice became more isolated and less able to cope with life's problems.
22. The media had begun to take an interest in "The Satanic Verses" issue with the symbolic burning of a copy of the book at a march in Bradford and the Muslims had then been equated with the Nazis. What a shameful comparison this had been. How did the media expect those who were denied access to it and who experienced a sense of powerlessness as a misunderstood minority to behave? It was quite wrong to suggest that Muslims wished to suppress freedom of speech: but this had to be exercised responsibly. There were many books freely available which were valid statements of particular opinions which were critical of Islam. But there were limits beyond which it was improper to go. In this particular case, the very core of Islamic faith had been abused. There had to be mutual respect for one another's positions in a multi cultural, multi faith society. The Muslim community had been reviled for standing up for principles which they regarded as important, with the implication that only individual freedom of expression was a valid principle and the demand for responsibility in its exercise was not. As a result of the controversy, Muslim children had been harassed in schools as had adults at work and in the street. It was important to realise how far Muslims found themselves within a Western culture even in countries where they are in a majority. Most cultures had now been processed through the western secular machine: to resist Western secularism was to be branded as a "fundamentalist".

23. Muslims believed that there had to be limits to freedom of speech: they were not alone in this because other limitations were placed on this freedom. For example, incitement to racial hatred is unlawful. The question was rather what these limitations should be.
24. The jargon phrase had moved on from "multi culturalism" to "pluralism". In this country we were now racially plural and ethnically plural and plural in terms of religious faith. But a pluralism in the realm of ideas did not seem to be as readily countenanced. If, as a society, we truly accepted pluralism, then we had to accept that people within it had a contribution to make to the development of society as a whole through the unique and fresh perspectives they brought with them. It was not just a question of there being different kinds of places of worship. Muslims felt the need to resist the acids of modern secularism and this was true in the field of education as well. It was clear that the present educational system was designed to buttress and serve the producer/consumer basis of modern society, of individualism and commercialism. It was not only Muslims who were challenging the basis of this society. For example, the "Green" environmental movement had many challenging observations to make about it. When the present controversy had died down, there would be a need to look for more fruitful ways of dialogue. Islam was not averse to dialogue: the "trialogue" between Muslims, Jews and Christians in medieval Spain under Muslim rule illustrated this.
25. Finally, he identified two issues which would challenge the world in the years ahead. The first was the dismantling of the nation state and the establishment of bioregional self-governing regions with control over their own destinies, and secondly, the dismantling of the international banking and economic system based on usury and its replacement with an interest-free banking system. The horrific problems of debt in the Third World, (not to mention the effects of mortgage increases in Britain!) illustrated the inherent weakness of a system based on interest. As a global human community we had to pool our resources and our ideas to face these challenges: we lived together on spaceship Earth, and we had to find our way forward on this basis.
26. Rabbi Hugo Gryn said that Mr. Martin Conway (President of the Selly Oak Colleges) who was to have spoken at the meeting, was instead present that afternoon at the funeral of his predecessor, Mr. John Ferguson, who had been remembered at the outset of the meeting. In his place the meeting was very pleased to welcome Dr. Jorgen Nielsen who was Director of the Selly Oak Centre for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations.
27. Dr. Jorgen Nielsen said that the Selly Oak Colleges in many ways presented a microcosm of Britain today, and of the developments which Britain had been through in the last fifteen years. It was a campus of adult education colleges overwhelmingly Christian in background with an important role in training for Christian mission and with strong links with the Quaker Cadbury family. It was increasingly internationalist in its intake and character. It was sometimes said that Selly Oak was better known in Katmandu than in many parts of Britain! Dr. Mary Hall had described in the morning the development of the Multi Faith Centre. The Centre for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations had been established at about the same time: alongside it were the Centre for New Religious Movements and, more recently, the Centre for the Study of Judaism and Jewish-Christian Relations. Within the Selly Oak Colleges could be found traditional mission training centres, Quaker lay training facilities, a trade union lay training college, teacher training, and training for social service qualifications, and for the rehabilitation of the physically handicapped. These linked institutions

of further education had developed a variety of approaches, reflecting the range of institutions involved.

28. So there was a rich variety of resources available at Selly Oak and the search for ways in which to respond to changing needs. One important challenge was how to respond to a multi faith world and from within what was now a multi faith country. Naturally in the Selly Oak context there was some concern that, if the inter faith dimension was over-emphasised, then particular religious identities and agendas might be under threat. So there was a need to balance an emphasis on common ground with a recognition and maintenance of values within our own distinctive traditions. There was inevitably a tension, too, between the disciplines of academic life and the need to incorporate in the life of the colleges day-to-day experience in the living out of individual lives: it was important always to relate the theoretical to the practical.
29. The Selly Oak Centres did not themselves operate at the "chalk face" in schools or at "street" level: they were behind the front line where those engaged more directly could reflect on their work and their experience and draw on resources for the next stage in developing their own work. The location of Selly Oak in Birmingham was of vital importance: it would not be able to operate as it did if it was in a less multi faith and multi cultural environment. He hoped that those involved with the Network would feel free to visit Selly Oak and in particular the three Centres which were affiliated to the Network.
30. Rabbi Hugo Gryn thanked the three afternoon speakers for their contributions which, taken together with those in the morning, had provided a great deal of illumination about the issues which presented themselves in multi faith Birmingham and beyond.
31. During the break for tea, the Lord Mayor and Lady Mayoress of Birmingham, Councillor and Mrs. Fred Chapman, offered their greetings to those present at the meeting. The Lord Mayor said that over the years Birmingham as a city had welcomed people of different cultures and different faiths and they had enriched its life. So it was entirely appropriate that the Network should hold in Birmingham its first national meeting outside London and he hoped that it would be the first of a number of visits by the Network to the city. Rabbi Hugo Gryn thanked the Lord Mayor for the use of the splendid facilities of the City Council House for the day's meeting.
32. After tea, under the chairmanship of Bishop Jim Thompson there was an opportunity for questions to the speakers and discussion on the issues they had raised.
33. Mr. Simon Trick (Waltham Forest All Faiths Group) asked for clarification on the concept of bioregional self-governing entities. In response, Mr. Fazlun Khalid said that his point was that people of faith had often been attacked on the grounds that religions had been sources of conflict. But in his view, nationalism had been much more damaging: nation states had encouraged and accelerated the destruction of Mother Earth. Islam offered a more holistic perspective of humanity as guardians of the earth and this dimension had been neglected in the context of a consumer oriented society. We needed self-sufficient bioregions which would be free from the manipulations of multi national concerns and the international banking system. There was a need to look in a much more challenging way at some of these fundamental issues about the way in which we organised life on our planet. Mr. Trick said that he agreed about the evils of nationalism, but he would himself see history as a gradual development towards unity which could perhaps one

day be reflected in a system of world government, in which each area had its own governmental and legal framework while giving up sovereignty in some matters to the world authority.

34. Mr. Ramswarap Kaushish (Coventry Interfaith Group) referred to the basic beliefs of the Hindu tradition and spoke about the important role of education and of prayer. Dr. Rao said that children needed to come to an acceptance of their faith tradition for themselves and not simply on the basis of external authority. But they needed to be educated in their own tradition so that they had the opportunity to do this. While his own faith community was wrestling with this task, it needed to be done better and on a larger scale. Children needed to know the basic values, beliefs and practices of their religious tradition. Within the Hindu tradition, culture and religion were very close to each other since it did not recognise any compartmentalisation between religious commitment and daily life. Rabbi Hugo Gryn said that within the Jewish community, which had been in this country for centuries, the crucial issue was whether their children wanted to identify themselves as part of the Jewish community or whether they wanted to let go of their Jewishness in the process of assimilating to the wider society in which they lived. An important aspect of inter faith relations was so to cherish one another's values and traditions as to offer mutual encouragement for the maintenance of one another's religious identity. All communities were faced with pressures from secularism to let go of their religious traditions. Bishop Jim Thompson said that in this context it had to be remembered that Christians were also a minority: within our consumer society it was the materialists who were the majority. Kiranjeet Jhite (a young Sikh girl) said that it was the first meeting of this kind which she had attended, and she had learned a great deal from it. It was important for young people to accept responsibility for exploring and learning about the religious tradition to which they belonged and it was important that there should be facilities for them to do so. Mr. Chanan Bharij said that the risk was that inter faith organisations only "preached to the converted": it was important for them to think ahead and to reach the young people who would be the citizens of our future society. Perhaps there should be a move to set up an inter faith youth wing?
35. Rev. Sidney Hinkes (Oxford Round Table of Religions) raised the question of the death threat to Mr. Salman Rushdie. Mr. Fazlun Khalid said that within Islam the penalty for treason was death and since Islam did not recognise a distinction between the religious and the secular, to traduce Islam constituted treason. At the same time, while the Ayatollah Khomeini, in his fatwa (or legal opinion), had identified death as an appropriate penalty for Salman Rushdie's offence, within Islam there was a need for a proper trial before a judicial sentence could be passed and carried out. The context of a trial offered an opportunity for repentance and for the consideration of all relevant factors. Muslims who lived in this country intended to live by the laws of this country, and knew that it would be wrong for them to take the law into their own hands. But it was clear that non-Muslims had failed to grasp the enormity of the crime which in Muslim eyes Salman Rushdie had been perceived to have committed. No one questioned anyone's right to examine Islam critically, or to criticise Muslims: this was different from scurrilous abuse directed at the core of a religious tradition's identity.
36. Bishop Jim Thompson said that he had been concerned about the linking of the words "liberal" and "secularism" within a single label. It had been the "liberals", in the broadest philosophical sense of the term, who had fought against racism and religious intolerance. Surely the materialist reductionism of a consumer society was a more appropriate target than

"liberalism" as such? Mr. Fazlun Khalid said that he recognised that there was a valid stream of liberalism which had good effects: he had used the term "secular liberalism" in the context of the Rushdie controversy as a label for those who had espoused the cause of freedom of expression without restraint. He agreed that it was important to distinguish between this "fundamentalist" position and a more balanced and thoughtful liberalism which clearly had an important contribution to make to the process of establishing a viable pluralist society.

37. Rabbi Hugo Gryn said that he would also characterise himself as a liberal. He recalled the cases within the Jewish tradition of Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud. Karl Marx had been a Jew until the age of 5 or 6 when he was then baptised as a Christian. By the time of his mid-20s he was writing vicious attacks on the Jews. Sigmund Freud, in his book "Moses and Monotheism" wrote a powerful and sustained attack on Moses and the Biblical tradition. For a member of a minority community there could be an insidious process of self-rejection leading to self-hatred and then to vicious criticism of the tradition and community from which the person had become alienated. The only antidote to this process was to be able to feel secure in one's own identity, without a sense of having to compromise on this in order to be accepted by the rest of society. No community was immune from this process of rejection and subsequent vitriolic attack by those who had become alienated from it; but that did not mean that it was any the less painful. One of the roles for the Network was to encourage the development of a social context in which it was possible to validate one another's identity, and to offer mutual security in this.
38. Bishop Jim Thompson said that there were challenging issues involved here: he felt great sympathy with many Muslim concerns about social attitudes in this country and the threats to Muslim family life. At the same time, there were ethical issues to be examined more deeply, for example in relation to the application of capital punishment, and there would be passionate differences of view between people of faith on these issues. There would be a need to explore these questions too in a sensitive way within the Network.
39. Dr. Christian Troll (Centre for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations) said that it was important to recognise the diversity within different faith communities. He was a Roman Catholic priest, but he found himself opposed to many attitudes which went under the label "Christian". There was a risk of obscuring these differences in the use of the phrase "we Christians", "we Jews", "we Muslims". We had to recognise the variety that existed within these different communities. Within the Christian tradition this was not simply a matter of different churches: there was diversity within the Roman Catholic community itself. There was a need to be aware of, and sensitive to, the diversity of attitudes, beliefs and practice, arising from different backgrounds and different experiences. In inter faith relations, it was not sufficient simply to recognise and authenticate "external" pluralism: we had to recognise "internal" pluralism as well. Similarly, it was important to distinguish between differing effects of the Enlightenment in Europe. He was proud of much that the Enlightenment had achieved although naturally not of everything. It had to be recognised, for example, that those who facilitated the "trialogue" between Muslims, Jews and Christians in medieval Spain did so in the context of a shared "rationalist" perspective. The Enlightenment had occurred and could not simply be reversed. We could not slough off our history: the question was the direction in which we would choose to move for the future.

40. Mr. Richard Sewell (New Ham Association of Faiths) said that he shared the concern of the Muslim community over the lack of recognition for their legitimate concerns. But he was troubled by the possible effects of greater restrictions on freedom of expression and the possibility of finding a basis on which decisions could be reached about the banning of particular books. Perhaps greater censorship would be a worse alternative to the present position, even though that caused pain. Mr. Fazlun Khalid said that the reason why it was possible for everyone to sit in the present meeting together was because there was a shared recognition and acceptance of certain parameters of behaviour. In a multi racial society, legislation such as the Race Relations Act and the Public Order Act had an important part to play in establishing a framework of law. They did curtail freedom of speech and behaviour in various ways. The present controversy was not about the suppression of free speech: intellectual, philosophical and theological debate was to be welcomed. Nor did Muslims want some special protection: any legal restrictions should apply to all faiths. But they did believe that limits needed to be fixed beyond which it was not socially acceptable to go in attacking a religious tradition. There was a need to draw the line at vilification of what a community held sacred and there should be some form of redress in such a situation. If we were to build a truly pluralist and multi faith society in Britain, then there was a need for agreed and enforceable parameters of acceptable behaviour.
41. Bishop Jim Thompson said that he regretted that more time was not available to continue the discussion. He expressed the gratitude of the meeting to all those who had spoken and had contributed to the exploration of a wide range of issues of significance to the life of Birmingham as a multi faith city, and to British society as a whole. He looked forward with anticipation to the next plenary meeting of the Network at the end of November, when no doubt there would be an opportunity to explore a number of these issues further.
42. The meeting closed at 4.30 pm.

1990 (Summer)

“Faith for the Future”

NOTE OF MEETING OF THE INTER FAITH NETWORK FOR THE UNITED KINGDOM
AT 12 NOON ON THURSDAY 7 JUNE 1990
IN THE CITY COUNCIL CHAMBER OF LEICESTER TOWN HALL
"FAITH FOR THE FUTURE"

1. Rabbi Hugo Gryn (in the chair) at the outset of the plenary meeting which followed the 1990 AGM recalled that it was at a conference convened in Leicester some years ago, under the auspices of the British Council of Churches, and chaired by the late Professor John Ferguson, that the Standing Conference on Inter Faith Dialogue in Education had come into being. The conference members had shared a vision of the role which education might play in providing a framework within which mutual understanding between the different faith communities could be developed. Indeed, at the heart of each faith community there lay a founding vision. People had come from other countries to Britain with their own visions of the new life which they might build here. The task before us was to find ways in which we might find a place for realising the many aspirations of our different communities within the destiny of the society as a whole within which we all lived. The theme for the plenary meeting was "Faith for the Future". It was good to have a number of young speakers to point the way ahead. This week's reading in Jewish synagogues from the prophet Joel contained the verse "Your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions". Whether we were old or we were young was perhaps not merely a matter of age but whether we only "dreamed dreams", relying on our memories and living only in the past, or still had a vision for the future of what might be and what ought to be. It was the task of each succeeding generation to translate that vision into reality. In the Network we had a shared vision of a harmonious multi-faith British society and he looked forward to the presentations from the panel of speakers from their own particular viewpoints. He introduced as the first speaker Mr Clive Lawton, Headmaster of King David School, Liverpool (a Jewish secondary school), formerly Education Officer at the Board of Deputies of British Jews and a recent Chairman of the SHAP Working Party on World Religions in Education.

2. Mr Clive Lawton said that he was a little uncomfortable with the title of "Faith for the Future": he believed that the term "faith" was not an entirely suitable word for the central concern of Jewish people. In the final analysis Jews were not nearly as concerned with "faith" as they were as about "facts". A "fact" did not mean whether God created the world in six days or whether King David was crowned on the 13th July or the 18th August, but the reality of the world in which we lived and how people interacted with one another. Jews looked to the Messianic Age and were primarily concerned with the efforts which they, and others who would work with them in the same endeavour, could make in working towards the realisation of that golden dream which Jews had for all humanity. The technicalities of how that dream would be made real (whether there was "a" Messiah or some kind of Messianic Committee, which might be the Jewish way of doing things!) were not the central questions. Whether there was life after death and how it was lived was not a central issue. The critical issue was how to deal with the present world here and now:

"faith" not converted into "fact" was only of academic interest.

3. Jews had two principal sets of responsibility laid on them as described and expressed within the Torah: responsibility to God (what most people might describe as questions of "ritual" and "practice") and responsibility towards one another. These two sets of responsibilities were seen as being closely interrelated. It was difficult to have a decent relationship with other people if one did not have a proper relationship with God; and it was impossible to have a proper relationship with God without a proper relationship with one's fellow human beings.

4. It was therefore a sense of these two connected responsibilities that the Jewish community looked to develop within their young people.

5. It might seem from the outside that the preoccupation of the community was with ritual because that was distinctive and marked the Jewish People as a separate group, based, for example, on explicit dietary laws and the observance of the Sabbath and Jewish festivals. The requirements for charitable behaviour, sound business ethics, the proper value to be given to life and its definition, the treatment of the dead and the respect for them and other ethical issues which concerned our whole society were often less explicitly articulated within the Jewish community. But it was becoming clear that there was a need to do this since there was not the same degree of collective agreement within society as a whole on ethical issues as had been thought. For example, the Jewish community might have wished to express different positions about abortion and euthanasia from those which other people in the country might hold. Even though those positions might be deeply held, morally based and ethically argued. It was not possible to assume that there was one ethically based view of abortion and one view that was not: there were half a dozen different moral and ethically based views on abortion. So the particular views of different communities, including the Jewish one, needed to be made more explicit as a contribution to the debate within society on issues of this kind.

6. The Jewish community was still essentially an immigrant community: they had been here a little longer than some of the newer immigrant communities in Britain but they still had many similar preoccupations: the need to establish themselves, the need to feel rooted, the need to feel at home, the need to argue for their distinctiveness and to explain that a society that is tolerant is not one that allowed them to become the same as everybody else, but one that allowed them to be different. These preoccupations were frequently expressed amongst the Jewish community through the desire to give their young people a "good education" in terms of the prevailing secular social context as the way of providing the best base for good career opportunities. But this course was often pursued by parents, with the best of motives, at the cost of the Jewish identity of their children. Again the term "faith" was difficult here. For the vast majority of Jews, Jewish identity was taken on at birth, making a personal commitment at some later date, not through subsequent acceptance of philosophical arguments or through "faith". Jewish identity could not be shirked by Jews:

sooner or later they had to deal with the question of that identity. It could not be pushed aside, suppressed or ignored indefinitely because it would re-emerge, perhaps at the point of parenthood when individuals started to ask themselves what they wanted to teach their children. So this issue of identity could not be neglected and Jewish young people could not be told to put this to one side and instead to concentrate on dealing with the "real world". The Jewish community over the last century had developed programmes of part-time schooling (and other communities would recognise this pattern) with "Sunday Schools" and weekend courses but they had also set up Jewish day schools, although all too few of them as yet, alongside these facilities for part-time education. He believed that the establishment of voluntary aided schools was one of the best models for pursuing the integration of different communities within society as a whole. Within this framework the central values of British identity were necessarily transmitted within the context of the central values of the community's own identity. As the head of a Jewish voluntary aided secondary school he found the Government's recent decision on the funding of the Islamic Primary School utterly inexplicable and unacceptable. He was not only committed to voluntary aided schools within the Jewish community: he believed that they were an excellent model for other communities to follow as well. The Jewish community was experiencing a crisis of continuity. Many present parents and grandparents had had their lives disrupted by the Second World War, either through evacuation, when Jewish youngsters lost the opportunity to spend their childhood or adolescence within a Jewish context, or through being caught up in the Holocaust itself, which had led to a breakdown in the understanding of Jewish identity and commitment and, not surprisingly, had frequently brought about a crisis of faith and identity. The Jewish community was working to repair that damage now.

7. In many ways the most significant item on the agenda of the Jewish community was parent and family education rather than simply child and youth education. Jewish life and values, like most of the important aspects of life, were generally "caught not taught". A Jew was not made by simply being put in a classroom or through being given interesting projects to do. Judaism was at its best transmitted through the family and enhanced through educational programmes. The attempt to deliver it only through learning programmes was bound to be a stilted exercise with limited success. Jews were committed to the continuance of the Jewish family: that required a vigorous approach to the issue of inter-marriage. It was difficult to have a "Jewish family" if one of the parents was not committed to the Jewish tradition. There were different responses within the Jewish community to the question of marriage and the attitude to be taken to the non-Jewish partner within a marriage, including whether it was possible to ease the entry of the non-Jewish partner into the Jewish community through conversion or whether inter-marriage should simply be completely resisted. The issue of the family, "marrying out" and assimilation and the pressures of secular society were of a crucial concern to the Jewish community and he suspected that they also would be to members of other immigrant communities. No doubt it was a frequent experience within the Inter Faith Network to arrive preoccupied with what we believed were our own particular issues and repeatedly to find that they were actually

issues for others as well. He was currently engaged in a thesis on the challenges which different religious communities were experiencing in Britain in transmitting their religious values to their next generations, so he would listen with great interest and concern to what the other panel members had to say about experience within their own communities.

8. Rabbi Hugo Gryn thanked Mr Lawton for his contribution and introduced as the second speaker Miss Avanika Patel, a graduate in nursing from Manchester University and President of the Young Women's section of the Swaminarayan Hindu community in Leicester.

9. Miss Avanika Patel said that she had been a practising Hindu since the age of six. Her parents had converted into the Swaminarayan movement when they emigrated to England. It was a relatively young tradition within Hinduism, having been founded in the early nineteenth century, basing itself on the teachings derived from the Vedic scriptures by Lord Swaminarayan. While members of the Swaminarayan movement belonged to their own strand within Hinduism they were Hindus. They believed in a Supreme Reality and they respected other faiths: they understood that different people had different beliefs and practices; but believed (to borrow a phrase) that "all roads lead to Rome"! The present leader of the movement was Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Just as pupils in school needed a teacher, so those within the Swaminarayan movement looked to Pramukh Swami as their guru to help them to understand the teachings of their tradition and to see more clearly how they should live their lives. There were four hundred Swaminarayan monks within the movement whose role was to help people through their teaching and in the interpretation of religious texts. The movement's previous guru, Pujya Yogiji Maharaj, had been concerned to develop work within the movement with young people. He was aware of the problems which Indian Hindus now living within Western countries were facing: he realised that the influence of secular Western society was adversely affecting the Hindu tradition and eroding the maintenance of the Hindu culture. So he launched a series of youth groups worldwide to help young Hindus develop sound attitudes and practice and to encourage their development as members of the wider community. It was in one these youth groups in Leicester that she had been taught the Hindu practices and values from an early age.

10. Experience as a child, as Clive Lawton had said, was very important. She had been given support by her immediate family as well as by her temple community. She had been allowed to explore the questions that had presented themselves as she grew up within her Hindu tradition and had been helped to find answers to these questions. Life in Leicester had provided her with many opportunities to develop and live her faith. There were many Hindu temples in the city which acted as resource centres for the Hindu community. Children of Hindu parents were not forced to become practising Hindus but were brought up within a way of life which enabled them to explore the practices, values and meaning of that tradition. At her own temple there were weekly meetings where women and men met in separate groups, although on major festivals and on other important occasions the community as a whole came together. Within her weekly group meetings there was the opportunity for

discussion with her friends and other members and it was possible to keep in touch with wider developments within the movement and with the current teaching of their guru. Young people were also encouraged to discuss any problems that they might be having in adapting to life as practising Hindus. Their sacred texts were written in Sanskrit and it was important, as part of their cultural identity, for young people to learn how to read them and also to practice their mother tongue of Gujarati. The maintenance of their heritage depended on keeping alive these languages. But at the same time it was important to produce publications in English for young Asians growing up in England which might then be more accessible to them.

11. She had been asked what it had been like to be a member of a minority within a multi-faith community: in Leicester she did not really feel that she was a member of a minority! The community as a whole was marked by tolerance and acceptance of the different groups which lived together there. In many ways the greater difficulty came from those from the same background who were not practising their Hindu traditions. Male Swaminarayan members had a mark on their forehead to indicate that they were practising Hindus: often at school other Asian children would make fun of this. Often the main difficulties in life came from those who were closest in background but had different beliefs and practices. There could be a lot a peer pressure on young Hindus to move away from commitment to their religious traditions and they had a definite sense of living in two worlds although it was possible to adapt to this. There was a distinction between home and temple on the one hand and school and work on the other and the sense of a switch from one role to another. Her own movement recognised the importance of working with young people, who would be the mothers and fathers of the generation to come after them. Whether the tradition was to be maintained for the future would be in their hands. Their leader Pramukh Swami had held many youth festivals; earlier in the year there had been a major festival in India attended by 20,000 young people. So her movement was rightly treating seriously the task of passing on the tradition to the next generation.

12. Rabbi Hugo Gryn thanked Miss Patel for her contribution with its personal insights into the experiences of young members of the Hindu community in Leicester: it was very appropriate for these remarks to have immediately preceded the arrival of the Lord Mayor of Leicester.

13. At this point in the meeting the Lord Mayor of Leicester, Councillor Peter Kimberlin, took his seat in the Council Chamber.

14. Rabbi Hugo Gryn said that the Network was delighted that, on the occasion of its first plenary meeting in Leicester, it had been invited to use the City Council Chamber. Those present at the meeting were grateful for the very warm welcome they had received. It felt entirely appropriate for the Network to be meeting at the heart of a multi-faith community like Leicester. A daughter of the city had just paid tribute to its tolerant nature. He presented the Lord Mayor with a book on world religions to mark the Network's visit.

15. The Lord Mayor spoke of the variety of Christian denominations represented in his own family's history. His ancestors had been Baptists, his wife had been an Anglican before their marriage and they were both now Roman Catholics. Barely a hundred and fifty years ago his own faith of Roman Catholicism had been outside the law so there had not always been the same degree of religious toleration that was shown today. But, interestingly, in the area of Leicester there were examples of Roman Catholics who had been honoured in their local communities years before the legislation giving emancipation to Roman Catholics in 1829. For example, in Aston Flanville to the south of the city was to be found the tomb of a Roman Catholic priest, Father Norton, who had, as an individual, been loved and tolerated within his local community even if his religion was not acceptable in law. In the city of Leicester the Roman Catholic church of Holy Cross had been built in 1817 prior to the 1829 Emancipation Act. Today Leicester was home to communities of many different faiths, which he saw represented at the present meeting, and he was proud of the relationships of mutual respect and affection which existed between them. Tolerance in itself was not enough: there was a need for a genuine love and encouragement of one another's communities. He hoped that the work of the Inter Faith Network would bear abundant fruit, not only in Leicester but throughout the country.

16. Rabbi Hugo Gryn thanked the Lord Mayor for his words of welcome to Leicester and said it was a great pleasure that he was able to join those present at the meeting for the lunch which would now follow.

17. After the break for a buffet lunch, Bishop Jim Thompson resumed the chair for the afternoon's first session. He introduced Mr Farooq Murad, Chairman of the National Association of Muslim Youth, an organisation linked to The Islamic Foundation, which was affiliated to the Network.

18. Mr Farooq Murad said that "faith" in Islam meant the recognition of God as the sole creator, master and ruler of the Universe; acceptance of the need to submit to the guidance that He had revealed through His messengers; and a belief that there would be a day of judgement at which we would need to account for the lives that we had led here in the world. For Muslims life in this world was important, as Clive Lawton had explained that it was for Jews. We all had to grapple with the problems which we encountered here and now and our faith must equip us to do that. Since his own faith required the recognition of one God as the sole guide to his behaviour then he would necessarily have problems living in a secular society which did not recognise God as law giver. That meant finding a way in which he could maintain his faith commitment while adjusting to the need to live within a largely secular society. That was the crucial problem for members of the Muslim community. After centuries of struggle to survive as a faith community in the face of the intensive onslaught of secularisation and secular domination it was clear that there was only one secure path: to seek to live by faith and to meet the challenges that presented themselves. This was the path that was being explored by many of the younger generation:

return to the sources of their faith, to the Quran and to the life of Muhammad, as the bedrock on which they had to build their lives, without necessarily being caught up in the later traditions which had developed culturally within their community. Various cultural traditions might have developed in different parts of the world in different Islamic societies but the founding sources of Islam were relevant regardless of time and space. Therefore Muslims had to find ways in which they could relate to the Quran and could relate the Quran to modern society. In many ways, despite the corrosion which had taken place through secularisation, within the new generation there was a greater desire to defend and live by the faith of Islam and a greater desire to draw their personal strength, self-confidence and identity from it. The immigrants to this country of the previous generation and their children had in some cases given up their faith and had accepted secular values, recognition and acceptance within the majority culture in society. But they had found that this did not necessarily win social acceptance for them. Within Britain there might be political democracy but this did not mean that it was a genuine multi-cultural society in which it was fully acceptable to be "different". Muslims found that if they assimilated to the wider society they were more likely to be accepted but there was less willingness to accept their separate identity if they tried to maintain this. The present generation of young Muslims had been brought up within an educational system which upheld secular values but were now increasingly identifying themselves with their Islamic faith. He himself had been fortunate in that he had always been kept in touch with Islamic teachings and the practice of Islam had successfully helped him through the task of living with faith in a secular society.

19. There was a need for young Muslims not merely to understand and practice Islam, but also to understand the society in which they lived and the wider world in the light of Islam. On this basis they could make a genuine contribution to their society. The realisation of this would instill a sense of purpose, pride and self-confidence in them. The National Association of Muslim Youth had been working for the past eleven years in this spirit: it believed that the young Muslims had a significant and positive role to play within society. It had developed recreational, cultural and educational programmes and had established many local groups in different cities. It had presented Islam to young people as a faith through which to learn to understand themselves, the wider society and their role within it. They experienced the joy of sharing that faith and their brotherhood and sisterhood within it and had in this way found a sense of direction. NAMY had placed a great emphasis on the value of residential programmes which gave young Muslims the opportunity to leave their inner-city surroundings and to spend time in the countryside. NAMY had also sought to encourage individual talents. Everyone was unique and was created with a special talent and role that needed to be defined, nurtured and developed. Then the individual could be an asset to society and find away to express and translate faith into a practical way of life.

20. Clearly a crucial issue within the Muslim community was the position of girls and women: NAMY had pioneered the development of youth groups for Muslim girls and had helped them to rediscover that

in many ways they had a more important role than their male colleagues in shaping the future life of the Muslim community. In addition to their training and educational facilities, NAMY was also developing an information data bank as it realised that one of the greatest problems which the younger generation of Muslims faced within a secular society was often the lack of adequate information on the faith itself. The challenges posed to young Muslims by secular society were very real but he believed that they could be met and solved. They could succeed in putting their faith into practice if they focussed their attention on the needs of society and the opportunities which that society offered to them.

21. Bishop Jim Thompson thanked Mr Murad for his contribution and introduced Mr Andrew Currah, a young Anglican working for the Methodist Church in Bradford, who had previously spent some time in Leicester.

22. Mr Andrew Currah said that in Britain there was a great deal of nostalgia about being basically a Christian country but in quantitative terms it plainly was not Christian. The culture of Britain was marked by its plurality of religions, its secularity of approach and its competing ideologies and political systems. The challenge for the Christian community was to live within post-Christian Britain with purpose and relevance and with a message that met people where they were and in terms that they could understand.

23. What was the present context for this? Within this society the integrity of the individual was safe-guarded at all costs. "A hedge between keeps friendships green" went the saying. Indeed buildings were constructed so that unnecessary meeting was avoided: an Englishman's home really was his castle! And "forgive us our trespasses" was the traditional form of the Lord's Prayer! Privatisation was the name of the game: the public realm had been evacuated. A consequence of this personal and individual freedom was that we left a degree of space for others to be themselves, perhaps not enough, but space nevertheless for others who were not the same. This led to a "supermarket" society of beliefs, ideologies and political practice in which there was endless choice but little or no commitment. Could we be fully human without an ultimate loyalty? If not, how did we avoid confusing loyalty with fanaticism and exclusion? We needed the commitment of the open hand and not the tight fist.

24. This supermarket of competing cultures spoke to its potential customers in the language of the mass media: television and the press had a major place in people's lives. Young people were no longer influenced very much by their elders or family (if they ever were): their influences were soap operas, videos and the tabloids. Many of these influences were handed over, as it were "on a plate", as undigested truth: an easier option than wrestling with God and faith. Britain also was suffering from a crisis of confidence. The erosion of its power in these post-colonial days had been mirrored in the depressed state of its economy and employment levels, in increasing poverty and a rising tide of alcohol and drug dependency. We also shared in the world crisis of confidence in the future of the planet

and the threat of ecological and nuclear disaster. It was in this context that the Church sought to continue the Christian tradition in this country.

25. The Church needed to examine itself more closely and to find a new role in a society where conventional religion was in decline. It seemed to him that this would be a role that accepted honestly and humbly, but joyfully, its minority status within our plural society. While it still saw itself belonging more in the corridors of power than in the back streets of the cities the Church would fail to attract and meet the needs of the majority of people and in particular the younger generation. As the Christian community moved further and further to the edges of society it would become more of a counter culture, a deviant minority contradicting the established order. This was the way of the subversive sage, Jesus of Nazareth. At the edges, Christians would find themselves at home and that there were already other marginalised communities waiting to welcome them and with an agenda to share.

26. For the writers of the gospels, each in their own way, the central issue was not Jesus but God. Jesus proclaimed God's Kingdom, determined to do the will of God and was continually conscious of his special relationship with God. So the Church needed to proclaim in word, deed and practice that firstly God is. Then that God has and is pursuing his Kingdom, one of justice, peace and shared love. To preach an "other worldly" gospel which endeavoured to recruit people to a cultic club which secured their individual salvation would, to his mind, be a betrayal of that gospel. The Church must stand against the increasing stress on individual and private satisfaction and advocate instead a concern for public and community concerns. Private religion by definition maintained the status quo. The gospel question must be presented less in the terms of "Is Jesus my Saviour?" and more in terms of "Are God and his Kingdom a possibility?".

27. Equally the gospel must be proclaimed to every part of every person's life: a faith that acted for integral liberation of the human being. The Church must become genuinely local and use language and practices which were familiar not only because otherwise Christians would feel alienated from the reality of their own lives but also to be in effective mission in the local situation. This had not happened generally speaking and the Church was alien to the majority of young people. There was a need for a contemporary Church, not in order to be popular, but in order to speak to people's felt needs, hopes and fears. Church buildings must become less like fortresses and more like centres of community activity. Worship needed to be more participatory and even enjoyable, involving more of the senses than just hearing, engaging with emotions and feelings. Our ministry should be less hierarchical and more feminine. Sunday Schools and Junior Church must be good memories for later life. Service and witness must cross all the barriers that existed locally. Our community of believers should be less divisive and exclusive and more like the voice and hands of Jesus, the one for others.

28. The tradition which was passed on must be ecumenical: not only in relation to other Christians but embodying a wider ecumenism.

Christians needed to listen to, and learn from, the other faith communities. This was important for the tasks that lay ahead: the search for a more just world, the overcoming of the threat of nuclear war and the solution of the ecological crisis. In relationship and dialogue with other religious traditions we witnessed to our deepest faith convictions and so grew together towards God. This demanded a respect which discerned God's presence and action wherever it was found and a humility which did not have any exclusive claim to God's truth and love. The sooner the Christian Church accepted its minority role alongside the other faith communities in this country the sooner we could all tackle together the tasks that lay ahead. As the Churches in Britain embarked on a "decade of evangelism" (which filled him with not a little dread) - he looked for a handing down of a society which was not necessarily more Christian, but one that was more just and more loving and so more peaceful.

29. Bishop Jim Thompson thanked Mr Andrew Currah for his contribution and introduced Mr Daljit Singh, who was involved with young people in the Sikh community.

30. Mr Daljit Singh said that he could be instantly recognised as a Sikh because of his beard and his turban. Members of the Sikh community faced a particular challenge because they stood out from the majority of society, whether English or Asian, as a result of their distinctive appearance. The problem of racism was not unique to Sikhs but affected all ethnic minorities. Apart from the name-calling, chanting, spitting and so-called "paki-bashing" Sikhs had to live with their distinctive appearance on top of their different coloured skin and language. Sikhs looked different with their turbans and beards and their long hair but these were differences adopted through their own choice as marks of their tradition. But it was an added difficulty in life in the West which had what he would describe as an institutionalised "clean-cut" image which could be quite intimidating. The socially accepted or expected norms of being clean shaven or enjoying a pint at the end of the day helped to set Sikhs apart from the majority. Culture and religion presented two separate types of problem. There was a distinct difference between being a British Sikh, a Punjabi Sikh or, for example, an American Sikh. The cultural environment in which someone had been brought up had a strong influence on their mannerisms and cultural identity. But there would be a common pattern in terms of religious behaviour. Was he himself British? Or was he a Sikh? Or was he British Sikh? How different did that make him from his parents? Attitudes towards adults and parents, the attitudes of boys to girls and girls to boys, attitudes towards marriage, music and even money all varied. These were not simply problems for teenagers at school or for young people at college but for people at work as well. By adulthood one might feel that one had established a personal identity. But apart from the obvious hurdle of an interview for a job, promotion was often difficult for the person who was "different". Even if there was no problem in terms of ability promotion still might not come. If it was important to "entertain the boss", how did you do this competitively with your colleagues if you did not drink, did not smoke and did not eat meat? How many people were ready to give up their careers for their ideals? What did this involve? Did you decide to become "one of them", or did you

simply try to excel at your work? In practice to get to the top of a career structure you would need to do both. Many religious Sikhs had their own businesses precisely because it was then easier for them to avoid these tensions in their work. But for Sikhs in other employment there were real tests to be faced in terms of their religious ideals. Their response to these challenges would be dictated by the strength of their beliefs and their understanding of their faith.

31. The understanding of one's religion had to start at a young age. Sikh gurdwaras had been playing an important role in educating the next generation of Sikhs in their religious traditions. Parents, too, needed to play an important role in guiding and educating their children and in supporting them through school and in preventing the formation of an inferiority complex which could cause problems in later life. The role of parents was vital. It really was their primary responsibility to teach their religion to children from infancy. Taking two boys who were living in the street both of whom were Sikhs, and finding that five years later one boy was still wearing his turban and the other one, was as much due to the way their parents had brought them up as to differences in their personality and character. In terms of passing on our religious traditions to the next generation, education, encouragement and support from parents and the older generation were of crucial importance.

32. Bishop Jim Thompson thanked Mr Daljit Singh for this contribution and introduced Dr Kim Knott, of the Community Religions Project at the University of Leeds, who was currently undertaking research into the transmission of religious traditions from one generation to the next in different communities.

33. Dr Kim Knott said that it was apparent that present day British society was one in which there were many ethnic, cultural and religious differences. Different communities had their own dynamics and different religious traditions had their own histories and circumstances. So the problem of transmission of the tradition from one generation to the next was not identical in different communities. But perhaps the over-riding question was how religious teaching and practice could be made to make sense in the context of present day secular society although there would be different answers to that question. It might have been thought that the position of Christianity would be different. But it had been argued that the Christian community was in a minority as well, even if its historic role in Britain meant that its circumstances were significantly different.

34. If we looked at the history of our religious traditions we would be struck by the fact of their survival over many generations. They had their own internal theological dynamics: they offered us resources and hope for the future, perhaps in the next life or for a better life here on this earth; they offered ways of making sense of the human condition. They offered social and psychological tools for their followers to use. They were the means by which people made sense of their own identities, both as individuals and as communities. They could offer a sense of belonging, perhaps in a

situation where a religious tradition's adherents were marked off as a minority because of their different beliefs and practices. They offered meaning for our lives and a sense of order and a way of making sense of the world. But there would be new challenges to those traditions and they would take new directions. The circumstances in which religions found themselves had changed: Britain in the 1990s was very different from Britain in the 1590s and it was very different from the Indian sub-continent early this century, or Eastern Europe at the end of the last century. Questions about nurture and transmission differed according to the historical circumstances that had to be addressed. In the past, or elsewhere in the world now, religion might be infused throughout the whole of society, but here and now there was a tendency to see religion as one compartment of life, separate from school, work and leisure time. This context of a largely secular society was a new challenge for religious traditions.

35. There was a tendency to identify the challenge of transmitting a religious tradition as being a concern for the young. But it was important to remember that adults too were faced with competing possibilities and these also affected the transmission of religion from one generation to another. Work, making money and creating a successful family life consumed a good deal of time. They were priorities on which we rightly and properly spent considerable time and effort at certain periods of our lives. But these commitments could leave us with less time to tell stories to our children and to attend to the need to hand on our traditions to them. Those who had spoken earlier in the day had underlined the importance in this process of transmission of the contribution of parents and the family. So what was at issue was not simply where children were in their minds and hearts but where their parents were in theirs.

36. The challenge of living with religious pluralism was also important. Mission was an important part of the work of the religions to be found in this country. Was this to be feared or should it encourage us to think more deeply about our own faith? We could be disturbed by missionary activity but we also needed to be challenged by it to explore the depths of our own tradition. The whole relationship between faith and mission and young people in the future would be a crucial one. There was a need to face up to this challenge and to explore its dimensions honestly. As had been said, the primary context for the transmission of a religious tradition was the home.

37. It happened in simple ways, through observation, imitation and participation, through young people watching what their older brothers and sisters did and taking part with them in the practice of their tradition, sitting on the parental knee, (or grandparental knee) and listening to stories about their faith. Were young people being encouraged to grow up in this way in the family setting? Did they have religious roles of their own to play of which they could feel proud? At places of worship there were often supplementary schools of one type or another. There might be youth clubs, opportunities for young people to study, participate in worship. But what roles did communities offer their young people in worship? Was the atmosphere at worship one which encouraged young people to attend

it regularly? Did the religious community appear to be a world belonging to adults and to religious leaders? Or was it one in which young people felt they could be true to themselves while having the opportunity to play their part?

38. Another issue was that of language, which Avanika Patel had mentioned. How was knowledge of the languages in which sacred texts were written to be handed on? What role would mother tongue vernacular languages play in the future in religious communities? Would there be opportunities for young people to learn these languages? Would materials also be produced in English which might help young people in the learning of their religious traditions? Clearly the role of the day school was also of vital importance. There was obviously a major issue at present about the future pattern of grant aided schools but the present context was one in which schools in the public sector were culturally mixed. What did children learn there about their own traditions? Was there an opportunity to learn about both their own religion and about the religions of others? Was there an opportunity for young people to talk about their religion, their culture and their background, their family life with each other? There were other important elements as well in the development of young people: for example, visits abroad, meetings and conversations with other members of their family, opportunities, as Farooq Murad had mentioned, to spend time away from normal family life, perhaps in the country, with an opportunity to learn more about different environments. Young people wanted many of the same sort of things that older people either wanted now or wanted in the past: they wanted to find meaning in their lives, to have a sense of purpose and to feel that they were contributing and participating. They wanted to know who they were and to have a sense of identity. In many respects we all had the same kind of concerns for ourselves. Sometimes young people wanted to please; sometimes they wanted to rebel. She herself remembered being extremely rebellious but at the same time wanting her mother to love her: we all had that experience in common and needed to remember what it was like.

39. What difference was there between what we wanted as adults for ourselves and for our religious traditions for the future and what young people wanted? What contribution would they be allowed to make to the way in which religious traditions developed now and in the future? It was important for young people to be involved with adults in working out how their needs could be met by religious communities. It was important for religious communities to find ways of making use of the creative abilities of young people. How far could they be allowed to doubt and question? Were there areas within a religious tradition that were open to new interpretations by the next generation? Our experiences as adults might be important here. If we did not feel that we had been involved in the development of our own religious tradition and our religious communities then we might feel that the next generation should not have this opportunity either. So we needed to examine how far our own earlier experiences were influencing our decisions about the way in which young people should behave and should be treated.

40. What were our hopes for our religious traditions? What was our

vision? We should discover these, quite simply by sitting people down and asking them what they hoped for their religious communities in the future. What then did these hopes suggest for the agenda of religious communities here and now? To embark on a process of this kind would mean facing hard issues: the issues of mission, of dialogue and encounter, of willingness to allow one another to learn from experience, the issue of inter-marriage, the role of religious leaders, the place of women. Would the future leaders of our religious communities come from within them or be imported from outside Britain? Were we taking steps to educate young people as future leaders within our communities? These were some of the questions which had emerged for her from the previous contributions and from her own recent work on the day's theme.

41. Following the conclusion of her talk Dr Kim Knott invited everyone to exchange with their neighbour some recollection of their own experience in their youth in terms of their own religious identity and involvement with their faith community.

42. Before breaking for tea, Bishop Jim Thompson thanked Dr Kim Knott and, once more the other panel speakers. After tea, Rabbi Hugo Gryn (in the Chair) opened the meeting to general discussion.

43. Rev Tim Fyffe (Wolverhampton Inter Faith Group) expressed concern about the drawing of a sharp line between faith communities and "secular society". Many of the problems in the world had been caused by those who had espoused a religious commitment, and many of the most significant contributions to the well-being of humanity in the world had been made by those who had rejected any religious commitment. Perhaps the maintenance of faith community institutional structures, as such, was less important than the promotion of the virtues of truth, peace, justice and love. Even though he had given much of his life to the church it was, in his view, vital to realise that faith institutions were means, not ends.

44. Mr Clive Lawton said that it was important not to underestimate the value of institutions and systems: social values were transmitted through these and were nurtured by them. It was dangerous to be too iconoclastic about institutions. People who could develop spiritually without a framework of practice and form and the support of community institutions were rare. He was personally troubled by the degree to which Christians down played the significance of the churches as institutions for the maintenance of their religious tradition. It was incidentally only Christians who tended to observe that Britain was not a Christian country! This was not how it struck members of other faiths who were aware of the pervasive presence and importance of the Christian tradition if only in the form of "folk religion" and the social calendar.

45. Ms Fiona Wynne (Inter Faith Network) suggested that what was at issue was not simply the maintenance of our religious institutions as they stood, but the need for these to be revitalised in each generation, and for the faith tradition to be restated in the language of the day. What mattered was not the institution as such, but the role which it played, which needed to be kept fresh and not taken for granted, and the meaning which was conveyed through its

symbols and rituals.

46. Ms Sajda Khoker (Community Religions Project, University of Leeds) said that there was a need within the Islamic tradition to revitalise the role of the mosque and to find ways in which the role of women could be developed within this. Institutions could be experienced as limiting and restricting but had to find creative paths.

47. Mr Barney Leith (Baha'i Community of the UK) said that within the Baha'i tradition its institutions played a central role, but it was recognised that these needed to be open enough to receive the messages which young people were sending so that young and old developed and grew together. Young people needed to provide the energy within institutions and elders, the wisdom. Within the Baha'i community, the image was used of young people as the head of a spear but which could not be effective without the shaft of older people providing the necessary weight and direction. Young and old were interdependent and both had vital, but complementary roles.

48. Mr John Hay (Nottingham Inter Faith Group) referred to the theories which had been propounded by various writers on the stages of faith development through which we passed. It was important for us to reach the stage at which we owned our faith for ourselves. Many adults had, in practice, not negotiated the transition from childhood to adulthood in terms of their religious faith. If they had remained at the stage of following outward forms and practices they would have problems in passing on their tradition to their children to whom the outside world would seem more lively. As a teacher he had found that he had to help children free themselves from a view of their religious tradition as being lifeless. In many ways, the problem over the handing on of a religious tradition lay with the parents rather than with the children themselves.

49. Ms Mildred Reynolds (Wolverhampton Inter Faith Group) suggested that inadequate attention was paid to the need to take account of time and place in the approach to young people. Religious traditions were often trapped in the language of the past. For example, when she was confirmed as a child she had been told she would be a "soldier of Christ" but this had conveyed to her the image of a Roman soldier which scarcely seemed an appropriate role model! There had been no attempt that she was aware of to look for an image which spoke to her in her life. As the time and place in which we lived changed, there was a need for our religious traditions to use language that responded to changing needs.

50. Ms Angela Wood (SCIFDE) mentioned in the context of discussion about whether Britain was a Christian country or not, that the Department of Education and Science was instructing all LEA's to carry out for the first time a census of the religious affiliation of children at the admission ages of 5 and 11 years, as well as of their language and ethnic origin. The religious categories on offer were; Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, "Other" or "None". Clearly there were pitfalls in this exercise but it should provide some interesting data. The forms would be completed by the school probably by asking parents the necessary questions at the admission

interview. The schools would collect the data under the direction of their LEA: the returns were due with the Department of Education and Science in the course of 1991. In future, the exercise would be carried out on an annual basis and would cover both primary and secondary schools. Thus in 5 years' time a total picture of the school population would emerge. It was not known when the first results would be published. She questioned whether our development in spiritual terms did run parallel to the development of other skills. Her work with children under the age of seven had led her to believe that childhood was often a period of the greatest religious maturity. During the period spent at school there was often a regression in terms of religious or spiritual development. It was possible to have a much more sophisticated theological discussion with a three or four year old than with a fourteen year old who had by then been educated in the scientific and technological "world view".

51. Dr Bernadette O'Keefe (Inter Faith Network) said that recent research suggested that by contrast with many state schools, there was not the same dip in religious commitment in voluntary aided denominational schools where there was more chance for the school, the home, and the religious community to reinforce one another. The confidence of the family within their own tradition was very important in the process of transmission. For transmission to be successful, a tradition had to remain true to its roots, but also be sufficiently flexible to deal with the changing realities of the world in which we lived and the desire of children to be "modern". She also mentioned that in some research ten years ago among Hindu families in East London, respondents had almost all said that they had not found obstacles placed by British society in the way of their practicing their Hindu faith.

52. Ms Avanika Patel supported the view that the home influence was very important. She herself was what her parents, family and community had bred into her. She had questioned what she was being taught, but her questions had been answered. It was important to find ways of helping children deal with the problems that they were encountering in taking on board the tradition being offered to them.

53. Mrs Ruth Tetlow (Birmingham Inter Faith Council) mentioned a day conference which the Birmingham Inter Faith Council had organised specifically for about 35 sixth formers from different faith communities. It had been a most valuable occasion and she would be interested to hear from other inter faith groups which might have attempted similar events to this.

54. Rabbi Hugo Gryn said that it was encouraging to hear of this initiative. The Network planned to consider how it might develop inter faith activity among young people.

55. Mr Richard Sewell (Newham Association of Faiths) referred to a recent conference which he had attended in East London on the spiritual needs of people with learning difficulties or, in the language of the past, the mentally handicapped. This had been an immensely challenging experience. When we talked about the handing on of our religious traditions, we needed to bear in mind the special

needs of those with learning difficulties. Arguably, faith communities ought to be more sensitive to these needs than society as a whole but this was perhaps not the case. Mr Clive Lawton referred to the work within the Jewish community on facilities for the blind and deaf. Some synagogues had introduced induction loops and "signing" at services. He mentioned a Jewish school in London for children with "special needs" and a boarding school near Manchester for children with behavioural difficulties. The involvement of the pupils from that school at a Liverpool Jewish youth centre had been very enriching. But Jews, like others, were perhaps too reluctant to admit to the existence of learning disability. This had its good side because it might mean that goals of achievement were still set but could mean that children were pushed beyond their abilities. Ms Avanika Patel referred to the way in which Down's Syndrome children, and deaf and dumb children were treated within their community, with the aim of making them feel fully accepted rather than isolating them. The existence of the extended family could also help here. There was clearly a need to serve the particular needs of individuals as well as the community as a whole. Mr Daljit Singh said that the approach in the Sikh community was similar. Mentally handicapped children were fully accepted within Sikh gurdwaras although there were no specific Sikh institutions for them so far as he was aware, dedicated to the care of Sikh children with special needs. There was a need for people to be trained to meet these. Mr Clive Lawton referred to past traditions of care within the community for the "village idiot" which had been replaced by clearing away the mentally handicapped into institutions. The new policy of "care within the community" too often left the displaced individuals without care in an uncaring community. Mr Andrew Currah said that there were many problems over physical access for the disabled to church buildings and a need to make it easier for those with special needs to play a part in church life. Monsignor Paul Hypher (Peterborough Inter Faith Council) referred to the work being done within the Roman Catholic church on the spiritual development of the mentally handicapped and the ways in which they could relate to the Christian sacraments. Ms Angela Wood (SCIFDE) suggested that often our religious traditions were too intellectualised and over valued cognitive ability. The mentally handicapped could be gloriously free of over intellectualism and be able to develop a creative spirituality.

56. Mr O P Sharma (National Council of Hindu Temples) said how much he had valued the contributions from the young panel speakers. He hoped that it might be possible under the auspices of the Network to arrange an inter faith youth programme.

57. Dharmachari Kulananda (Friends of the Western Buddhist Order) said that his own community had a different approach to the transmission of religious traditions from those mentioned so far. Members of his community did not assume that their children would necessarily be Buddhists, or push them into following that tradition. The aim was to have a more open-ended approach so that young people could decide when they wished to do so on their religious affiliation.

58. Mr Ataullah Siddiqui (Leicester Council of Faiths) spoke of a national group for deaf Muslim children which had arranged a dialogue

meeting with deaf Christian and Hindu young people. He referred more generally to the need for Muslims to reflect on the way in which their religious tradition was to be understood. Was this to be anchored in the Quran and hadith, in cultural tradition, or in the immediate context of today's society? There was a need for Muslims to accept what was good in society around them, and to recognise the extent to which some of their traditions were simply the cultural aspects of life within particular Islamic societies, rather than being central to the religious tradition of Islam as such. There was a need for the Muslim community in Britain to work out what it meant to be a British Muslim. In his view, the threat was not so much the existence of secularism as the risk of secularisation.

59. Rabbi Hugo Gryn invited the panel of speakers to offer any closing observations in the light of the general discussion.

60. Mr Daljit Singh referred to the earlier comments about the role of religion in promoting conflicts in the world. Professor A J P Taylor had once observed that the making of a dictator was a very religious mother! But it was the members of a religious tradition who failed that tradition rather than the tradition itself which led to war and violence. It should be the task of different faiths through their institutions to encourage mutual tolerance, and to base their religious commitment not on intellectual propositions but on the service of love and truth.

61. Mr Andrew Currah reaffirmed his view that we did not live in a Christian society, but we did not live in a secular society either. We lived in a religious society in the sense that questions which were essentially religious about the meaning of life and the hereafter were being raised. But these questions were not always being answered adequately for those who asked them by the conventional wisdom of our religious traditions.

62. Mr Clive Lawton spoke in favour of the maintenance of Jewish schools as an important facility alongside the state system. Not all Jews (perhaps not even himself) would want to send their children to separate schools. The Jewish community was concerned with survival and retained a sense of insecurity. The Jews in their history had been "professional refugees". A Jewish school could provide a more secure base for the transmission of Jewish tradition but could only work effectively in partnership with the home and family. If the pressures of work and daily life on young parents marginalised their religious tradition and they were not secure in this, then they would have difficulty in handing their tradition on to their children and a Jewish school could not easily do it alone. On the question of the character of British society today, perhaps it was a "secular Christian society". Certainly it was a context in which it was not possible to leave the transmission of religious traditions to chance and there was a need for an institutional framework for this.

63. Ms Avanika Patel said that it had been heartening to be present at the meeting and to share experiences at it. There was a need to find a way of balancing commitment to one's own community with participation in the wider society. In her view, the two were compatible.

64. Dr Kim Knott said that there were basic questions about the transmission of values which could be put in concrete terms such as how does a young person learn to give up their seat on a bus to an older person or a disabled person? How did we tackle questions about the way the world is and what happens to us when we die? She had not had a religious upbringing. However, she thought of herself as a religious person and did now have a religious affiliation. But she had learned to grapple with these religious questions at an early age outside the framework of a religious community. So she liked to think that there was still hope for those whose lives did not fit into prescribed religious categories.

63. In closing the meeting, Rabbi Hugo Gryn thanked once more the panel speakers and all those who had contributed to the general discussion and the Network staff for the arrangements made for the meeting. It had been a fascinating day which had provided a lot of food for thought. It had been very rewarding to have the meeting at Leicester which had helped to underline the fact that the Network was not simply a London based organisation but had countrywide concerns.

64. The meeting concluded at 4.30 pm.

1990 (Autumn)

Archbishop Dr Runcie
reflects on inter faith
relations in the UK

REPORT OF PLENARY MEETING OF THE INTER FAITH NETWORK
HELD ON THURSDAY, 29TH NOVEMBER 1990 AT JOHN ADAMS HALL,
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION, 20 BEDFORD WAY, LONDON, WC1

1. Rabbi Hugo Gryn, in the chair for the morning session, welcomed representatives of the Network's affiliated organisations and guests. After a period of silence, he opened the preliminary business session preceding the arrival of the guest speaker, the Archbishop of Canterbury.
2. At the chairman's invitation, Mr Brian Pearce presented a report on the seminar organised jointly by the Network and the Commission for Racial Equality on 24th October. The report is at Annex A.
3. Rabbi Hugo Gryn thanked the Director for his report. The second Network/CRE seminar had been a valuable opportunity to take further discussion of the issues tackled at the previous seminar held in October 1989. This co-operation with the Commission for Racial Equality had been a significant development in the life of the Network. The CRE had recognised the value of the role which the Network was now playing, and it was hoped to build on the relationship for the future in matters of common concern.
4. Rabbi Hugo Gryn drew the attention of the meeting to the motion tabled on behalf of the Executive Committee proposing an increase in the level of the Network's annual affiliation fees from £10 to £15 for local inter faith groups and from £25 to £40 for other organisations. The level of the present fees had been set when the Network was launched in 1987 and clearly they needed to be reviewed from time to time. Affiliation fees did not represent a major source of revenue for the Network, but their payment was a sign of commitment on the part of affiliated organisation. He hoped that faith community organisations in particular might be ready to offer significant additional funding support, but it was recognised that the majority of affiliated organisations only had slender financial resources. The Executive Committee intended that if the proposed increases were agreed by the meeting, any affiliated organisation which had difficulty in meeting the increased level of fee should be able to approach the Network office about this.
5. In discussion, it was agreed that the level of affiliation fees needed to be reviewed from time to time even though the majority of the Network's funding would need to come from other sources. Mr Eric Moonman reported on discussions in the fund-raising group on a fund-raising programme to be undertaken during 1991. Any ideas for fundraising which could be channelled to the group would be most welcome. Mr David Yarham suggested that those groups with slender resources might consider taking a collection for the Network at one of their meetings: this would no doubt enable them to fund their affiliation fee, and possibly to make a larger donation as well. It was agreed that a collection for Network funds should be taken at the present plenary meeting. Some concern was expressed that some concessions on the payment of affiliation fees should only be made when this was absolutely necessary. It was a matter of principle that all affiliated organisations should offer at least some element of financial support to the Network.
6. The meeting agreed the proposed increases in affiliation fees.

7. Rabbi Hugo Gryn said that the meeting might be interested to hear of developments with two Network projects: exploration of a project on the theme of shared values in a multi-faith society and work towards a directory of faith communities.

8. Mr Brian Pearce introduced Dr. Harriet Crabtree, who had recently returned from the USA where, for nine years, she had been a member of the Centre for the Study of World Religions at Harvard University. She was now working on a period appointment for the Network exploring the shape which a project in the field of shared values might take, with a view to preparing an application for funding for this. Dr. Crabtree said that she hoped to be in touch with representatives of a number of Network organisations to discuss the project and to collect suggestions of others with whom she should make contact.

9. Mr Brian Pearce referred to the agreement reached with the Derbyshire College of Higher Education for a project to collect directory material covering the different faith communities in this country. Mr Paul Weller, former Resources Officer for the Network, was now head of the new Religious Resource and Research Centre at the College. Mr Paul Weller said the project would welcome the contribution of information from affiliated organisations and it would be helpful to have attention drawn to any listings and directory material which were already available. An advisory panel with representatives from some of the academic bodies affiliated to the Network had been established, and it was also planned to set up consultative groups drawing on the resources of the faith communities represented within the Network. It was most important that any directory which was published was acceptable to the faith communities which it covered. He introduced Ms Rachele Castle, a graduate in sociology from Sunderland Polytechnic, who had been appointed to a Research Assistant post at the College to work on the project with him. In discussion, it was noted that there were some difficult issues to resolve in terms of the precise coverage of any planned directory, but it could be an invaluable source of information given the current absence of directories in the case of a number of communities. It would be important to consider how best to present the material which was collected in a manageable, but at the same time informative, way.

10. At this point in the meeting, Rabbi Hugo Gryn welcomed, on his arrival, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Rt Hon and Most Rev Dr. Robert Runcie, together with his chaplain, Canon Graham James. Rabbi Gryn said that it was a time of changing leadership in the country, in some cases by planned design, in some otherwise! The Archbishop was drawing near to the end of his term of office, and it was a great pleasure both personally and on behalf of the Network to be able to welcome him to this plenary meeting which would offer an opportunity for representatives of different faith communities to express their gratitude to him for the work that he had done in the field of inter faith relations. All those who cherished a vision of harmonious inter faith relationships saw in him a kindred spirit. When the Network itself had been launched, the Archbishop had sent a message of encouragement in which he had said: "The Network will help to build bridges between the many and various faith communities who now live side by side in our country. Our future enlightenment, enrichment and even survival depend on such initiatives, and this Network certainly has my whole-hearted support and blessing". He believed that the Network had made a good start in fulfilling its aims. It was the wish of the Network in inviting the Archbishop to this present meeting to honour him; in accepting the invitation its Archbishop had honoured the Network.

11. The Archbishop of Canterbury, the Rt Hon and Most Rev Dr Robert Runcie thanked Rabbi Hugo Gryn for his greetings and delivered his address of which the full text is reproduced at Annex B.

12. Rabbi Hugo Gryn thanked the Archbishop for his moving and thoughtful address and for the spirit in which it had been delivered. It was clear from the way in which it had been received that it had been deeply appreciated. He recalled that representatives of the different faith communities had been present at the Archbishop's enthronement in Canterbury Cathedral in March 1980; the arrangements for this had been made by the late Canon Peter Schneider. This invitation had been an indication of the Archbishop's commitment to building bridges with other faith communities and was an early promise which had been happily fulfilled. He invited contributions in response to the Archbishop's address.

13. Mr Indarjit Singh (Sikh Council for Inter Faith Relations) thanked Dr Runcie on behalf of the Sikh community for his moving address. We were often too ready to criticise the lack of progress in inter faith relations, and to forget how much had changed in recent years. The excellent work of the Archbishop in promoting interfaith understanding during his term of office should certainly not be relegated to an appendix!

14. He recalled as a child learning the speech of John of Gaunt in Shakespeare's "Richard II" with its reference to "this other Eden, demi-paradise; this fortress built by Nature for herself against infection and the hand of war this precious stone set in the silver sea which serves it in the office of a wall or as a moat defensive to a house against the envy of less happier lands". While he and his classmates had examined the passage's literary style and the figurative language, it had never occurred to them to criticise the xenophobia and insularity which those words actually expressed, or to consider that other nations might have different explanations for England's isolation!

15. Inter faith dialogue was very much in the spirit of Sikhism. In his very first sermon, Guru Nanak had said "In God's eyes there is neither Hindu nor Muslim". By extension, neither was there Christian, Jew or Sikh. God was not interested in labels, but only in the way we lived our lives. The Sikh holy book, the Guru Granth Sahib, contained the writings not only of the Sikh Gurus, but also of Hindu and Muslim saints. The ninth Sikh Guru, Tegh Bahadur, gave his life for the rights of Hindus to worship in the manner they chose in the face of their rulers' intolerance. The Archbishop had referred to the need for tolerance and wider understanding, and these were the motivating forces behind The Inter Faith Network. He welcomed the Archbishop's comments on the importance of safeguarding the rights of minorities and was grateful for the support which the Christian churches had given to this. As Pandit Nehru, India's first Prime Minister, had emphasised, majorities had a responsibility towards minorities: more than a responsibility, a sacred trust. He fully appreciated the dangers to which the Archbishop had referred in the "tribalising of religion" and of "fundamentalism" when there was a preoccupation with the trappings of a religious tradition, rather than its true message. At the same time, it had recognised that the term "fundamentalist" was unfortunately too often used today to smear minority communities. There were the twin dangers of "fundamentalism" itself and of the label "fundamentalist" being used as a covert way of attacking minority groups. The work which the Archbishop had done not only in promoting understanding between communities in this country, but internationally was much appreciated. Sometimes this had been at great cost. We would

remember on this day, as we should always do, the incarceration of Terry Waite on a mission of peace on behalf of the Archbishop.

16. Sadly, inter faith dialogue was still sometimes regarded as a regrettable necessity, arising from the need to find some framework of discourse with minorities because of the risk of friction and discontent in a plural society. But that was to take a very negative view of inter faith dialogue. The Archbishop had commended exploring other religious traditions and rejoicing when we found, as we often would, that they reflected our own religious values, and helped us to a deeper understanding of our own faith. We also needed to learn to respect differences. True dialogue of this kind needed to permeate our national life. If there had been more mutual understanding and more weight given to respect for other religious traditions, then "The Satanic Verses" would not have been greeted as a work of literary merit. He thanked the Archbishop for his clear endorsement of the need for social partnership between religious communities. As he had rightly said, there had been an attempt to marginalise religion within a secular society by limiting it to personal faith. Sadly and too often, religious leaders had accepted that approach, retreating into a cloistered contemplation of the hereafter. But there was a need to engage with the current problems of this world even though they were complicated and difficult. He closed by quoting the saying of Guru Nanak that the final vision of justice is not contained in man or in any creature of the universe, but is God's alone. It was the task of our religious communities: to make sure that the cruder visions of justice that were so often offered to society were enriched by a spiritual dimension.

17. Mr Om Parkash Sharma (National Council of Hindu Temples) began with a chant from the Hindu scriptures, and offered this translation of it: "O Lord, may your creation live in peace. May the sovereign rulers rule with justice. May their subjects adopt the righteous path. May spiritual masters and intellectuals respect it". He said that the Hindu tradition was the oldest living religion in the world. All the good teachings of the world's religions could be found within the Hindu tradition, even though there might be differences between them in terms of ritual. The Hindu tradition was always open to the adoption of the insights of others. The Vedas said: "Let noble thoughts come to us from all corners of the world. Revere and pay greatest respect to your own holy scriptures but do not condemn any other scriptures". Tolerance and respect for others was the great strength of the Hindu tradition.

18. Along with those in other minorities, the Hindu community were experiencing difficulties in practising their religious faith in Britain and he hoped that Christian people would help them in overcoming these difficulties. There was strong support from the Hindu community for inter faith dialogue. He himself had a strong personal commitment to building bridges of understanding between the different faith communities of Great Britain. He accepted that there were differences between the faith communities in terms of the source of various religious traditions, but they did hold many values in common on which they could build better relations. We knew what damage had been done in different parts of the world where there had been religious strife, and we needed to do all that we could to develop positive and constructive inter-religious relations here in Britain. To do this, we must listen to one another and The Inter Faith Network itself provided a forum for doing so as did various inter-religious organisations at local and national level which needed to be given strong support. He believed that it was important to avoid misrepresenting one another and to make sure that, within our own communities, we did not encourage a false picture of one another's religious traditions which could only encourage prejudice. As the draft Network

statement on inter-religious relations in Britain said: "If we are to transform and enrich our relationships we need to avoid demeaning or disparaging one another's personal religious traditions. We must always beware of comparing the practice of another's religious tradition with the ideals of our own. There will be occasions when we need to express convictions which differ from those of people from other religious traditions. At the same time, we need to learn what causes offence to each other, and avoid this wherever we can do so without compromising our integrity".

19. We could hope that, as we grew in understanding of one another, we could work together to build a better society in which we all could share. Naturally, there were practical issues which our communities had to face, for example in the field of education, as exemplified by the difficulties with the recent Education Reform Act, but we would deal with them more readily in an atmosphere of mutual respect for one another's needs and concerns. He closed with a prayer: "May we all love thy creation. May there be peace and harmony among all the nations of the world".

20. Mrs Ivy Gutridge (Wolverhampton Inter Faith Group) said that she was pleased that a number of members of the Wolverhampton group were present: it had been in existence since 1974. It had been a great encouragement to hear the Archbishop's address and she had been pleased to hear him refer to problems at local level. She believed that everyone who had been engaged in inter faith work, particularly in its early years, felt that they were in a minority within their own communities, and felt perhaps at times unsupported in their own communities. That was gradually changing, and the Network itself had had some influence in that, but there was still a long way to go, and therefore the Archbishop's words had been good to hear. She was concerned about how to handle in an inter faith context the Decade of Evangelism. We all had to do what we could to prevent this bringing with it polarisation and misunderstanding, and to use the Decade in a positive way to build up the mutual understanding and recognition of one another's values about which the Archbishop had spoken. She hoped that he would offer the meeting some further comments about how this more open approach could be encouraged at congregational level within the churches so that the Decade of Evangelism became a positive experience for the whole community, and not a divisive one.

21. Dr Zaki Badawi (Imams and Mosques Council: UK) said that he was always impressed by the deep commitment of the Archbishop to inter faith relations. The previous week he had been in dialogue with Roman Catholics at a meeting organised by the Islamic Call Society which had discussed how Muslim and Christian communities could live amicably together in different parts of the world. At the outset, one of the participants had introduced theological issues, but the meeting had decided that a better way forward was to accept the existence of theological differences, to adopt an attitude of tolerance and to move forward to deal with the practical issues involved in Muslim/Christian relations. The meeting had looked at issues arising in Africa, Asia and Europe and had formed groups to look at the position in different parts of the world. A most valuable part of the meeting had been a contribution from the Catholic members about how Christians viewed Muslims, and from Muslim members about how Muslims viewed Christians. This enabled them to come together to try to learn from each other about their mutual perceptions and how right or wrong these were. The approach commended by the Archbishop required all of us to learn about each other, not in the absence of the other, but in the other's presence. We needed to recognise each other as bretheren but also, as the Archbishop had put it, to accept our "strangeness". For years he had been advocating that the clergy of different

faiths should learn about other religious traditions from members of those traditions: in other words, to learn about Islam from Muslims; about Hinduism from Hindus; about Sikhism from Sikhs and so on. He would like to see the practitioners of various religions flocking into the seminaries of each other's religious communities. In that way we would learn about one another in a positive and sensible way, and this would help to counter the dangers of fundamentalism.

22. Many people in the Muslim community as in other communities saw dialogue as a step towards heresy or letting go of one's own faith. They feared that it was really a different way of seeking conversions. But the reality of dialogue was far from this. In dialogue we learned about each other, and about each other's faiths. Not only did we learn about our common values and our common beliefs, but we also learned that our faiths were intended to be at the service of everyone. Our religious traditions had to be concerned with the problems of our societies. We could not dispense with religion. But some religious practitioners believed that they had the right to dictate to their communities and to others outside those communities. We needed to recall that our Prophets and the founders of our different religious traditions had all taught the importance of tolerance and of humility. He was grateful to the Archbishop for an address which had emphasised these virtues in our relations with each other.

23. Ven Vajiragnana (Maha Bodhi Society of Sri Lanka: UK) said that when he had first arrived in England during the mid-1960s there had only been a few western followers of Hinduism, Buddhism, the Baha'i faith and other "imported" religious traditions. The "flower children" had opened doors in a most unexpected way. Suddenly young English people were looking to other faiths and cultures to find support for their somewhat revolutionary ideas. Many were just searching for "culture hitting" devices and linked meditation with their LSD trips. Vegetarianism became a vogue. But the "flower people" had little actual spiritual awareness because of their drug-taking, alcohol and sensual cravings. Although their exploratory "ego trips" were short-lived and those young people were now middle-aged, the interest they had shown in other cultures and religions had helped to bring Britain to its present open attitude. Now, in the '90s, we have a golden opportunity to build a liberal way of life in this country.

24. Followers of religions that were not historically established in Britain must express their respect for a people who had allowed them to build centres and teach philosophies which were dissimilar to its Christian heritage. We should not proselytise our beliefs but we should give those who wished to enquire about them an opportunity for research and discussion, leaving each individual completely free to choose what, if any, of our teachings to accept. The new school curriculum was bringing many enquiries both from teachers and from students. Frequently, we were asked to address school assemblies, to join in multi-faith forums and to receive visits from classes of students with their teachers. It was difficult to express fully the gratitude which was appropriate to a nation that was so forward in its thinking as to encourage this kind of openness. He referred to an example in history of another welcome to other beliefs where the effect had been the opposite to that in Britain! The Buddhist King of Thailand during the early nineteenth century, had welcomed Christian missionaries, and even built a fine church for them. But the local people, although they had great respect and showed hospitality to the ministers, were not interested in Christianity, and none of them went to church. So after about five years, the missionaries went home! But in Britain this was not happening. From his own experience, he found an ever-increasing number of people coming to study: people of different ages,

different social status, different academic levels, indeed a complete cross-section of society. He found his work in England extremely exciting and spiritually rewarding. He believed that a good deal of credit for the development of greater understanding between different religious communities was due to the work of The Inter Faith Network, and paid tribute to those who had established it. It was of the greatest importance that meetings of this kind continued to expand. As the Buddha had said 2,500 years ago: "Where people meet in harmony, discuss in harmony, and leave in harmony, there no evil forces can overcome".

25. Ms Angela Wood sang to a Jewish melody the saying of a Hasidic Rabbi: "The whole world is a narrow bridge, but the important thing is never to be afraid". She believed this echoed much of what the Archbishop had said in his address, to which she had responded very warmly. She wanted to reflect on the apparent paradox between the Decade of Evangelism (to which Ivy Gutridge had already referred) and the very positive comments made by the Archbishop about the need for social partnership. She offered, as a way of resolving this paradox, the saying of another Hasidic Rabbi, Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotsk: "Do not look after your own body and another person's soul. Rather, look after your own soul and another person's body".

26. She had worked for twenty years in multi-faith education and wanted to reflect on the points made by the Archbishop about similarities and differences. He had said that there was more to unite us than to divide us, and this was no doubt true. But she believed that it was Peter Ustinov who had said in the context of discussion in the early 1970s about British entry to the EEC: "We are held together by our differences, and driven apart by what we have in common". She thought this was also true of inter faith dialogue. She was more interested in what was different about another person, rather than what she and they had in common. She enjoyed meeting different people, rather than people who were exactly the same as her. The differences between people represented for her images of the complexity, diversity and richness of the Divine. If people were monolithic, then her image of God would be a duller one. So she owed a great deal of her personal faith and her commitment to her work to the notion that people were very different from one another. She was aware of the concern that, in the context of multi-faith education, there might be a threat of conversion or of losing one's faith. But in her experience this was not a real risk. She could cite countless examples, for example, of Christian parents who had been grateful for some multi-faith event in which their children had been involved which they had found had helped their children to be better Christians. In a multi-faith context their children had been able to express their essential spirituality and to see Christian faith as a viable option in a secular society through seeing its place in the context of a deeper awareness of the broad fabric of human meaning.

27. Speaking as a woman, she was concerned that in the past inter faith dialogue had been conducted by the leaders of religious groups who were traditionally male. Men were perhaps slightly less than half of humankind, and they had a particular perspective, and a particular agenda. Perhaps they reflected the public face of their tradition, whereas women expressed themselves in religious terms in a more private way. She did not wish to suggest a distinction whereby women should be private and men should be public, but women had perhaps developed an inner spirituality partly because of their exclusion from public leadership of religious traditions. They had cherished, valued and transmitted a spirituality through their children and through family life. Perhaps it was because this was the priority of women that they had not put themselves forward as much in public. There were

difficult questions here of cause and effect. But she welcomed the development of dialogue between Jewish and Christian women, and more widely involving women of other faith groups. Women-only groups might look feminist and exclusive, but were not meant to be so. There was a need for women to foster their particular perspective, and to have settings for this which were not male-dominated. In this context an insight which she would like to share from her Jewish tradition was that one of its names for the Divine was "Av harahamim" which was normally translated as "Father of Mercies". But etymologically the name derived from the word for a womb, and therefore a better translation was "a womb-like Father".

28. Bishop Charles Henderson (Roman Catholic Committee for Other Faiths) said that in the context of the Decade of Evangelisation (as the Roman Catholic Church termed it) it might be helpful to friends of other faiths to say that each of the Christian churches was asking the question, "What is evangelism? What is evangelisation?" Christians did not yet themselves know fully what they meant by these words and within the churches were wrestling with their meaning. Fundamentally and primarily, the purpose of the decade was for Christians to evangelise themselves. Within the Roman Catholic church, evangelisation was the work of enabling its people to appreciate the religious principles which could guide their lives and make them better members of a peaceful, harmonious and understanding society. This was therefore a purpose that could be shared by all our religious traditions, enlightening their own members and making them into more effective and more conscientious citizens. There was a need to eradicate many of the problems that arose from fundamentalism and from prejudices implanted in the past in which church members had been brought up, of which they were often unaware.

29. The foundation of his own approach to inter faith dialogue was that he was first and foremost a human person. Everyone that he met was also a human person and he saw his own attributes as a human person reflected in his encounter with them. It was on the basis of human friendship that we needed to build our relationships. Religions might create differences, but recognising the human nature we shared would bring friendship. Dialogue must begin with friendship, accepting one another as human beings, with all that that meant. There could be delight for us in recognising how much we had in common because we were all human beings. He saw his task as Chairman of the Roman Catholic Committee for Other Faiths as one of promoting an understanding of those faiths amongst Catholics. The purpose of the Committee was not to tell other people what they should or should not be, but to encourage Catholics to understand the value of others.

30. It could be difficult to persuade people who might feel alone and insecure, and who might be confronted with difficult social conditions, to think at an academic level about different religious traditions. It was easier to talk to them as human beings with compassion, with sympathy, and with understanding, and to encourage them to adopt these attitudes towards their neighbours. It was possible to develop a common sense of community, bridging religious differences, and all of us needed to co-operate in this very important task. In the latter years of his life, he had begun to realise that the preaching of principles had little effect. What touched people was one's own human story: how you had approached life, and how you had journeyed through it. Everyone present, indeed everyone in the country, would have a story which was interesting to hear, which involved who they were as human beings, and what had brought them to their present situation with their happinesses and with their problems. In his own life, having been brought up long before the Second Vatican Council of the Roman Catholic Church, he

had been as zealous as anyone in proclaiming that his Church was right, and that other communities of faith were wrong, whether they liked it or not! But he had moved from that prejudiced attitude through the enlightenment of the Vatican Council and the various documents which it had promulgated and in which many riches were still being found, towards embracing all other people as people, whatever their religious stance. He could tell a long story of that change, but he knew that such instruments as The Inter Faith Network and the time which it enabled us to spend together had helped to change him. If we could tell our personal stories more widely, we would make other people more conscious of the great riches that they could find for themselves and for the community in being friends and human beings together.

31. Mr Sher Azam (Council of Mosques: UK and Eire) said that he had made notes of the magnificent speech delivered by the Archbishop and the various contributions made by his friends from other communities. However, he did not want to take up the details of these, but to expand on one particular issue which had been mentioned: the controversy caused by the publication of "The Satanic Verses". The issue was of as much concern now to the Muslim community as it had been two years before. The book had been published at the end of September 1988. Those within the Muslim community who had read it started to complain about it to various Muslim organisations, and these organisations made contact with the authorities and with lawyers to explore the possibility of action in the courts. But the Muslim community found that it was not possible to do anything through the existing law about the publication of this book which was clearly not only grossly offensive but insulted and abused Islam in an unprecedented way. The Muslims had decided that the only way to seek support and pursue justice was to demonstrate publicly to express their feelings. They did not possess power and influence, and could not use the law, so had to make their views known through demonstrations. But instead of these attracting support for the Muslim community, they had been condemned not only by the press but by many of the general public. The Muslims had made clear their desire for justice. Although there had been injuries and deaths in other countries, fortunately the demonstrations had been much more peaceful here in Britain. The Muslim community did not seek the abolition of the blasphemy law. The Christian community, or at least the Church of England, had rights of protection under that law against insult and abuse. The Muslim community were seeking, either through an extension of the blasphemy law or perhaps through other new legislation, similar protection to ensure that this kind of event did not occur again. "The Satanic Verses" was still being published and there appeared to be no redress against it. He hoped that the Muslim community would have the support of the Network, and of all faith communities within it in seeking protection for all religious communities against this kind of insulting and abusive material.

32. Rabbi Hugo Gryn said that in the afternoon session participants might want to discuss a number of the points which had been raised, including the concerns just expressed by Mr Sher Azam. He was himself concerned about the absence in this country of any provision to deal with "group libel" and he believed there was a need to discuss together what kind of legal protection might be appropriate in this field. But, at this stage in the proceedings, he wanted to invite the Archbishop of Canterbury to respond to the contributions which had been made following his address.

33. Dr Runcie said that it was not possible to do justice to all the points which had been made without trivialising them, but he did wish to thank all those who had spoken for the contributions which they had made because in their variety and in their underlying faith they had demonstrated very palpably the kind of points that he had tried to make in his address. He respected the concerns which Mr Sher Azam had put and which they had discussed at a meeting he had held at Lambeth with Muslim leaders. He hoped The Inter Faith Network itself would be able to continue its work on the issues raised by "The Satanic Verses" controversy.

34. He would like to pick out for his response the contribution made by Angela Wood since it had touched on ways in which he believed he had himself changed in the last ten years. When you became an Archbishop, perhaps you did not expect to change very much, but one did!

35. Angela Wood had referred, first of all, to his observation about the claim that there was more that united us than divided us. He wanted to underline the point that she had made on this. In the past, he would have been inclined simply to say, "Let's rejoice in those things that unite us". But now he, too, had come to see how important it was to rejoice as well in those things that divided us. This was linked to the need for us to retain our beliefs with integrity. Tolerance of other religions must never be based on a simplistic sense that we were all going in the same direction. He had come across a recent paper for an Oxford examination which asked: "Is it possible to be tolerant towards different religions only if one is deeply attached to none?" The proper answer was the reverse: it was only possible to be tolerant if one was committed to a particular faith, and if one was secure in one's own doubts. Otherwise tolerance became a case of "just not bothering". It was the insecurity of people, particularly of people who had persuaded themselves that they were secure in their own faith by suppressing all doubts, that was the breeding ground of intolerance. We should not be afraid of recognising the "strangeness" of other religions and the security which we had in our own faith would allow us to do this.

36. The second point she had made was about the significance of the feminine. In the last ten years he had begun to see that this element in our belief and in our spirituality was not simply something on which we should draw, but was actually something which was part of ourselves and which we were neglecting. All of us needed to come to terms with that, and to do so had been quite a revolution for him.

37. The last point was her reference to the Father of Mercies. This was an illustration of how, from another faith, you were constantly being told things which you thought belonged to your tradition alone. In days gone by, when asked about the difference between Judaism and Christianity, he would have made much of the fact that Judaism was a religion of law and of very impressive moral order, while Christianity was a religion of mercy and grace. But these were half-truths when they were slogans. We needed to get to know one another in order to understand, for example, the depth and quality of mercy in the Judaic tradition. These points illustrated his gratitude for the enriching of faith that had come from encounters of this kind with people of other religious traditions.

38. Perhaps, as an appendix, he could offer a brief comment on the Decade of Evangelism. He could understand certain apprehensions which needed to be borne in mind by Church leaders such as himself. He had given an address to the General Synod of the Church of England within the last fortnight which had devoted a good deal of its time to this subject, and he hoped that if

anyone read it, they would find that it allayed some of the fears that people might have about aggressive and manipulative sorts of evangelism which he wholly condemned. But since the last war, the Christian Churches had been preoccupied with self scrutiny, with reviewing their own liturgy and law, and their own machinery for internal debate with the setting up of the General Synod. In recent years, there had been much more of a sense of looking outwards at the world in which the Church was placed, and reports like "Faith in the City", and "Faith in the Countryside" had been part of that shift. It had to be said that, although evangelism would be particularly directed towards our own lapsed membership at the fringes of the Church, it was part of that same movement of looking outwards which said, "Faith is not just a matter of projects and changing buildings. You have to be definite if you are going to be a person of faith". But those who called for a Decade of Evangelism at the Lambeth Conference in 1988, where the phrase originated, also produced the document "Jews, Christians and Muslims: the Way of Dialogue". So he hoped that we would be able to share together with proper understanding and sensitivity the belief that religion in a society needed to be not mere religiosity, but committed and sacrificial faith. The concern of the Decade of Evangelism was to foster that kind of living faith in our society, rather than to be an operation which was intent on simply achieving scalps for the Church's own particular membership.

39. Bishop Jim Thompson expressed the thanks of the meeting to the Archbishop for the contribution which he had made to a very rich morning's session. In the Archbishop's address to the General Synod, which he had mentioned, he had quoted from the advice of one of his predecessors, William Temple, to people who were trying to share the Christian faith: "Above all, never make Christ unattractive to anyone". The present Archbishop could never be accused of having done so. Within our different faith communities, we could all respond in our different ways to this thought: we all wanted to make our God, our Prophet, the founder of our own faith community, attractive to other people.

40. Rabbi Hugo Gryn presented the Archbishop with two books on ancient and classical Turkey as an expression of the Network's gratitude for the Archbishop's visit. He hoped that these books would be good companions for the Archbishop in his forthcoming lecture cruises in the Eastern Mediterranean. The books were presented in grateful thanks for the Archbishop's outstanding contribution to inter faith relations during his term of office. Dr Runcie expressed his thanks for this gift. The meeting then adjourned for lunch.

41. After lunch, Bishop Jim Thompson said that it was clear that the Archbishop had very much appreciated the contributions which had been offered in the morning session. There had not been time for all those who had wanted to speak to do so, and there were many issues to pursue in the afternoon session. He wanted to clear up any misunderstanding about his own comments at the close of the morning: he had not been seeking to include everyone under the umbrella of a Christian sentiment. His point had been that each religious community had its commitment to its own understanding of God, to its own founding figure, or to its own underlying principle, and in each case its members wanted that commitment of theirs to be attractive to others. He was bearing witness to the fact that the Archbishop had helped him as a Christian to be proud of the faith they shared at a time when there was a good deal of antagonism to religious commitment. If there had been any misunderstanding of his remarks, then this had in itself illustrated the need, particularly in the context of the Decade of Evangelism, to be sensitive to one another's concerns and to resolve any misunderstandings which arose

through our choice of language to express our convictions. He invited Rabbi Jacobs to make the first contribution to the afternoon's discussion.

42. Rabbi Julian Jacobs said that he had been deeply impressed by the Archbishop's address and by the spirituality which it conveyed. In listening to it in this meeting of people of so many different faiths and ways of life he had been struck by the thought, which was at once both obvious and crucial, that we were all united by respect for human life and human dignity. Each of the diverse religious traditions from which we came spoke of this. The early chapters of Genesis spoke about the creation of the world, and the creation of all mankind: the story of the Jewish people did not begin until chapter 12 with the calling of Abraham. If he believed, as he did, that the whole of the Bible had a purpose, how was he to respond to those opening chapters? They were surely there to show that God was concerned with every human being and that every human being had a unique position within his creation. One of the Rabbis within the Jewish tradition asked: "From which part of the earth did the dust from which Adam was created come?" The answer he gave was that the dust was taken from every single part of the earth. It would be possible from within his own tradition to enumerate many examples of the truth of the unity of mankind and the dignity of each individual and he was sure that within every tradition those present could find their own examples. Respect for human dignity indeed united not only believers, but even non-believers as well. Each human being was unique. He had been told by a surgeon that even the size of one's toenails was different from those of anyone else! If this uniqueness of humanity could be emphasised and put at the forefront of our relationships, we would be more aware of the way in which we were united both by our uniqueness and by our common humanity with its vulnerability to disease and sickness. This commonality led to the principle as expressed in his own tradition that one should not do to anyone else what one did not want others to do to oneself. If we had respect for one another, then there was no need for us to worry about, or to fear, our differences. Respect for the other person should include respect for his beliefs. This, as he saw it, was the basis of inter faith work: that we gained insights from one another and that our own lives and personalities were thereby enriched. He realised more than in the past that he was not just an individual, not just a member of his own family or his own community: he lived in the world as a whole. Coming together at a meeting like this with so many different people, brought this home to him forcefully. If we could hold together both our unity and our diversity, then we would not be very far away from God's purpose for us all.

43. Mr Tom Daffern (World Conference on Religion and Peace: UK Branch) said that he was the new secretary of WCRP (UK). He was based at the University of London Institute of Education where he was working on a project developing Peace Studies courses in the Centre for Multicultural Education. So he wanted to take this opportunity to welcome the meeting to the Institute: it had a long commitment to developing the role of education in bringing about better international understanding. In this same hall two weeks previously, there had been a lecture by Frederico Mayor, the Director General of UNESCO, on the role of science in promoting better international understanding. It was clear that UNESCO was increasingly aware of the significance of culture and it was under this heading that religious traditions crept on to UNESCO's agenda. UNESCO had recently launched the World Decade of Cultural Development and he had been fortunate enough to be present at a meeting recently in Paris sponsored by this project, exploring Andalusian culture in the period when Islamic, Jewish and Christian thinkers and scholars had worked together and had collaborated in producing some of the fundamental work which underlay our modern ways of thought. What role

did science and philosophy now have in sharpening our inter faith dialogue and what role did education play in facilitating it? He had been interested to learn at the Paris meeting from Professor Hanafi (who was Head of the Philosophy Department in Cairo University, and had been trained at the Sorbonne) that many Arab Nationalist leaders, including some of the Baathist party, had been inspired by the French philosopher Henri Bergson. These inter-connections between our religious traditions and philosophical reflections were fascinating. He also wanted to mention the Euro-Arab University (for which Professor Hanafi was the Egyptian co-ordinator) which was seeking to bring together scholars and intellectuals from the Arab and European worlds. It was an itinerant university meeting on different campuses and he had been asked by the Institute to act as the UK liaison person for this work. He also wanted to mention a day seminar planned by WCRP jointly with the Conflict Research Society for early January to explore the different aspects of the Gulf crisis. WCRP's contribution would be to bring in the spiritual dimension. He mentioned the Ven Terasawa, a Japanese Buddhist monk, who was beginning a week of vigils and prayer in Baghdad and who, it was hoped, would be present at the meeting.

44. In the context of the Decade of Evangelism, it was important to remember that etymologically "evangelism" actually meant "good news". The inter faith movement should try to develop a theology of good news which went beyond the superficial understanding of evangelism. What was there within our own religious traditions that we could bring to the world community that constituted "good news"? He referred to the magazine Beshara published by a group inspired by Ibn Arabi, one of the great Islamic Spanish intellectuals and a Sufi mystic. Beshara was an Aramaic word which meant "good news". One of the functions of the inter faith movement in the decade of evangelism was to take the idea of "good news" and to universalise it, looking for a deeper understanding of what this could mean in our time, with each religious tradition contributing to this in its own way. In its own small way, the information centre which he ran at the Institute of Education tried to be a source of "good news" on peace and reconciliation.

45. Dr Jorgen Nielsen (Centre for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations) said that those who knew the Selly Oak campus would be aware of the somewhat ambivalent relationship between his Centre and the missionary training function of its colleges. He was in consequence very much caught up personally in the tensions created by the prospect of the Decade of Evangelism. It was quite possible to work out in terms of a liberal Christian position a concept of "evangelism" or "mission" which was not threatening to people of other faiths. But those who were on the liberal wing of the churches needed to realise that the very strong resurgence within the Christian churches of their more "evangelical" wing was genuinely experienced as a threat by the smaller religious communities in this country. The vast majority of Muslims in Birmingham, for example, would experience the Decade of Evangelism through the activities of "on the street" evangelising by those who did not share the less strident attitudes which had been expressed at the meeting and by the Archbishop of Canterbury himself, and which certainly represented the views of his Centre. There needed to be an internal debate within the Christian churches which took seriously the tension involved between different approaches to the Decade of Evangelism. If this was left to the "door knockers in the street" then it could be very dangerous for community relations in this country.

46. Monsignor Paul Hypher (Peterborough Inter Faith Council) said the appropriate approach to the Decade of Evangelism had been discussed in the Peterborough Mission 90s Group. He had made the point then that if

Christians took seriously the notion of dialogue with other faith traditions, then this had to be made an integral part of the churches' approach to evangelism. He had been deeply impressed by the Archbishop of Canterbury's address which had posed the need for us to recognise and to celebrate the differences between us. But we were faced with the dilemma that at the grass roots, this was an unintelligible activity. To his mind, the problem of inter faith relations was not primarily a theological one, but one of pastoral and spiritual development. If a person was going to become sufficiently mature in his or her own faith as to be open to people of other faiths, then it was necessary to take seriously the whole concept of spiritual growth and to analyse what it meant in inter faith terms. Within our different "faith houses" we had to look at what we meant by spiritual maturity and the processes entailed in its development. Otherwise our religious traditions would simply produce conformist members who would relegate inter faith relations to the margin of their religious life. It was an essential part of our attitude to spiritual development to build into it an inter faith dimension.

47. Mr Syed Faiyazuddin Ahmad (The Islamic Foundation) said that he had been most enriched by the Archbishop of Canterbury's address. He was concerned about the Decade of Evangelism: if we decided that everyone should evangelise in the sense of seeking converts from one another, there would be many problems. But if we took to heart the meaning of evangelism as "good news" and, following the lead given by the Archbishop of Canterbury, looked for our common values, we would find that our spiritual values had not just been given to our own religious tradition, but constituted a legacy for the whole human community. There was a shared respect for the old, for the sanctity of the family, for womanhood, a concern for the disabled, a love for children, a recognition of the need for good education, and a shared opposition to alcoholism, drug-taking and pornography. We had a wide range of values which were our common heritage: we needed to explore these and to build on them. Unless and until we lived out these values together, and worked out together what their application meant for our life in society, then inter faith meetings would be so much talk and we would by-pass the real issues which were confronting us. We needed to work together to uphold the shared values by which we lived. We needed to tackle together the actual issues confronting us in our social life. If to do this was what the Decade of Evangelism meant, then it could be open to all our faiths to take part in it. In response, Bishop Jim Thompson asked about those areas where there might be significant differences in attitudes. For example, were there not differences about the appropriate role for women to play in society? He wondered how far Mr Ahmad was suggesting that we already had a framework of shared values and how far these needed to be established in dialogue between us. Mr Ahmad said that we needed to explore both those values which we held in common and our differences. But we should not under-estimate the common ground. There was agreement on the respect which should be given to the elderly, and the respect which should be given to neighbours' rights. He believed that there was more in common between our values than there were differences.

48. Ms Fiona Wynne (The Inter Faith Network) suggested that it was important not to discuss the Decade of Evangelism in isolation: it linked with other issues that were of interest to the Network. She regretted that the Archbishop's address had not included any reference to the contribution which young people could make: they approached inter faith dialogue in a very different way from older people, because most young people had lived in a multi faith society for as long as they could remember. There was a link here with the whole issue of education and the transmission to children of their religious tradition. Would there be a need for a Decade of Evangelism

if Christian parents had been teaching their children their faith? There was a link here, too, with the debate about voluntary-aided schools.

49. Mr George Cox (International Association for Religious Freedom) referred to the emphasis which the Archbishop had placed on common values and on the need for common action. He had referred to the need to develop a sense of community and to pursue the ultimate aim of the common good. He wanted to suggest that not only did we share common values, but that at present we also shared common problems and indeed common threats. If we were to move towards common action, then there were essential problems to which we should address ourselves: questions of the human heritage, of the population explosion, of protection of the environment, of world poverty, of drugs, of AIDS, and of the appalling amount of world military expenditure. If we were really concerned not only for dialogue and understanding one another's religious position, but also to work together, then we had to tackle the basic problem of our actual human survival which was now under threat. He wondered whether the Network might consider making joint statements on some of these issues.

50. Bishop Jim Thompson said that there had been earlier discussion within the Network about its approach to public statements on matters of common concern: indeed, the main statement which had been agreed so far was a statement about statements! It was perhaps more important for the Network to provide a forum for the mutual exploration of these policy issues, rather than to constitute itself as a platform for statements about them. But work was in progress on a draft statement on attitudes to inter-religious relations in Britain and that kind of statement could be helpful in affecting attitudes.

51. Ms Mildred Reynolds (Wolverhampton Inter-Faith Group) commented on the fact that many other speakers clearly wished that the Decade of Evangelism was not happening, and had referred to it with dread! But it was going to happen and perhaps the better response was to be ready for it. When the knock on the door came, perhaps the right answer was to open it with a smile, to invite the visitor in, to give them hospitality, to listen to them, and perhaps then to say: "Thank you for sharing your faith with us; now let us share our faith with you". It was important to dissipate the fear of the Decade of Evangelism, and rather to use it as an opportunity for inter faith dialogue. There was no need to fear it: fear bred itself and fear was what gave power to the other when we were in a situation of confrontation. She had also been struck by the reference which the Archbishop had made to "being secure in our own doubts". Most of us attached importance to being secure in our own faith. But faith by definition had an edging of doubt and if we failed to face our doubts, and tried to suppress or run away from them, rather than admit them, this was perhaps a weakness in our faith. If we could establish security in our doubts as well as in our faith, then, while not being unassailable, perhaps we would be as near to this as we were humanly likely to get.

52. Mr Pounj (Vishwa Hindu Parishad (UK)) referred to the Archbishop's comment about common values. It was the belief that we shared common values that brought us together within The Inter Faith Network. Problems began when we said that our religion was the "only" religion which was a value-based religion, and which could bring peace and prosperity to all of us. The Hindu approach was to say that the Hindu tradition did bring peace and prosperity, but that other religious traditions could do so as well. If we took the "only" out of our religious attitudes, then our relationships could be much more cordial. Early one morning, a visitor had come to his house carrying a Bible and asking to talk to him. His religious tradition required him to invite

visitors inside. But this visitor had said that the Bible was the only book, and his religion was the only religion. He asked his visitor if he had read the Bhagavad Gita: the reply was that he had not. How could one make a claim to the uniqueness of one's religion in ignorance of other people's books and religious traditions? He respected the Quran, the Guru Granth Sahib, and all other holy books. We needed to respect all of them: they all had good contents. We needed to remove the "only" from our claims. We had to respect all religious traditions. He closed with a Hindu prayer which was recited daily: "O Lord, Protector of All, Dispeller of Miseries, you are the Creator and Sustainer of the whole universe. We entertain you in our souls with great devotion and crave for your guidance so that our intelligence may lead us to do only what is good, what is good, what is good".

53. Mr David Yarham (Cambridge Inter Faith Group) said that he had recently been to a meeting at which a missionary had spoken. He had been very persuasive and had been totally convinced in his beliefs and was equally certain that, within 300 years, all the world would share his faith. Later, he had shown those at the meeting a display of his scriptures translated into many languages. The missionary was a Muslim. As a Christian, he thought that it was wrong for those of other faiths to imply that only Christians were involved in evangelism. This was not so. The Muslim missionary had a great commitment to sharing what he believed was true. Equally, if he himself was sincere in what he believed, he would want to share this with other people. Indeed, if we did not want to share our deepest convictions with others, then perhaps they were not sincerely held. The important issue was how we set about doing so. Were we ready to listen to one another? He mentioned a Muslim school teacher who had experienced much greater difficulty in the environment of our secular state schools than she had experienced teaching in a Catholic school in East Africa where there was more respect for religion. The Cambridge Inter Faith Group itself was a missionary organisation! It sent speakers out to neighbouring localities to promote the concept of inter faith dialogue: in doing so they were sharing their beliefs about the right way to approach relations with people of other faiths.

54. Bishop Jim Thompson said that often his Muslim and Sikh friends in East London expressed their disappointment at the fact that "Christians" weren't very Christian, and the difficulty which they had living in a secular society. He endorsed the point made by Ms Mildred Reynolds that the Decade of Evangelism could be an opportunity for inter faith dialogue. Certainly the Decade was an opportunity to put this on the agenda of the Christian churches because everywhere it would raise the question of attitudes to other faiths. He certainly intended to do so in the Diocese of London.

55. Rabbi Hugo Gryn underlined the importance of this point. Perhaps it might be possible for the churches to look at the kind of guidelines which should be followed in approaching people who belong to another faith tradition. He referred to the saying of Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotsk, quoted earlier by Angela Wood, enjoining concern with saving other people's bodies and your own soul, rather than your own body, and other people's souls. There was particular concern in religious communities about the position of their young people, if they were to be subjected to manipulative and aggressive evangelism. He hoped that Bishop Jim Thompson and Bishop Charles Henderson would convey to their colleagues the concern which had been expressed by those who belonged to other religious traditions about the way in which the Decade of Evangelism might be tackled.

56. Bishop Jim Thompson said that he would certainly do this, and was sure that Bishop Charles Henderson would similarly be drawing on the day's discussion in what he said within the Roman Catholic Church. There were existing guidelines for dialogue which had been produced by the Committee for Relations with People of Other Faiths of the former British Council of Churches. He thought the guidelines were ones which most of those present at the meeting would be ready to endorse. Clearly, the whole question of the transmission of faith from one generation to the next was of crucial importance. Young people in our different communities had complex questions of identity with which to deal. Did they belong to the "tribe" of their peers, the "tribe" of the place where they were born, or of the faith into which they were born? He mentioned a recent meeting at which he had been present to discuss race relations in East London. One of the leaders of the "Rights for Whites" movement who was present had obviously concluded that everybody else there were from another faith, were middle class or were "do-gooders" and were not "genuine" East Enders. He asked everyone who was born in East London to stand up with him: a number of people did so, and were all young Bangladeshi Muslims and he and they had then argued together in pure cockney. This illustrated the way in which the questions of "tribal" identity had become much more complicated.

57. Mr Nathubhai Jagjivan (Leicester Council of Faiths) referred to the importance of the media and in particular the role of television. It was not enough simply to discuss inter faith relations within churches, synagogues, temples, mosques and gurdwaras. In order to reach the grass roots, it was important to put the message of inter faith dialogue across on television. We met and expressed our commitment to inter faith dialogue at meetings like the present one, but it was more difficult to put it across at local level. Perhaps we did not do as much as we should to get the message across within our own local communities. But there were many who would not be reached within our own places of worship: many young people were not interested in attending them. That was why the role of the media and television in particular was so important.

58. Bishop Jim Thompson said that various television programmes with an inter faith theme were being planned and he hoped that they would appear in due course. Planned changes in the framework for broadcasting both in television and radio would also have an important effect.

59. Dr Harriet Crabtree (The Inter Faith Network) endorsed the point about the importance of the media. Much reflection on values went on in the context of television programmes. For example, "Star Trek: The New Generation" which was currently being broadcast, showed situations in which the characters had to discuss their values. When she had taught undergraduates in the United States, it was difficult to get them to discuss directly the teachings of their religious traditions (mainly Christian and Jewish) on specific issues such as capital punishment. But if she introduced examples from a television series, this established neutral ground and often provided the most fruitful context for a debate on values, and the students could then bring to bear their traditions on that discussion. She did not have in mind television programmes which catalogued particular values, or which explored inter faith dialogue, but ordinary programmes which nevertheless explored issues of values and moral choice. It was important for older people to watch these programmes from time to time if they were to have some idea of the context in which many young people were doing their moral thinking.

60. Mr Prelad Singh (Sikh Council for Inter Faith Relations) said that there had been a good deal of discussion about the need to appreciate diversity and at the same time to explore common values. But the fundamental question was perhaps how far we all shared the same goals. What goal did we have? Happiness? It was perhaps easier to draw young people into a discussion of aims and goals, rather than of abstract values.

61. Sri Akhandhadi das (National Council of Hindu Temples) said that the issue of young people facing duality in their identity was of concern to the Hindu community in this country. But when he talked to young people, he found that they themselves saw less difficulty: they knew that they were both British and Hindu. It was often their parents who had the greater difficulty because their young people were not complying with their expectations for them. He was also struck by the extent to which members of newer communities in this country were saddened by the fact that they were not living in a Christian country but in a secular society. If other faith communities could be persuaded to see that the Decade of Evangelism was intended to help those who related in some way to the Christian faith to become more spiritual, to bring their faith more into their own lives, and to live out a religious commitment as a contribution to their society, then members of other communities could value the work that the Decade of Evangelism would do, and could welcome it. As the Archbishop had said, evangelism was not a matter of "taking scalps": it was about undertaking our own purification and developing an understanding of our own spiritual identity on the basis of which we could respect others who also had a spiritual dimension to their lives. If the Decade of Evangelism was about the promotion of spiritual understanding, then it could be welcomed and could indeed be a shared task for all our different communities.

62. Bishop Jim Thompson welcomed this contribution which provided a very suitable point at which to close the discussion. Ms Rosemary Gordon (International Association of Religious Freedom) had suggested to him that the meeting might close with a period of meditation focusing on the Gulf crisis and the hope that a way of peace with justice could be found, while also recalling other places where there were tensions in the world.

63. After the period of meditation, Bishop Jim Thompson closed the meeting with thanks to the Network staff for their organisation of it. He believed it had been a very valuable day, with many riches on which to reflect, including the notable address from the Archbishop of Canterbury. He endorsed the suggestion of Mr Sharma that a letter of thanks should be sent to the Archbishop.

REPORT BY DIRECTOR ON
NETWORK/CRE SEMINAR ON 24TH OCTOBER 1990

1. As part of the Network's response to "The Satanic Verses" controversy, we organised a consultative seminar in September of last year in conjunction with the Commission for Racial Equality to review the law of blasphemy and the case for its abolition, extension, or replacement with new legal provisions. The CRE also arranged two other seminars last autumn in conjunction with The Runnymede Trust on "Britain: A Plural Society" and with the Policy Studies Institute on "Free Speech". Reports on all three seminars were subsequently published.

2. At our seminar there was general agreement that the existing law of blasphemy is unsatisfactory in current circumstances both conceptually and because it does not take account of religious diversity in present-day society. Those who thought that some legal provision was desirable applying to religious communities generally were agreed that this should not be based on blasphemy but along different lines. But a significant number believed that it was inappropriate to use the law at all in this area because of the difficulties of definition and application and the threat, as they saw it, to freedom of expression.

3. It was agreed that it would be helpful to hold a further seminar to carry forward discussion on the issues which had been under debate. This second seminar took place at the Commission for Racial Equality on 24th October, and its 40 participants were drawn from the faith communities and from the academic, legal, media and publishing worlds. Two government officials were present.

4. Professor Simon Lee, who had been one of the main speakers at our first seminar, presented a paper in which he reviewed in more detail the legal options which he had summarised at the end of the first seminar. These were:

- (a) to preserve the status quo;
- (b) to extend the existing blasphemy law to cover other faiths;

(neither of these options attracted much support);

- (c) to abolish the blasphemy law without replacement;

or

- (d) to replace it with some alternative legal provision.

5. Under (d) a number of possibilities were suggested. At present, it is an offence in Northern Ireland to stir up religious hatred but not racial hatred; in the rest of the United Kingdom it is an offence to stir up racial hatred but not religious hatred. One option would be to bring the law into line throughout the United Kingdom, covering both incitement to racial and religious hatred. This was Professor Lee's preferred option. He pointed out that it would bring our domestic law into line with the provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Another possibility would be legislation to prevent the publication of grossly abusive or insulting material with the purpose of wounding or outraging religious feelings. This was recommended by a minority of the Law Commission when they reviewed

the position in 1985. Another option would be to give protection to religious groups, or to groups generally, against vilification of the kind which, in the case of individuals, are dealt with by the law of libel.

6. Professor Michael Zander, who had expressed some scepticism at our first seminar about the use of law in this field, presented a response to Professor Simon Lee, explaining that he favoured abolishing the law of blasphemy without replacement. The rest of the morning session was taken up with a discussion of the case for and against legislation in this field, and an exploration of the various options which had been tabled. There were suggestions that perhaps some combination of these alternative provisions might be needed but there remained a clear division of opinion on the case for, and against, the use of law at all. It was argued that it might be difficult to bring successful prosecutions under any new law and that it was, for example, unlikely that any of the provisions under discussion would have been applicable to "The Satanic Verses". There was, therefore, a risk that new legislation would only give rise to misleading expectations. There was a concern, too, that the law should not inhibit debate about religious traditions and beliefs and that where the boundary between robust debate and gratuitous offence might not always be easy to draw. On the other hand the case on community relations grounds for legislation which would protect the position of minority groups was recognised.

7. With the benefit of hindsight, it might have been helpful for us to have been able to spend more time on discussing the legal options. But we also wanted to look at the use of codes of practice and self-regulation in relation to the media as an alternative to, or supplement to, the law. We had speakers in the afternoon from the Press Council (Mr Louis Blom-Cooper, its Chairman; and Mr Kenneth Morgan, its Executive Director), the Publishers' Association (Mr Ian Taylor) and the BBC (Rev Ernest Rea, Head of Religious Broadcasting) to help us in this. The Network had been in correspondence earlier with the Press Council about the absence, in its Code of Practice, of any requirement for care in the handling of issues of religious identity. We had seen the seminar as an opportunity to pursue that point. But, in the meantime, the Calcutt Report was published, and the Press Council will not now survive in its present form. This undermined some of the value of our afternoon session. But it did provide an opportunity for us to look at the media's treatment of religious issues and the machinery for dealing with complaints about this.

8. We shall be producing a full report of the seminar. Copies will be sent to all the Network's affiliated organisations, and we plan that it should also be available to others who are interested in the issue even though we are not currently planning to publish it formally.

9. We hope to do some further work on the legal options in consultation with some of the experts who have been helping us. We hope then to prepare a short paper summarising the position which we have reached as a result of our two seminars. This might provide the basis of a wider Network discussion as one of the items on our next plenary agenda.

10. I think that both seminars have been valuable. Although they did not lead to agreement between all those who took part in them (and no one really expected that they would), the material which they have produced has been widely welcomed, and I believe that they have contributed to a growing awareness of the importance of religious identity and sensitive respect for it in our multi faith society. It is very encouraging that the Network has now reached the position where it is recognised as a leading forum for the discussion of these issues.

November 1990

Thursday, November 29th 1990
Meeting of the Interfaith Network

Archbishop's Address

Earlier this year Professor Owen Chadwick published his biography of my predecessor, Archbishop Michael Ramsey, who held my present office from 1961 until 1974. It was in his time that an Archbishop's relationships with other faiths broadened beyond contacts with the Jewish community. He was the first Archbishop, as far as I know, to visit a Hindu temple. He welcomed the Dalai Lama to Lambeth, as I have done twice myself. He was the first Archbishop to establish links with the Sikh community in this country. Yet you will find none of this in the main body of Owen Chadwick's text. Instead, there is an appendix at the back of the book headed, 'Note on Archbishop Ramsey and the non Christian religions'.

This is no criticism of a fine biography. It is an accurate reflection by Owen Chadwick of Ramsey's priorities. It is a sign of how much things have changed, for I hope that if anyone thinks it worthwhile to write a biography about my time as Archbishop, they will not relegate my contacts with non-Christian faiths to an appendix. Michael Ramsey was a great Christian ecumenist, but today ecumenism is beginning to be understood in its original Greek sense as embracing the entire world. Even specifically Christian ecumenism needs to take account of the natural theology which believes there to be a light - what St. Paul called conscience - which enlightens every person. That demands a reverence for other faiths as expressions of the divine wisdom.

In the midst of so many farewell occasions, I am glad to be with you today. No Archbishop in his final months has had an opportunity to address such a group as yourselves. But then no other Archbishop has had the benefit of the Interfaith Network. In itself it is one of the most positive innovations of the 1980s in this field. To Hugo Gryn and Jim Thompson I pay tribute for their imagination and sheer hard work, as I do also to the enormous amount we owe to Brian Pearce whose quiet, yet courteous, manner is combined with a great determination and vision. But what has been most encouraging has been the positive support and involvement of people from a wide range of different faith communities. This has given the Network weight and credibility.

In this brief address I want to reflect upon the past decade and try to assess just what progress we have made in relations between our faiths before I draw a few tentative conclusions. In doing so, I am conscious that I am an amateur amongst experts. I claim no extensive knowledge of world religions. Yet I have travelled widely and not confined my visits only to predominantly Christian countries. In the Anglican Communion it is normal to be in a minority, often in a minority as a Christian and even in a minority amongst Christians. England is the exception, not the rule. Arguably Anglicanism is the most widely distributed church after Roman Catholicism in the world, but we are thinly spread in many places even where we are vigorous - Burma, Japan and Cuba to give just three examples. But it was India which did most to add to my experience of religious diversity, which I reflected upon at length in my Younghusband lecture, Christianity and World Religions. I will not attempt to summarize that lecture, but one paragraph bears repetition before I go on to think about the consequences of religious diversity in our own country. I said then:

It takes courage to acknowledge religious diversity as a rich spiritual resource, rather than a cause for competition and tension. And it takes humility and sincerity to concede that there is a certain incompleteness in each of our traditions. However diverse in their development and message, they always remain in a process of becoming, so that there is always room for growth towards a fuller, richer vision of the truth. We must also recognize that ultimately all religions possess a provisional, interim character as ways and signs to help us in our pilgrimage to Ultimate Truth and Perfection.

Very quickly after my appointment I discovered the expectations that all faith communities in this country have of the Archbishop of Canterbury. Perhaps I helped a little to create them by having a wide range of representatives of other faiths at my enthronement. Far from the establishment of the Church of England seeming to be a barrier, I learned that the place of the Archbishop within the establishment caused minority faith communities to hope that I might use my influence and access to help provide the channels in which their own voice might be heard. That I have tried to do, whether in the debate on the Education Act or in the wake of the publication of The Satanic Verses, to give just two examples.

In doing so I have become aware of the different role and emphasis of

a religious leader when speaking on behalf of minority communities in our country. We have, I believe, come to realize that the establishment of good race relations or the protection of minority rights are not enough in themselves to lay the foundations of a multi-faith and multi-cultural society. The categories of analysis set by secular sociology have begun to prove inadequate to the task. British Muslims, above all, have forced the rest of us to recognize that the religious dimension of a community's identity must be recognized. In an age which has seen much privatization in the economy, the privatization of religion, which has been such a feature of British consciousness in this century, has revealed its weaknesses. 'Religion is a private matter', it used to be said by those who wanted to keep religion out of politics. Now it is said that religious people don't have enough to say about the family, drug abuse or AIDS, as if these things could be dealt with by a purely private faith.

Religion is never simply a private activity. The root meaning of the word itself lies in the concept of binding together. The 1980s have seen religion taking a more prominent role in public life in a number of ways. Those who once believed that religion was in irreversible decline have discovered its undoubted significance in reshaping the character of our world. The Iranian revolution, change in Southern Africa, the revolutions of Eastern Europe: no-one should mistake the role of religious faith in these movements.

That, I believe, has had a more profound impact on the public consciousness than the many efforts within the Christian churches to help British society adjust to the many different faith communities now present within it. Even so, these deserve recognition and thanksgiving. The Churches often move forward by way of documents and, amongst them, the Interfaith Consultative Group in the Church of England produced Towards a Theology for Interfaith Dialogue. That, and the Lambeth Conference document, Jews, Christians and Muslims: the Way of Dialogue have been significant in establishing the style of engagement with other faiths endorsed at the highest level within the Church of England. Then, also within my own tradition, the Anglican-Jewish residential conversations which took place in 1980 and 1987 helped to strengthen already positive relationships with the Jewish community, which continues to be encouraged by the work of the Council of Christians and Jews. Jewish-Christian relations have a unique character because there has been a century of shared biblical scholarship as well as the human shared experience of the holocaust in Europe. It is important that

this relationship should not be thought of as a threat to other faiths, nor as a privileged relationship, but as a model for others to follow. At the local level, many Anglican dioceses have now designated someone to be responsible to liaise with other faith communities and sponsor specific meetings. The work of Roger Hooker in the diocese of Birmingham or of Philip Lewis in the diocese of Bradford are models of what is being done.

The 1980s have also seen perhaps the most significant global interfaith event ever. Amongst my most memorable experiences will be the meeting at Assisi. The Pope is the only religious leader who could have called together such a diverse gathering. That was the greatest symbol of the wider ecumenism I spoke about earlier. But whilst there has been transformation in the relationships between leaders of the world faiths, this needs translation into a changed attitude at local levels. As I reflect upon the past decade, I believe that a note of caution must be sounded lest the optimistic developments I have enumerated appear to have swept the board. Recently a parish priest with extensive interfaith contacts wrote to me with a sober assessment about how far things have penetrated at a local level. He said:

Those of us involved in interfaith discussions do not need further convincing of their importance. In talking to clergy chapters and in informal conversations I have found that quite different attitudes are maintained. The very word dialogue seems to arouse immediate suspicion as people feel that we are betraying Christianity. I came across an example of this recently in a magazine for Christians in the armed forces. There, every attempt by Christians to learn about other faiths or to share such concerns as that over the environment is condemned. The creation festivals, as they are called, in Assisi, Canterbury and Winchester draw particular vehemence as 'adaptations of a Hindu fertility ritual'. And equally, efforts in multi faith education are roundly condemned as 'attempts to undermine Christianity in the young'.

The resurgence in the 1980s of fundamentalism within Christianity is part of the reason for this, but there is, of course, much fear in it as well, and the Iranian revolution at the beginning of the decade, as well as the continuing controversy over The Satanic Verses with the generally hostile media coverage of Islamic objections, has meant that the task of encouraging a sympathetic Christian appraisal of Islam has become much more difficult.

The misunderstandings are not all one way. I receive a good deal of literature at Lambeth which presents an ill-informed caricature of Christianity in its efforts to convince me of the superiority of another faith. It is tempting when your faith is caricatured to hit back in kind. When we do so we break a fundamental principle in interfaith relations - that of not bearing false witness. We must each speak about the other in terms that the other can recognize. All of us must make the effort to learn about and understand other faiths before we develop a theological response. This must have implications for the training of both clergy and laity. In the sort of society we now have in this country it is not an optional addition to a course of theological training; it ought to be an integral part of it. It was not even thought of when I trained for ordination forty years ago. But British society has changed, and so too must our preparation to minister within it.

During discussions about the Education Reform Act I remember hearing many references to the 'host community' when people were arguing for a predominantly Christian syllabus in religious education. It was an unfortunate juxtaposition. Hosts may be welcoming, but they generally show their guests to the door at the end of an evening. I much prefer the term 'co-owners' which stresses the responsibility we each have for the society in which we live. As this Network's draft statement on inter-religious relations in Britain makes clear, Christianity has been the principal religious tradition which has shaped our legal and cultural heritage. That is undeniable. But, as the statement also suggests, we now have to examine how a much greater range of religious diversity can be expressed in the framework of our society.

As we do so, what are the issues we must address in our different faith communities in the coming decade? The first, as I see it, is the great need to resist the tribalizing of religion. That phrase comes from Durkheim who saw the origins of religion in a tribal society erecting a totem pole and effectively deifying its corporate existence. The dangers of that sort of religion, for which the term fundamentalism simply will not do, are seen in places as varied as India, Sri Lanka and Northern Ireland. All our traditions can be subject to it. None of us are insulated from its dangers. I believe one of the tasks confronting every religious tradition in the coming decade is the search for those stories, teachings and parts of its own history which demonstrate what might be called 'the place of other religious

traditions in our own account of truth'. In the Christian churches it is imperative that we undertake this task at the same time as engaging in a decade of evangelism. For we cannot engage in mission without realizing how the God who created this world has made Himself known through the great variety of all that He has made. When a religion gives no place in the divine economy to those not part of its community, the dangers of discrimination and domination grow alarmingly.

Then, secondly, I think we must come to terms with the strangeness of other religious traditions. In the early years of Christian ecumenism, enthusiasts for unity thought that if Christians of different denominations learned more about one another they would come to discover that what united them far outweighed what divided them: There was truth there, but more recently we have come to appreciate diversity within the Christian Church and seen it as enrichment rather than enfeeblement. Equally we must recognize that the gulf between our different faiths is not merely a matter of ethos or styles of life, but goes to the very root of our concepts of what the world is and the nature of the human relationship with the divine. The account of the transcendent in our different faith traditions differs profoundly. When, as we are tempted to do sometimes, we use the word God as a kind of common denominator, we only confuse the issue, as Buddhists would be quick to remind us. We may fail to recognize we speak in one term of someone and something strangely different to each of us.

I might seem by saying this to be placing a limit to how far dialogue can go. I am not. I am simply saying that dialogue is likely to reveal ever further our strangeness to one another. If we recognize this fact, we will not allow that strangeness to make us strangers. It leads to my third and final point. We must move on from dialogue to partnership. We can work together on the basis not of common belief but of common values. None of this is easy because the debate about values often runs through the middle of religious communities rather than between them. Yet there is sometimes a sharp contrast between the values of an unreflective secular world and reflective religious traditions with a transcendent dimension.

I am glad to see that your draft statement on inter-religious relations talks of 'common action towards agreed social goals'. I hope that as we do so we never forget that we are faith communities. It is always tempting to secularize ourselves in the service of common action, to forget that it is as communities we have much to offer our world in the moral

enterprise.

I have been enormously impressed by this year's Reith Lectures by Jonathan Sacks, the Chief Rabbi-elect. He reminds us that you can argue away religion; you can argue away morality; but you cannot argue away communities. 'It is precisely as a member of a community that I learn a moral language, a vision and its way of life.' As I have done earlier, he illustrated his point by reference to Durkheim, who argued that religion provided the symbols that constituted communities and thus made possible the pursuit of the common good. So, as we work together, let us do so as communities of faith for it is within them that our sense of values grows.

The rich diversity of religious experiences, traditions and communities is one of God's greatest gifts to his world. It requires from us the virtues of understanding and sympathy, humility and readiness to listen and to learn. I thank God for this Inter-Faith Network and I pray that in the task before you I shall be more than an observer in the 1990s.

1991

The impact of overseas conflicts on interfaith relations in Britain; and Mission, Evangelism and Inter Faith Relations

**Report of Plenary Meeting of The Inter Faith Network
held on Tuesday 25 June 1991
in The City Council Chamber, Derby Council House, Derby**

1. In introducing the plenary meeting which followed on from the 1991 Annual General Meeting, Rabbi Hugo Gryn introduced the first item for discussion: The impact of overseas conflicts on interfaith relations in Britain. He said that since this was the first Network gathering since the Gulf conflict, it seemed right to take this opportunity to reflect on that experience and its effect on inter faith relations in this country, setting it in the wider context of how we could respond constructively in handling the impact of difficult overseas situations of this kind. He drew attention to the passage in the Network's Statement on Inter Religious Relations in Britain dealing with this: "As a society, we are not insulated from events beyond our national boundaries. In varying ways all our communities in Britain have overseas links. Situations abroad can, as a result, have a significant and sometimes disruptive effect on inter religious relationships here. But in the context of a growing awareness of our global interdependence, these links can also be a source of greater understanding of the wider world in which we live". We all carried with us our own loyalties, commitments and concerns. In reflecting on what lessons we had learnt from the Gulf Crisis, it seemed right first to draw on local experience in the East Midlands. He welcomed Dr Fazal and Dr Hugh Goddard, Chairman and Secretary respectively of the Nottingham Christian/Muslim Forum.

2. Dr Fazal said that this was his first encounter with the Network and he was glad to know that there was an organisational link at national level to bring together people of different faiths in a constructive way. He taught at Nottingham Polytechnic and, at the height of the controversy over "The Satanic Verses", in co-operation with Dr Hugh Goddard (who taught at the University of Nottingham), he arranged a series of lectures on "Islam and the West". This had led to the establishment of the Christian/Muslim Forum which had developed links with mosques and churches in Nottingham. One of the Forum's early tasks had been to make a contribution to dealing with a spate of racist attacks in the area and to build bridges over this with the local police.

3. Dr Hugh Goddard said that after the Gulf conflict broke out, the local Methodist Superintendent for Derby and Nottingham suggested a meeting of Christian and Muslim leaders to discuss the situation and a meeting of senior members of both communities, including the local Anglican bishops, was arranged. An agreed statement was issued stressing their joint intention to pray for peace and to continue to work for harmonious inter faith relations within the local community. He believed that the Muslim participants had welcomed the meeting, although there was some frustration at the failure to reach agreement on a condemnation of the war. Christian leaders were pleased to have made contact with the leadership of the Muslim community: it had needed the crisis to bring about this first meeting. There had been a spate of attacks on mosques in Nottingham and abusive phone calls, and concern within the Muslim community about the way in which these had been handled had led to a deterioration in relations with the local police. The Christian/Muslim Forum had tried to play a mediating role in the situation.

4. Rabbi Hugo Gryn thanked both speakers for their contributions to this theme, which would be explored further after lunch. He welcomed to the meeting Councillor John Keith, the Mayor of Derby.

5. Councillor John Keith said that it was a great pleasure to welcome members of the Network to the Council Chamber in the heart of the city of Derby. He understood that meetings had taken place in previous years in the Council Chambers of Birmingham and Leicester. He had read the Network's aims which he heartily endorsed. A greater mutual understanding and respect between people of different faiths, and a realisation of the common ground between them must lead to a better quality of life for all of us. It was important to move away from the tragic misunderstandings of the past. He referred to the vigils in churches and mosques in Derby which had taken place during the Gulf War. He was glad that those involved in this activity in Derby would be speaking to the present meeting. He was also pleased to learn about the very practical project to prepare a directory of the different faith communities in which the Network was collaborating with the Derbyshire College of Higher Education. He mentioned that Canon Richard Orchard, the Convenor of the Derby Multifaith Group, was his chaplain for his term of office as Mayor. He also referred to the World Congress of Faiths' pilgrimage to Iona the previous summer which had set off from Derby Cathedral. He wished the Network a very successful meeting and offered his sincere good wishes for its future work.

6. Rabbi Hugo Gryn said that it was a pleasure to be permitted to make use of the Council Chamber of the genuinely multi-faith community of Derby. He presented the Mayor with a book on world religions, and a copy of the Network's Statement on Inter-Religious Relations. The meeting then adjourned for lunch.

7. After lunch, Rabbi Hugo Gryn introduced Mr Roger Waterhouse, the Director of the Derbyshire College of Higher Education, expressing the Network's pleasure at the collaboration with the College's Religious Resource and Research Centre on the faith communities directory project.

8. Mr Roger Waterhouse (Derbyshire College of Higher Education) said that the College had been formed from an amalgamation of a number of institutions including an Anglican College, and that its new Religious Resource and Research Centre had been established in conjunction with the Diocese of Lichfield. He believed the faith communities directory project to be a very valuable one which would help to encourage contact and understanding between people of different faiths in the multi-faith society in which we live. He himself was not a stranger to "network" organisations, having been involved in creating a number of educational networks. It was no easy task to establish and maintain these: they could start with great enthusiasm and then run into difficulties as divergences of approach emerged. But they were valuable, and were worth maintaining for the common purpose which bound together these different approaches. He believed that the aim of the Inter Faith Network was a most valuable one, and he offered the organisation his good wishes for the future.

9. Rabbi Hugo Gryn thanked Mr Waterhouse for his good wishes and looked forward to the successful completion of the directory project. He then invited Rev Michael Futers, the Anglican priest in charge of St James's Church in Derby, to describe local experiences during the

Gulf Conflict, as the meeting resumed discussion of its first main topic.

10. Rev Michael Futers said that the parish of St James had many Muslim residents, mainly from Pakistan. The invasion of Kuwait had led to fights between children in the local school playground, not merely between those from Christian and Muslim families, but also between Muslim children whose fathers took different sides in the crisis. In January, at a time when the UN deadline for the withdrawal of Iraq from Kuwait was due to expire, he went with Councillor Abdul Rehman (who had hoped to be present with him to make a joint presentation, but was unfortunately absent from the meeting) to visit the Imam of the mosque at the other end of Rosehill Street, in which his own church was located. Councillor Rehman had played an invaluable role in facilitating the meeting. It was agreed among them that it was important for Christians and Muslims to find some way of joining together for prayer and to make it publicly known that they were acting together in this way. On the day before the UN deadline expired, a meeting was arranged at the mosque after careful discussion of the way in which this was to be handled, as neither he nor the Imam had previously been involved in inter faith activity but had been brought together by the crisis. Men and women gathered separately in the mosque following the midday prayers. They shared in silent prayer and spoke with one another about the situation, and Christian and Muslim prayers were then recited, and greetings were exchanged between one another. During the Gulf Crisis a Christian vigil was held at the market place in Derby and some Muslims joined in this. There were also marches through the city organised by the Muslim community but only a small number of Christians took part in these. He and the Imam both went on the march to show their unity together. The joint prayers at the mosque received media coverage and news of it, as had been mentioned by Dr Goddard, stimulated a meeting between Christian and Muslim leaders in Nottingham. This, in turn, encouraged a meeting of leaders in Derby at the Open Centre. A number of Imams and Muslim community leaders, together with Christians from various denominations, met to discuss their concerns and areas of misunderstanding. At the meeting, some of the Muslims asked why, if the Christian leaders were able to pray for peace, they were not able to pray that the war should stop. He invited the local Imam into the local junior church school to take an assembly: of about 400 children in the school some 80% were Muslims. He believed that these various meetings and exchanges had helped towards breaking down barriers which had previously existed, and that the pressure placed on relationships by the Gulf conflict had underlined the need to work for relationships of trust and understanding.

11. Rabbi Hugo Gryn thanked Rev Michael Futers for his contribution and invited other comments.

12. Councillor Stephen Crotty (National Council of Hindu Temples) referred to the many people from the Indian sub-continent who had been repatriated from Kuwait and the surrounding areas as a result of the conflict. Over 700,000 Indians had left the area. He referred to the poor working conditions of those who had been recruited to work as servants and in other employment in Kuwait. Sometimes servants were brought to this country and mistreated here. He had taken up with the Anti-Slavery Society the problems caused for tied workers through the confiscation of their passports by their employers. It was important to recognise that the Middle East crisis had been more than a conflict involving Christians and Muslims. We

now lived in a global village, and we needed to have special regard for the victims of the crisis. Mr Om Prakash Sharma (Vishwa Hindu Parishad) expressed concerned about the position of those who had been made destitute, having used their savings to travel to the Middle East to find employment and then having to leave the area when the conflict broke out. He had written to the Kuwait Ambassador to press for financial assistance to them, but without response. He also referred to the problems of Iraqi university students in Britain who had been left without funds and had needed to return to Jordan and other countries while wanting to remain in this country.

13. Rabbi Hugo Gryn said that these comments reminded us that we tended to look at conflicts in terms of the newspaper headlines. As always, in military confrontations, the real victims were often innocent bystanders. Our various religious traditions led us to have sympathy with the victims of war and to look for practical ways of helping them.

14. Mr Syed Faizuddin Ahmad (The Islamic Foundation) said that, with the benefit of hindsight, it was clear that the Gulf conflict, although mercifully brief, was not a war between faiths, but a war between "warlords". It was a futile war which had served no good purpose and had led to the deaths of many innocent people. He believed the conflict to have been primarily concerned with the assertion of US supremacy. The media had frequently behaved in an irresponsible way. But in Leicester the Council of Faiths had tried to encourage the local press and radio to work to contain the damage to inter faith relations. It was a mistake to see the Gulf War as a religious war. It was to the religious communities rather than to politicians that we needed to look if we were to find peace and reconciliation.

15. Rev Kenneth Wilson (Waltham Forest All Faiths Group) said that, at the request of the Waltham Forest Borough Dean, the inter faith group had tried to arrange a meeting involving Muslim, Jewish and Christian leaders, but it had proved impossible to bring together Muslim and Jewish representatives, while each had been willing to meet with the Christians.

16. Rabbi Hugo Gryn said that this illustrated the distance we still had to go in building inter faith relationships. It was important to give signals of hope and reconciliation. He referred to the BBC's special Songs of Praise programme televised live from Westminster Abbey during the conflict, during which Psalm 23 was read by a Muslim in Arabic, by a Jew in Hebrew, and sung by a Christian children's choir. This signal had clearly touched many people. It was one of the long-range objectives of the Network to be able to affect the climate of opinion in this country and within faith communities in a way which enabled us to build better relationships between them.

17. Sheikh Gamal Solaiman (Islamic Cultural Centre, Regent's Park) referred to his sense of powerlessness during the conflict in which both Christians and Muslims were to be found on both sides. The conflict had unleashed the forces of greed. There was a need to work for healing within our own communities as well as between our communities and it was important for people of faith to join with one another in this work of reconciliation. Rabbi Hugo Gryn said that he and his wife had been in Israel for a few days during the period when Scud attacks had been taking place. The Jewish people had been shocked not merely by these attacks, which were frightening in

themselves, but by the images conjured up by talk of turning Israel into a crematorium and the threat of poison gas, given the background of the Holocaust. Was it possible for us to learn from history? What was happening to the peace process now? Religious communities perhaps had better memories than politicians: they needed also to have visions. It was important for the Network to sustain a vision of relationships within British society which would not permit conflicts to develop within our midst.

18. Bishop Jim Thompson said that some of the contributions which had been made appeared to assume that there would be general agreement with the views which were being expressed. But it was important to recognise that there would be differences of view among people of faith. For example, he was not a pacifist; others were. How were the pacifist and the non-pacifist to cope together with their different viewpoints? We would interpret and understand events in different ways and offer different solutions. It was important to recognise this but, at the same time, to work towards establishing the kind of relationships where we could reach across these barriers, listening to one another and seeking to understand one another. While every one would share a common distress over violence and war, it was unlikely that it would be possible to reach agreement within the Network on particular conflicts. The Statement which the Network officers had issued about the Gulf Crisis had been valuable but it had not been able to offer agreed judgements on specific issues. He believed that there was no place for self-righteousness among religious communities: many wars and conflicts derived from religious memories.

19. Ms Mildred Reynolds (Wolverhampton Interfaith Group) said that she believed that our religious faith should help us to escape from the limitations of our human nature and not to pursue our self-interest. We must not limit our vision and we must see that there are other ways besides conflict for resolving disputes. We must find other paths without resorting to violence and war, and yet a further build-up of weaponry.

20. Bishop Jim Thompson said that he had not wished to initiate debate on the case for or against pacifism as such, but rather the question of how we dealt within the Network with clear divergences of view.

21. Dr Peter Bell (Leeds Concord Interfaith Group) referred to meetings which had been held in Leeds. At the time of the crisis a meeting had already been scheduled on Islam as part of a series and it was decided to devote the first part of the meeting to shared prayer. Representatives of different faith communities agreed to take part in this. Subsequently, the Bishop of Ripon asked Concord to arrange a larger gathering in the Civic Hall which was attended by members from a range of faith communities including Orthodox and Progressive Jews, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Hindus and Baha'is. Over 150 people were present. He had reflected afterwards on whether these prayers for peace, for success in finding solutions to the conflict, and for reconciliation were merely a token gesture. It seemed to him that their real value lay in the fact that it had been possible to bring together and to contain within the meeting a variety of different views and attitudes. We had to carry our differences with us, but at the same time keep our communities together and recognise that we belonged to each other. We could affirm our common humanity and our common concern for one another,

and there was value in our doing so, particularly at times of difficulty and of tension.

22. Mr John Hay (Nottingham Inter Faith Council) said that there had been a multifaith gathering with civic representation in Nottingham during the Gulf conflict. In the wake of the murder of Rajiv Gandhi a meeting had quickly been arranged at a local Hindu temple with each of the major communities represented there. This had received good coverage in the media and the speed with which it had been possible to arrange it showed how much progress there had been in building inter faith relations over the last few years. The media had handled the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi in a much more balanced and sensitive way than that of Indira Gandhi some years previously. The media were looking for opportunities to report on signs of hope and if they were properly handled, would report gatherings of this kind.

23. Mrs Ivy Gutridge (Wolverhampton Interfaith Group) referred to meetings held in Wolverhampton both at the time of the Gulf War and following Rajiv Gandhi's assassination. It was the network of contact and trust which had been built up over the years which made it possible to arrange these meetings. She agreed that the media were increasingly recognising the importance of giving proper publicity to events of this kind.

24. Dharmachari Kulananda (Friends of the Western Buddhist Order) said that the discussion had underlined for him that the task of the Network was to deal with issues of religious hatred and misunderstanding in Britain itself. For the Network, the issue was not the justice or injustice of the Gulf War itself but the risk that this would spark off religious hatred and a breakdown in community relations in Britain. That had to be the focus of our efforts.

25. Rabbi Hugo Gryn invited the guest speakers to offer their closing observations.

26. Dr Hugh Goddard said that the Christian/Muslim Forum and the Interfaith Council in Nottingham were complementary bodies. The Christian/Muslim Forum had been established to deal with particular issues of concern to Christians and Muslims of the kind which arose over the Salman Rushdie controversy and the Gulf Conflict. He endorsed the view that the media, particularly at local level, were very ready to report inter faith gatherings as a sign of hope and as an alternative to the chauvinistic approach of other parts of the media. In response to a question from Bishop Jim Thompson he said that the Muslim community had been disappointed that local Christian leaders in Nottingham had been unwilling to condemn the war, and it was partly this sense of frustration on their part which had led to the view that, unless the local situation deteriorated, it would be preferable not to arrange a further meeting. Dr Fazal said that within his own understanding the invasion of one country by another was contrary to Islam. He therefore believed that the UN was entitled to intervene following the invasion of Kuwait. But he was less than happy with the ruthless bombing of Iraq by the allied forces and the destruction of the troops retreating on the road to Basra. He believed that the Network had an important role to play in tackling the kind of situations which they had been discussing. There was a need for inter-religious dialogue at local, national and international level.

27. Rev Michael Futers said that when he was trying to arrange contacts between the Christian and Muslim communities in Derby, he had considered involving Jewish representatives but very few Jewish people lived there. When the meetings with the Muslim community had taken place it was the Muslim leaders who had urged that other faith communities should be involved as quickly as possible. The war had thrown into sharp relief different approaches to the question of war including pacifist and non-pacifist attitudes and there had been a good deal of internal debate within the churches with divergent views expressed. Many did see a contradiction between praying for peace and yet supporting the war. It was as necessary now, as before, to pray for peace in the Middle East.

28. Rabbi Hugo Gryn thanked the speakers from Derby and from Nottingham for their contributions. He thought that the discussion had validated the comments on overseas conflicts included in the Network statement which he had quoted at the beginning of the meeting. He referred to the Rabbinic legend of the children of Israel celebrating their deliverance in their exodus from Egypt after they had crossed the Red Sea and the pursuing soldiers of the Egyptian Army had been drowned. The children of Israel saw that God was weeping. They asked him, "Are you not glad that your children are saved?" He replied, "But my children are also drowning". The story offered a perspective of God's universal concern for all humanity, which was the point from which we ourselves needed to try to start. He thanked all the contributors to the discussion.

29. Rabbi Hugo Gryn then said that it might be helpful before tea to deal briefly with one of the other themes for the plenary: The law, blasphemy and religious identity. Mr Brian Pearce reminded the meeting that, as part of its response to the controversy over "The Satanic Verses", the Network had arranged a joint seminar with the Commission for Racial Equality in September 1989 to review the law on blasphemy. A further seminar was held in October 1990 which had looked more generally at the issue of the law in relation to religious identity and at the framework of regulation for the media. Reports were available on both these seminars and the position reached as a result of them was summarised in his own introduction to the second report. There had been a variety of views on whether the blasphemy law should be replaced by some wider legislation relating to religious traditions generally. There had been general agreement about the need to look at the way in which the law dealt with questions of religious as opposed to racial identity. There had been discussion about bringing the law into line throughout the UK which, at present, prohibited incitement to religious, but not racial, hatred in Northern Ireland and incitement to racial, but not religious, hatred in the rest of the UK. In Northern Ireland there were also legal provisions dealing with discrimination on grounds of religion. The Commission for Racial Equality had now published their "Second Review of the Race Relations Act 1976" and the relevant section had been issued as a Network Circular. It suggested that the law of blasphemy should be abolished, but did not propose new legislation dealing with abusive language and behaviour in relation to religious traditions. The CRE did propose that incitement to religious and racial hatred and the prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of religious identity should be prohibited throughout the UK. These proposals had been published as a basis for discussion and consultation and comments had been invited by 1 November. It was very important for affiliated organisations to consider offering comments on these proposals. It would be more appropriate for them

to do so individually rather than for the Network to comment centrally. However, the Network's collaborative work with the CRE on this issue had, clearly encouraged the CRE to look afresh at the case for extending legal protection in relation to religious as well as racial identity. It might be helpful for the Network to arrange a meeting for representatives of its affiliated organisations at which the CRE's proposals could be explained by its Legal Adviser. This would help organisations to inform themselves on the issues before making their comments to the CRE on its proposals.

31. Bishop Jim Thompson asked whether there was a short document which set out the issues involved. Mr Brian Pearce suggested the short introduction to the second seminar report and the section on "Religion and the Law" in the CRE consultative document. Each was about three pages long.

32. Mr Om Prakash Sharma (Vishwa Hindu Parishad) referred to the circulation of material in this country, published in the Middle East, which contained derogatory definitions and descriptions of the Hindu religion. He hoped that the Network might investigate this. Rabbi Hugo Gryn said that it was difficult to deal with such material in the absence of a "group libel" law which he personally would like to see, but which had not been proposed by the CRE.

33. Mr Paul Weller said that in its earlier review of the 1976 Act in 1985, the CRE had examined the question of discrimination on religious grounds but had reached a different conclusion. He believed that the collaboration between the Network and the CRE had contributed to the shift in its position and it was important to build on this in a constructive way while making sure that any new legislative provisions would be helpful rather than inflaming particular situations. Councillor Stephen Crotty (National Council of Hindu Temples) said that the legal provisions relating to Northern Ireland dealt with relationships within the Christian tradition. When different religious faiths were involved, the problem became more difficult. One example was that some sacred texts contained derogatory references to other communities. It would therefore be difficult to frame legislation to replace the blasphemy law which would deal satisfactorily with the multiplicity of religious traditions in a plural society. Dharmachari Kulananda (Friends of the Western Buddhist Order) asked what further work the Network itself might undertake on this topic.

34. Rabbi Hugo Gryn said that it seemed right that individual affiliated organisations should submit their comments separately to the Commission for Racial Equality. This was likely to be more effective. It would, however, be helpful to arrange the briefing meeting at the CRE which Mr Pearce had suggested. No doubt the Network itself would need to keep the position under review.

35. The meeting then adjourned for tea.

36. Bishop Jim Thompson (in the chair for the final session) said that the third topic for the plenary meeting was: "Mission, evangelism, and interfaith relations". He referred to the discussion at the plenary meeting in November 1990 addressed by Lord Runcie, then Archbishop of Canterbury, about the impact of the Decade of Evangelism/Evangelisation on inter faith relations. Dr Carey, the new Archbishop of Canterbury, had held a meeting at Lambeth Palace on 10 June to enable him to meet leading members of different faith

communities. This had been arranged in consultation with the Network and had been an encouraging meeting. Cardinal Arinze, the President of the Pontifical Commission on Inter-Religious Dialogue at the Vatican, would be visiting the Network Executive Committee on 11 July. There clearly were difficult issues involved in the relationship between mission, evangelism and dialogue and this agenda item gave an opportunity to explore it further. Rev Martin Forward and the Most Ven Vajiragnana had agreed to introduce the topic.

37. Rev Martin Forward said that he handled inter faith relations within the Methodist Church and also belonged to a group set up within the Methodist Church to monitor the Decade of Evangelism on which the Christian churches were now launched. The words "mission" and "evangelism" could arouse anxiety and even fear on the part of those to whom these activities were directed. Why was this? It was perhaps because some people had made evangelism into an ideology. Literally, it meant offering "good news" but for the recipients or victims it was often seen as "bad news". Sometimes it seemed to people of other faiths that the Christian churches were trying to fill their empty pews with people from other communities! In the past, missionary activity overseas had often been accompanied by economic exploitation. Sir Francis Drake had written to Queen Elizabeth the First setting out the intention of his voyages to other lands: "Theirs shall be the knowledge of our faith and ours such riches as their countries hath". There was concern when mission was directed at the vulnerable, for example, students who might be unsure about their own identity at a time of upheaval in their lives; and he was uneasy about evangelism among them, whether by Muslims among Christian students, or Christians among Jewish students. Often evangelism appeared to proclaim that "God loves only me and my crowd" and to project an exclusivist view. This did not imply a helpful or generous view of God's character. His own wife was an African. At a conference he had been distressed to hear in the grace said before a meal references to "the dark continent" of Africa. There was a belief among Europeans in the middle of the nineteenth century that Africans could not have any view of God because they did not yet know him. But Africans knew about God long before Christians and Muslims arrived in Africa. His daughter was called Naomi (a name from the Hebrew and Christian scriptures) and Kechinyere. The word "chi" was an African word for God, used long before Christian missionaries arrived on the scene. Perhaps we should be less interested in nouns and more interested in adjectives. In other words, as the Christian theologian Wilfred Cantwell Smith had suggested, we should be more interested in people being "Christian" than being "Christians"; in being "Muslim" in the sense of willingly submitting to God rather than being "a Muslim". Many people delighted in telling the stories of their faith to others and would want to continue to do so. There were real differences between different faiths: they do not share identical views of reality. Sometimes we could celebrate these differences, but we might not always be able to do so. There was also, as well, the possibility of an individual changing the way in which he or she looked at life, and transferring from one community to another. The exchange of ideas between different religious traditions was nearly always beneficial. In the Middle Ages Christians learned a great deal from Muslims which helped shape the framework of Thomist and Renaissance theology. Muslims had themselves learnt much from the culture of ancient Greece and having refracted it through their own experience, transmitted it back again to Western European Christian culture. In nineteenth century India the renaissance of the Hindu tradition owed a good deal to challenge

of Christian missionary activity. He concluded by making four points. First, the question was not whether, but how, we engaged in mission. The Islamic term was dawah which appropriately embodied the concept of "invitation". An invitation could be accepted or declined. Second, there was a need to look at the experience of converts from one religion to another, and what this had to teach us. Third, it might be helpful for a group, perhaps within the Network, to try to draw up some guidelines on fair and unfair practice. What were the appropriate limits to place on mission and evangelism? Fourth, what were the real aims of mission and evangelism? What did they imply about other ways of faith? Is the process of exchange and dialogue involved in mission more important than making individual converts? These were themes which it would be valuable to explore in continued discussion between people of different faiths as we tried to understand our different aims and concerns.

38. Most Ven Vajiragnana said that, to a Buddhist, mission and evangelism were foreign terms in the sense in which these were generally understood. He came from Sri Lanka where there were Christian missionary schools and training centres. Their activities unsettled the indigenous people there. Within Buddhism there was no concept of trying to persuade other people to adopt the Buddhist path. There was, as in every religion, a desire to share what they had learned on their path, their happy feelings and achievements, and the tranquillity and peace which their religious practice brought. The Buddha sent out his followers to spread his teachings saying, "O monks, go out and preach this doctrine for the happiness of the people, for the gain of the people, and for the peace of the people". But there were no Buddhist missionary programmes designed to secure conversions. He had come to Britain because he had been invited to do so by people who were interested in studying Buddhism, as many people in the West now were. It was for people to accept the Buddhist path voluntarily: it was not for Buddhists to "convert" them. He mentioned the meeting earlier in the month at Lambeth Palace with the Archbishop of Canterbury, which had discussed the fears of other communities about the aims of the Decade of Evangelism. He came away from the meeting feeling confident that the leaders of the churches had an honourable attitude based on a desire to revitalise the Christian faith among lapsed Christians rather than being concerned to secure converts from committed members of other faith communities. The meeting had been a helpful opportunity to clear up misunderstandings and everyone present had had an opportunity to express their own views. As he saw it, the theme which had emerged was a desire to encourage people to follow their own religious path more effectively. He believed it was the role of the Network to do this: Buddhists needed to be better Buddhists, Christians better Christians, and Muslims better Muslims. In his view, the concept of a conversion was an outdated one. At the same time, we should not assume that there was some middle ground where all faiths blended in a melting pot. Individuals were too diverse for that. It was important to be ready to explain one's religious tradition to others who inquired about it; not so much to try to change their own views or faith commitment, but to help to remove the evil of prejudice through ignorance. In a Buddhist text, the Buddha was approached by his followers who said: "Sir, there are some religious teachers who visit us and illuminate only their own doctrines and condemn, despise and spurn the doctrines of others. Then other teachers come and do likewise. But as for ourselves, we are always in doubt and perplexity as to who among these teachers speaks the truth, and who falsity". The Buddha replied: "It is

proper for you to be in doubt and in perplexity, for doubt has been raised in a matter which is doubtful. Do not believe just what respected teachers propose, even myself, to be true. But when you know for yourself that certain things are wholesome and good, then accept them and follow them". On another occasion, the Buddha said: "Whatever doctrines you shall hear, bearing on what is good, to all of that doctrine you should listen with attentive ear, digesting it, pondering it and gathering it all up". Ashoka, a Buddhist king, had said: "One should not honour only one's own religion, condemning the religions of others. But one should also honour the religions of others. In doing so, one helps one's own religion to grow and, at the same time, renders service to the religions of others. In acting otherwise one digs the grave of one's own religion. Also, you may think in condemning other religions you show devotion to your own religion, but on the contrary, you injure your own religion".

39. Bishop Jim Thompson thanked Rev Martin Forward and the Most Ven Vajiragnana for their introductory contributions. These had opened up a range of issues in a very deep way and it was unfortunate that there was not more time available to explore them in general discussion.

40. Mr Ajit Singh Dost (Sikh Missionary Society) referred to the teaching of the first Sikh Guru, Guru Nanak. Guru Nanak had taught, "There is no Hindu; there is no Muslim". People were astonished by this as Islam and Hinduism were the two main religions of his time but he meant that there were no true Hindus or true Muslims who were living out in practice their religious beliefs and laws. Guru Nanak said that, for him, truth was the highest virtue, but higher still was truthful living. God was One and God was One for everyone. God did not discriminate between Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs, between black and white, young and old. Every child was God's child. If you were a Hindu, then you needed to be a true Hindu; if a Muslim, a true Muslim; if a Sikh, a true Sikh; if a Christian, a true Christian. We had to live out our beliefs, and not merely hold them in our minds.

41. Mr Om Prakash Sharma (Vishwa Hindu Parishad) said that he thought that Christian missionaries should not try to detach people from other faith communities. Their main task should be to preach belief to unbelief: there were many in today's society who had no religious commitment.

42. Mr Paul Mendel (Council of Christians and Jews) said that he thought that it would be valuable if the Network could take up the suggestion by Rev Martin Forward for some work on guidelines on mission and evangelism. While reports on the meeting with the Archbishop of Canterbury had been encouraging, the Director of the Church's Mission to the Jews, Rev John Fieldsend, had written an article in the "Church Times", speaking about the need for the "conversion" of Jewish people. He had been involved recently in discussions with firms seeking television franchises who were exploring the appropriate content of religious broadcasting. There were many who were seeking guidelines on what was acceptable.

43. Bishop Jim Thompson commented that it was difficult for Church leaders to control the activities of all their members, and that it was important not to focus exclusively on Christians and make them the scapegoat; other communities had a strong belief in mission too.

44. Ms Carmen Henry (Wellingborough Inter Faith Group) said that, as a Baha'i, she would not want to convert anyone but simply to bring before them the message of the founder of her faith. It would then be for them to decide what they wished to do in response to it. The term "conversion" made her uncomfortable.

45. Mrs Ivy Gutridge (Wolverhampton Inter Faith Group) said that it would be helpful to draw on this discussion in exploring these matters in one's own community. There was a need for dialogue on these matters within one's own faith community. Within the churches, and perhaps in other communities too the main challenge was fundamentalism and there was a need for guidance, help and courage as well in tackling the dialogue which was necessary with fundamentalists.

46. Ms Fiona Wynne (Network) endorsed the comments by Ms Carmen Henry and said that it was important to respect the right of people not to believe.

47. Sheikh Gamal Solaiman (Islamic Cultural Centre, Regent's Park) said that it was legitimate to engage in mission, but we needed to realise that it was a sensitive area. He thought it would be helpful for the Network to arrange a seminar at which there could be a longer discussion on this theme. His own irritation in conversation with a Jehovah's Witness who had visited him at his mosque underlined the difficulties that we had in handling it.

48. Bishop Jim Thompson said that the Executive Committee would, no doubt, reflect on this discussion. He thought that it would be helpful to pursue the suggestion for work on some guidelines. There was certainly as much disagreement within the churches themselves about the appropriate approach to the Decade of Evangelism as there was among those outside the churches. Mr Paul Weller added that he hoped that work might also be done, as had been suggested, to explore the experience of converts from one community to another. There were converts who played an active role within the Network itself: people who had found new light and truth because they had transferred from one community to another. We needed to reflect in an inter-faith context on the relevance of that experience. Bishop Jim Thompson added that even if we withdrew all the evangelists from mission, God could still convert people. He himself had experienced a conversion, sitting alone in a churchyard one Christmas Eve .

49. Bishop Jim Thompson thanked all those who had contributed to the discussion and the Network Secretariat for having made the arrangements for the day's meeting.

1992 (January)

“Inter Faith Worship and
Prayer: The Current
Controversy”

THE INTER FAITH NETWORK FOR THE UNITED KINGDOM
NOTE OF PLENARY MEETING HELD AT 11.00 am
ON 16 JANUARY 1992 AT THE
INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS HOUSE,
GREAT PORTLAND STREET, LONDON W1

"Inter Faith Worship and Prayer: The Current Controversy"

1. Rabbi Hugo Gryn welcomed those attending the meeting which was to be devoted to exploring the issues surrounding inter faith worship and prayer. It was a delicate issue. How far was it possible for people of different faith communities to come together with integrity in worship and in prayer? There were many people present who believed that they could do so. But there was a risk that events which were organised for this purpose were shaped by the lowest common denominator to avoid giving offence and even then there would be those who, in good conscience, could not take part in them. The issue was a topical one. The "Open Letter" addressed to the leadership of the Church of England and signed by some 2,000 of its clergy underlined the anger which could be aroused by shared acts of worship or prayer. There was a need to understand that anger and the sources of it and the concern expressed by the "Open Letter" signatories that in some way or other there was a threat to the integrity of the Christian tradition if events of this kind were held in cathedrals and churches. But there were issues here not only for Christians but people of other faith communities as well. What was the aim of inter faith worship and prayer? What kind of signals were offered to the wider community when events of this kind were organised and also by expressions of opposition to them? Was it possible to find an approach which would be widely acceptable? Or was inter faith worship a blind alley in developing relations between the different faiths? The plenary meeting gave an opportunity to hear from a wide range of perspectives. Its purpose was to increase understanding of each other's views rather than to arrive at some agreed consensus.

2. Rabbi Hugo Gryn introduced as the opening speaker Rev Dr Christopher Lamb who had recently taken up post as Secretary for Inter Faith Affairs within the Church of England and was also convenor of the Coventry Interfaith Group. He had been heavily involved in the preparation of the booklet on inter faith worship which would shortly be published by the relevant Board of the Church of England.

3. Rev Dr Christopher Lamb said that the issue of inter faith worship and prayers was a difficult one which carried many implications for the life of our religious communities, and one which had become a very controversial issue recently in the Church of England. There had been a great deal of unease in the last few years about events in which Christians joined with others in some form of common prayer of which the best known took place in Westminster Abbey each year in March, attended by the Queen, and was described officially as "An Observance for Commonwealth Day". Various affirmations were made, such as: "We affirm our common faith in the dignity and unique worth of the human person independent of colour, class or creed". Hymns were sung, and readings from various scriptures and prayers were made in their original languages, and translations were given in English. Whether called an observance or an event or a celebration, this was what many people thought of when they heard the expression "inter faith worship". A number of people in the Church of England would like to prevent it happening, or rather to prevent it happening in cathedrals and churches, and to stop Christian clergy from taking part in it.

4. In the autumn of last year an Open Letter was sent to all the 11,000

clergy of the Church of England asking them to request the leaders of the Church to stop these events. Eventually 2,000 clergy signed this letter, although there were many who strongly objected to it. One of the arguments made most strongly in the letter was in connection with the Decade of Evangelism. The argument ran like this: "If you are prepared to join with other religious traditions in worship, you are implying that theirs is an equally good way to God, and that therefore they do not need to hear the Christian message. Evangelism is therefore a waste of time". Like most of the clergy of the Church of England, he had not signed this letter because he disagreed with it.

5. Why were some people so anxious about praying with people of another religious tradition? Not just because they were fundamentalists. He knew some of the people who signed this letter well, and they were not rigid obscurantists, or people who thought they had nothing to learn from anyone else or that other faiths were rubbish. For the most part these were people who did not want to compromise their integrity, and who felt that something of very great importance was at stake. We should take them seriously, even if we could not agree with them, as he did not.

6. What was actually happening in these events of so-called "inter faith worship"? Did it compromise people's integrity, and was it incompatible with commending your faith to other people? One of his problems with the Open Letter was that it did not offer any definition of what it meant by "inter faith worship" at all, but simply played on people's fears that something nasty was happening in our churches. We all knew how that kind of fear could be stirred up, and how difficult it was to deal with. Faith and worship were very precious to many millions of people.

7. A note which he had prepared (copy at Annex A) gave a few examples of situations which Christians, and particularly Church of England clergy, faced quite regularly. It was not an exhaustive list. We could add examples of the collective worship which went on in schools - though that was a rather special situation because children did not choose to be there - and we could add situations in colleges and hospitals, and personal occasions like weddings and funerals, where for one reason or another people of more than one faith were involved. The couple being married, for example, might come from two different faiths, or the person being buried or cremated belonged to one faith but had family and friends of other faiths. Conferences which brought together people of different faiths seemed to lead naturally to occasions for shared meditation, prayer or worship.

8. Clearly many factors were involved. For example: where was the occasion taking place? Was it in a church? Then it was bound to have a Christian flavour to it, whatever you called it, and whoever took part, because the building had all sorts of Christian symbols and furniture which you could not alter. If it was a gurdwara or a mosque it would have a Sikh or Muslim flavour, and generally that would be the community mainly organising it. Secondly, if English was the main language, as it was almost certain to be - again it would have a Christian or perhaps a Jewish "feel", to it, because other communities worshipped in Arabic or Hindi or Punjabi, and Jews mainly in Hebrew. There were many questions to ask when trying to decide what sort of occasion it was. Whose place was it? Who were the hosts, and who was in charge? And whose initiative was it? And what form would it take? Would there be hymns? Muslims did not usually sing in the mosque and certainly did not use instruments like an organ. Thinking about the practicalities like this, it became obvious that it was very difficult for everyone to feel at home on such an occasion, even if it was on "neutral" ground, in the open air, or a secular building, because no one would be used to worshipping like that. In his experience most of these occasions tended to be dominated by

Christians, and not many people of other faith communities came.

9. So was it worth the effort? It certainly made us think about what we normally regarded as worship, and how adequate that was as an expression of our devotion to God, (or our seriousness about the fundamental things in life if we were in a non-theistic tradition). What did we actually think we were doing when we did worship? He had been using this rather odd English word "worship" without explaining what he thought it meant, or whether it covered what people did in the temple, the mosque, the synagogue, the church and the vihara. Did a Theravada Buddhist pray at all? It raised the question of our basic assumptions, and whether there was any point in pretending that we were doing the same thing, or thinking the same things, or addressing the same Being, when we came together. This was partly what the writers and signatories of the Open Letter were concerned about.

10. There were undoubtedly different levels of worship, and most religious traditions had some sort of "cut-off" point where outsiders were not welcome. He did not think he would be encouraged to join the line of worshippers at a Muslim salat or namaz. He could not give to the Prophet Muhammad the status that Muslims would want him to give. He prayed to God through Jesus. In most Muslim eyes his niyyat, his intention, was not correct. They might say he was not ready for salat. In any case, he did not himself feel that he could take part. Similarly, many Christians had reservations about admitting people who were not Christians, or even who were members of other churches, to receive the bread and wine of the Eucharist. He understood that Sikhs admitted people to full membership of the Khalsa, to baptism, with no outsiders present. He was not saying that these were the same things, simply that there were levels of significance in worship, and perhaps part of the difficulty of inter faith worship was a confusion of these different levels. When two people met in many cultures they often exchanged a ritual greeting which was in reality a form of prayer. "Salam-aleikum", "peace be with you", or Namaste, or Sat Sri Akal. All these greetings had a religious meaning peculiar to the particular community, yet they could be used with outsiders too. Some Muslims might have misgivings about saying "Peace be with you" to a non-Muslim, but most were happy to do so. So perhaps certain forms of prayer - even the invoking of the peace of God on a meeting - was not really a problem to anyone. Nor was a shared silence, in which each could think his or her own thoughts and pray in their own way. When Jews, Christians and Muslims met, for example, it was often felt appropriate to recite a psalm, part of a shared scripture, together and then to pray in silence.

11. For most people, meeting on a level of common humanity while acknowledging the dimension of the transcendent in which we all lived, and to which we all in some way aspired, was not a problem. The problems came when we tried to use our familiar symbols to point to the transcendent, or to give expression to the way in which we believed God had reached us with his word. Because our symbols and our attempts at definition were so different, and in some cases mutually contradictory.

12. So what were the implications of trying to share worship in some way together? Did it mean, as the writers and signatories of the Open Letter clearly thought, that if, for example a Christian sat and prayed in the gurdwara, or listened to a synagogue sermon, that he or she was agreeing with the truth of Sikhism or Judaism? He did not think so at all. For him at least, it carried no such implication. He had been to the mosque hundreds of times, but was not and had no intention of becoming, a Muslim. Yet his purpose was not simply educational - to make a sociological investigation of the life and practices of the mosque. He entered the mosque, and the temple, as in some sense a fellow-believer. If we prayed together we were acknowledging a common humanity as religious people, people with a sense of

an ultimate dimension to life which was not exhausted by the things we could see and hear and touch, and which put us in touch with something deeply serious, demanding everything of us, and yet also profoundly joyful and life-giving.

13. Because it was so serious, it was so easy to get it wrong, and we were afraid of doing just that. The more religion, the more problems. One of his problems was with the Westminster Abbey Commonwealth Day Observance. He went on one occasion, and had seen the texts of other occasions on other years, but did not want to go again. This was a personal opinion, but it did not feel authentic to him. There had been no opportunity to develop the kind of trust needed to worship together. He did not know any of these people, and they did not know him. Whereas that might be true in an entirely Christian environment, in this case it mattered much more, because there were so many more cultural and other barriers.

14. We had to get to know each other a great deal better before some of these occasions could really work, and the shared symbols be effective for us. We needed more carefully controlled experiment, and a great deal more mutual understanding, so that we could handle the profound disagreements between us, and maybe, maybe, reach some kind of "bi-lingualism", where we did become at home in more than one religious tradition. That was possible to some extent, and he was excited to learn what was possible in that way, without in any way abandoning the Christian conviction and commitment that he had. That conviction included the desire to commend his faith to others, which was what he understood by evangelism.

15. To sum up: he thought certain kinds of inter faith worship, especially those in which we listened carefully and seriously to one another's scriptures and convictions, were possible. Inter faith worship depended on trust, and trust depended on knowing one another, and reaching out to one another, much more than most of us were able to do as yet. We needed to preserve our integrity, and be careful of one another's, because in the end that was all we could bring to any of our relationships, especially that fundamental relationship with God.

16. Rabbi Hugo Gryn thanked Rev Dr Christopher Lamb for his opening analysis of the issues involved and introduced in turn a panel of three speakers who had been asked to explore the theme from their particular perspectives and in the light of their own experiences, beginning with Councillor Amarjit Singh, Mayor of Newham, and a member of the Sikh community.

17. Councillor Amarjit Singh began by outlining his personal philosophy. He believed that God was like a mountain which could be approached by many different religious paths and that the Almighty could be worshipped in any language and in any form. In each case the objective was to acknowledge the Almighty. His own chosen path was that of the Sikh faith. It had been a great joy to him to be elected as Mayor of Newham in May 1991 and it had given him the privilege and pleasure of meeting very many people in the different communities who contributed to the diverse religious life of his borough. The community as a whole was enriched by this diversity. As Mayor, he had set out to represent the people of the borough as a whole: whether Sikhs, Muslims, Hindus, Christians, Jews, Buddhists or those who had no faith allegiance. As a Sikh he had no ambition to convert members of other faiths to his own. He was happy to participate in the worship and celebrations of different communities. For example, he had attended the opening of Brentwood Cathedral and he had experienced no hesitation in going forward during the service to receive a blessing from Cardinal Hume. When he was asked why he had done so he had said that it was an honour for him to be blessed by such a man of God, who preached the word of God. When a new Christian priest was installed or

a new church was commissioned, the Councillor was invited as Mayor and was very pleased to be present and joined in the singing of the congregational hymns. In doing so, as he understood it, he was singing the worship of the one God. As Mayor, he was also invited to festivals in many different communities, such as Eid el Fitr and Diwali. He was very pleased to go along on these occasions and to participate in the celebrations. At Christmas the local press had telephoned about the absence of a Christmas tree from the lobby of the Town Hall, wondering if this was because he was the first non-Christian Mayor. He was able to explain that he had a Christmas tree in his Mayoral parlour: the Christmas tree in the lobby had been a victim of cuts in the Council's budget! He had attended the Remembrance Day service in his borough, along with representatives of all faiths, which had been conducted by a Christian military chaplain. He thought it was right that all faiths should be represented on such occasions: people of all faiths had given their lives so that we could live in peace. He had been pleased to take part in the civic service of the Lord Mayor of London at St Paul's Cathedral and the civic service of the Lord Mayor of Westminster at Westminster Abbey. On taking up office as Mayor of Newham he had arranged a civic service in his own local gurdwara. He distributed copies of the order of service which he had brought with him. Out of 60 council members only one member, a Hindu, had complained after the service to the Chief Executive about the way it had been conducted; the other Hindu, Muslim and Christian councillors, had all been content with it. The hymns, readings and prayers had been carefully chosen to draw on a range of different religious traditions and members of various faiths had read the selected passages of scripture. During his term of office his religious adviser was a Sikh granthi rather than a Christian chaplain. After the service those present had been invited to participate in the langar. It had been an inspiring occasion and had brought people together from across the local community.

18. Rabbi Hugo Gryn thanked Councillor Amarjit Singh for his presentation and introduced Rabbi Julian Jacobs, adviser on inter faith matters to the Chief Rabbi.

19. Rabbi Julian Jacobs said that he welcomed this opportunity to reflect on these issues. Like Sikhs, Jews believed that there were different paths by which one could reach God, and Jews accepted that others should approach God in their own way. But within the Jewish tradition, prayer and worship were regarded as being very personal matters involving the most intimate relationship between a human being and God. Orthodox Jews, at least, did not feel that it was right to share in joint prayer or worship with people from other communities. They were ready to invite people of other traditions to attend services in their synagogues, but would not invite people who were not from the Jewish tradition to take part in a synagogue service. Similarly, Orthodox Jews were willing to attend events at the places of worship of other faith communities, but not to participate in them. For example, the Chief Rabbi would attend the Commonwealth Day Observance held in Westminster Abbey, but was not ready to participate in it by taking responsibility for a reading. The passage from the Jewish scriptures had instead been read by a Reform Rabbi who took a different view of the matter. The former Chief Rabbi had also been present at the memorial service held in a Christian church for those killed in the Lockerbie air disaster. Rabbi Jacobs had been present on various occasions at religious services of other faith communities. He had been present but had not been a participant. When he had been present at the Westminster Abbey Observance he had worn a cap and gown and had asked whether it would cause offence for him to wear his hat in the Abbey as he would normally do in his synagogue, and he had been told that there would be no objection whatever to his doing so. He had appreciated that as a sign of the way in which he and his tradition was being welcomed to the event. After an event in St Paul's Cathedral, he had been asked by someone whether he felt

uncomfortable as an Orthodox Jew present at a Christian service. He had said that he was happy to be present, that the Christian tradition was not his own but that he respected the Christian faith and was pleased to be in a place of worship where people were praying to God. In that sense he had felt a part of the congregation and had appreciated the religious sense of the occasion, even though he had not joined in the prayers which were offered. On occasions he received an apology for the robustness of the Christian content of a service which he attended but he took no offence at this. He would not expect another community to water down the service because he was present. Indeed, it would make him uneasy if they did so, rather than if they did not. He felt somewhat uncomfortable at the United Nations Day commemoration (which he attended) being held in Westminster Abbey as this was not a specifically Christian occasion, and thought it might perhaps have been more appropriate for this to be held in a non-denominational building such as a civic centre. For him, the venue of an event and the implications of this were important. He had explained that visitors to a synagogue would not be invited to take part in its service. But there was no reason why a visitor should not be invited to address those present in the hall alongside the synagogue after the service was over. Reflecting on his various experiences, he thought that the nearest that he had come to participating in shared worship or prayer was when he was serving as Mayor's Chaplain in Blackpool and had taken part in a Remembrance Day service at the local Cenotaph and had read a psalm in English. He had also been invited as Chaplain to invoke God's blessings on various civic meetings. Whether he attended an event in a place of worship of another faith as an expression of our common humanity would, he thought, depend on the religion of the country. Because this was a Christian country he thought that it was right to be ready to attend events in Christian churches when invited to do so. If he was in a Muslim country he would similarly be prepared to accept invitations to attend a mosque rather than a church, but when in Israel he would probably not feel it appropriate to attend either a church or a mosque but only a synagogue. He thought that the religious character of the national community within which one lived affected the range of events and places that one should be prepared to attend. But this did not in any way cut across his wish to express on these occasions his sense of being part of a common humanity. There were, however, in his view, limits on what it was appropriate for him to do in terms of either shared worship or prayer.

20. Rabbi Hugo Gryn thanked Rabbi Julian Jacobs for speaking from his own experience in this way and introduced Dr Siriwardena, a teacher in Brent, who was connected with the London Buddhist vihara.

21. Dr Siriwardena pointed out that Theravada Buddhism was a non-theistic religion. Theravada Buddhists did not believe in a Supreme God or a Creator God, in a God who controlled our destinies or punished us or forgave us our sins. So Theravada Buddhists could not take part in prayers or worship directed to God. This was not because Theravada Buddhists did not respect other religious traditions, as they certainly did so. Buddhism was based on precepts, not on commandments, and on taking responsibility for one's own life and did not involve rites of worship. So she could not participate in shared worship with others. She therefore found herself in a good deal of agreement with the points which had been made from a different perspective by Rabbi Julian Jacobs. She believed that it was more important for people of different faiths to work for mutual understanding and to strive for the good of humanity and of all beings. It was important to develop among people of different religious traditions a breadth of vision and an equanimity and tolerance, being able to disagree without acrimony and without hurting one another's feelings. If there was mutual understanding and respect then it would be possible to work together to solve the problems which we faced. It was not singing hymns together that was important so much as this developing mutual understanding and respect. Without it we would find ourselves in

difficulties. At the same time, Theravada Buddhists were prepared to attend, as silent observers, events organised by other communities as a mark of friendship and respect. She believed that in schools many children were confused partly because they did not receive adequate education in their own religious traditions. There were risks in the multi-faith approach to religious education if children did not have any sound grounding in their own tradition. She doubted the value of school assemblies which were simply based on an attempt to offer a universal ethic but without any religious flavour. It was true that there were many ethnic groups in schools today, but an attempt to please everyone would please no one. The need was to educate children in the cardinal tenets of their own religious traditions and to show them how they could lead their lives within a framework of self-discipline for the good of themselves and of others. If this education was not given, children would not have the resources on which they needed to be able to draw.

22. Rabbi Hugo Gryn thanked Dr Siriwardena for her contribution and invited a range of contributions from the floor of the meeting reflecting a further range of different perspectives and experience.

23. Mr Mathoor Krishnamurti (Bharatya Vidya Bhavan) said that, as a Hindu, he had no problem in joining in the prayers of any religious community because the Hindu religion was a universal religion. He had recently received a letter from an Edinburgh teacher asking for suggestions for prayers in English translation which could be used by all the pupils in her school and he had offered five prayers for peace, understanding, truthfulness, sincerity and belief in the Almighty. He had been warmly thanked for them by his correspondent who had asked from which tradition they had come. They had all been drawn by him from the Hindu tradition, but could be used by people of any faith. Language and symbols of worship might differ but the purpose of prayer was the same. Just as rainwater fell on different leaves of different trees in different forests, but all the water made its way to one ocean, so all our prayers reached the one God, however called. He regretted the way in which some people wanted to be narrow-minded and defensive about their religions. He did not believe that we differed about essentials. There might be those who did not wish to acknowledge the existence of a God but that did not affect God's existence. There was a need for people to come together to sense their common humanity. There was much in our different traditions that we could share. He had been sorry recently to see in a recent press report that yoga had been pronounced by a local vicar to be un-Christian. This showed the extent to which there was a need for understanding and education about what might at first sight seem to us strange and different. We were really all one under one God and could all work together on that basis.

24. Mr Shahid Raza (Imams and Mosques Council (UK)) said that many people of faith, including those among his own community, were hesitant about being involved in inter faith activities. If it was suggested that inter faith worship and prayer was the main goal of these, it would discourage them still further from becoming involved as they would regard this as an unsuitable activity. It was more important to focus on a deeper appreciation of shared spiritual values and of one another's culture and to promote greater mutual understanding between people of different faiths and to create an atmosphere of mutual tolerance and respect.

25. Rabbi Hugo Gryn said that, as a main focus of criticism in the "Open Letter" had been the Commonwealth Day Observance, it was helpful to have a representative of Westminster Abbey present to offer some comments on this.

26. Canon Anthony Harvey (Westminster Abbey) said that in many churches, as in places of worship in other religious communities, those present would all be committed Christians or exploring the possibility of being so. But

Westminster Abbey, like other cathedrals, welcomed throughout the year a great variety of people to its services. Some came only to look at the architecture or listen to the music. Only some would be committed members of the Christian community; believers and non-believers alike came to the Abbey. At other cathedrals, too, there would be a broader range of people present at services than in a local parish church. The Abbey, like other cathedrals, attached great importance to being a place of hospitality to all who wished to enter it. The Abbey did not compromise its own Christian commitment but tried to be sensitive to those who came to its services. There was naturally a sense in which those involved in the work of the Abbey felt a greater affinity with people who belonged to other faith communities than with those who had no religious faith at all. There was an instinctive respect for those who belonged to other faith traditions. So if there were particular occasions, such as the Commonwealth Day Observance, (although this was not the only one) on which representatives of other faith communities could be made particularly welcome, and invited to participate to some degree if this could be done without misunderstanding, then the Abbey, like other cathedrals, was keen to do this. It was important for all the participants to be clear about what was involved and there was a need for more discussion and exploration to make sure that sensitivities were respected and the scope for misunderstandings minimised. The Commonwealth Day Observance had changed a little in recent years. The fundamental decision was the one taken some 15 years ago to hold it in the Abbey and not in some neutral place. Westminster Abbey was not a "neutral" building: it stood within the Christian tradition, and was a centre of Christian worship. This inevitably gave events held within it a Christian character, but there was a certain flexibility built into Christian worship itself which could be used on particular occasions. In theory, and frequently in practice, Christians prayed to God the Father through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit: prayer and worship was Trinitarian. But Christians did not make a point of being Trinitarian all the time but very often said prayers which did not use the full Trinitarian formula. This was true of normal prayer and worship within the Christian tradition. Therefore, on some occasions when people of different faiths were coming together, there was no reason on Christian grounds not to use prayers to God the Father or God the Creator rather than prayers which expressed a belief in the divinity of Jesus, or referred to the Holy Spirit. In doing this there was no disloyalty to the Christian tradition, but rather an endeavour to show sensitivity to those who were present and to express the degree of common value and faith existing between members of different faiths. There was no loss of integrity. At the same time it was being required of the Abbey authorities (very vocally at present!) that there should be no compromise and that the act of worship, being in a Christian building, should be distinctively Christian. There were two considerations which the Abbey tried to keep in balance. On the one hand, to use the resources of its worship in such a way that a sense of common value and of common inheritance could be expressed, and on the other hand, to use the tradition of Christian worship in such a way as to show that the whole context of the occasion was a Christian one. It was that kind of balance which the Abbey tried to keep and within which the details would vary from year to year: it provided the guideline for carrying out what the Abbey was specifically asked to do and which he believed was consonant with the task which the Abbey had in its own religious tradition and in the nation.

27. Rabbi Hugo Gryn referred to the televising from Westminster Abbey during the Gulf War of a live "Songs of Praise" programme in which Psalm 23 had been sung by a Christian choir and read in Hebrew by a Jew and by a Muslim in Arabic. This had been a healing symbol offered at a time of conflict which was having repercussions within our own society. He regretted the fact that the "Interfaith Update" which had been circulated in support of the Open Letter had in places caricatured the way in which others had approached with sensitivity their participation in inter faith worship and prayer. People

who have security in their own faith would not act in this fashion.

28. Mr Martin Farrell (British Red Cross Society) said that the British Red Cross Society was one of 147 Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies throughout the world. It was based on seven fundamental principles: humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary service, unity and universality. In terms of humanity, the international movement "endeavours ... to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found". In order to do that it must enjoy the confidence of all communities. Recently, the British Red Cross Society had issued guidance to its local branches advising them that "no official single faith Red Cross service should be initiated and held which could give rise to any other public perception" than that it provided its services on an equally impartial basis. Where such services currently existed, branches were advised to seek alternative celebrations. This did not mean that Red Cross members, friends and other officials, were discouraged from representing the Society at religious services of any faith invited to attend by other organisations. This guidance had, however, given rise to some concern among local branches where there had been a tradition of holding a Red Cross service in a church year after year. "Public perception" was difficult to define. It was, however, fundamental to the principles of the Red Cross movement that members of all faiths and of none should be equally welcome at any religious service organised specifically on behalf of the Society. It was important that the venue, publicity and content of any event should not undermine the public perception of the Society as being impartial. Naturally, the Society welcomed gatherings at which people re-dedicated themselves to the principles of the Red Cross. The British Red Cross Society had consulted the headquarters in Geneva of the international movement which had supported the guidance which they had issued. The Society saw this guidance as being an appropriate response to the demands of the more religiously plural society in which it was now working in Britain.

29. Ms Angela Wood (Standing Conference on Inter Faith Dialogue in Education) said that the provisions in the Education Reform Act 1988 for collective worship in schools raised different issues from those being considered in this more general discussion about inter faith worship and prayer. But whether at school or outside school, no one in practice could be compelled to worship. As she liked to put it, "You can take a horse to assembly, but you cannot make it worship". But there were some parallels in the school situation in needing to identify where the boundaries of personal integrity lay. A child was as entitled as an adult to have their privacy and integrity respected but might not be aware that his or her spiritual integrity was being violated. So adults needed to protect the position of children from a spiritual point of view, just as they would protect a child from physical harm. At the same time she believed also that children needed to learn how to protect their integrity themselves: they needed to have a range of experiences of their own to help them to do so. They needed to decide where they were going to take their stand as they grew up. A child was also entitled to become intimate with the resources of human spirituality which knew no boundaries. The world of the Spirit was unbounded. This need to be aware both of the boundaries of personal integrity and the unbounded character of the Spirit was a paradoxical requirement which we had to learn how to meet.

30. Dr Pauline Webb (World Conference on Religion and Peace) said that while she had been in charge of religious broadcasting on the BBC World Service she had worked to broaden the range of those who took part. She had organised a series of discussions between a panel drawn from different faiths tackling different topics within the worlds of faith such as mission, scriptures and incarnation. For the programme which discussed prayer, the participants brought examples which were central to their own traditions, for example the

Eucharistic Prayer of the Christian tradition. Those who took part in the programme, which had the format of an objective discussion like the rest in the series, had been subjectively drawn into a mutual appreciation of the spirituality of the other traditions represented there. Even the studio managers working on this particular broadcast had remarked on this. In the end it was the existential experience which counted and into which we were drawn. We were faced with a great mystery: God was drawing us deeper into that mystery as we became more aware of each other's spiritualities.

31. Brother Daniel Faivre (Westminster Inter Faith Programme) quoted from the writings of Thomas Merton shortly before his death in Bangkok in 1968: "We are going to have to create a new language of prayer, which has to come out of something which transcends all our traditions, and comes out of the immediacy of love. The things that are on the surface are nothing, what is deep is the Real. We are creatures of love. Let us therefore join hands, concentrating on the love that is in all of us". Brother Daniel also referred to the Vedas which said that the Spirit enfolds the whole universe and in silence is loving to all. He suggested that since experience counted more than words, it would be appropriate to reflect on all that has been said in the morning, with a period of shared meditative silence. This silence was then kept.

32. Rabbi Hugo Gryn then invited Rev Marcus Braybrooke, who had been involved in the inter faith movement for many years through the World Congress of Faiths and the Council of Christians and Jews, and in other contexts, and had wide experience of inter faith events of different kinds, to close the morning's discussion.

33. Rev Marcus Braybrooke (World Congress of Faiths) said there was time only to make a few brief points. He hoped that in the discussion in the afternoon account could be taken of more personal situations such as marriages or funerals in which people of different faiths had come together to mark a particular occasion of personal significance for those involved in the ceremony. He had been greatly privileged to be invited to participate in ceremonies held in the communities of many different religious traditions. He underlined the need to be conscious of the signals which were sent by occasions when people of different faith communities came together within a shared sense of the sacred, while being sensitive to those who had genuine hesitations about doing so themselves. He had recently been in India. In Delhi one of the Sikh gurdwaras had organised a joint service of prayer for the healing of Mother Teresa to which representatives of other faiths had been invited. The Ramakrishna Mission had held a common gathering at Christmas time, when the Anglican Cathedral had also held a celebration to which people of all faiths had been invited. We needed to reflect on the implications of the movement in many places and in many communities to create situations in which people could share with one another across faith boundaries. There must be no pressure on people to take part in these events but they were now taking place increasingly and were a signal that religions were beginning to see their responsibility for fostering a wider human unity.

34. Rabbi Hugo Gryn thanked all those who had contributed to the morning session. There was a great deal on which the small groups which would be meeting in the afternoon prior to the closing plenary session could reflect.

35. At Rabbi Gryn's invitation, Mr Eric Moonman (Board of Deputies of British Jews) as chair of the Fundraising Group then reported briefly on fund-raising developments since the AGM in Derby the previous summer. The Network office had been working hard to raise funds from trusts. The work of raising funds to meet our expenditure was, however, everyone's responsibility. There could be no excuses. If the Network failed this would reflect on all our

organisations and on ourselves. First, there was good news. One trust which did not normally make grants for this kind of work (and which therefore did not wish to be named) had been sufficiently impressed by the application presented to them to promise £10,000 this year, and for the next two years. The Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust had also made a grant of £10,000 a year for this year and the next two. In addition, it had offered the Network a further annual grant of £5,000 a year over the same three-year period if it could secure "matching" funding from within the different faith communities. It was obviously vital to raise matching contributions to enable the Network to secure this further grant. "Matching" grants were an increasingly common device and tested the commitment of an organisation's supporters. The need for the Network had now been proved and faith communities had to look for ways in which they could support its work. If this extra grant could be secured then, with the "matching" contributions themselves, we would have an extra £10,000 in total towards the budget for 1992. We would then still be £2,000 or so short on what was needed in income to cover the Network's planned 1992 budget of about £98,000.

36. This budget included provision to meet the cost of a fourth member of staff. With this step, Fiona Wynne could be freed to work on the development of local inter faith activity and on dialogue between women in the different faith communities. It was most important that these areas of work should go ahead.

37. We need to use up our present reserves of £36,000 to help meet the cost of the Network's 1992 budget unless still further fresh funds could be secured, and it was most important for us not to have to draw on our reserves in this way. In addition, we had further to go in raising the money needed for 1993 and 1994. If its affiliated organisations wanted to have the Network, then they needed to help raise the funds to pay for it. He would welcome any suggestions of ways in which the Network's fund-raising drive could be pursued in the coming months. The responsibility for this could not just be left to the office and the Fundraising Group. It was important to have help both through raising funds directly and through identifying potential sources of financial support.

36. Rabbi Hugo Gryn underlined the importance of the fundraising task and also expressed appreciation for the work in recent months of the Network staff.

37. Dr Harriet Crabtree referred briefly to the questionnaire about the Network's activities, procedures and priorities which would be distributed a week or so later to all affiliated organisations. It would be very helpful if those to whom the questionnaire was sent could consult within their organisation so that the Executive Committee could have a good picture of the changes which affiliated organisations would like to see made in the way in which the Network was currently operating.

38. The meeting then adjourned for lunch.

39. After lunch, meetings took place in four small groups which were invited to reflect together on the theme of Inter Faith Worship and Prayer, and to report back to the subsequent plenary session on issues which they wished to see discussed at it.

40. Bishop Jim Thompson introduced the concluding plenary session and invited reports from the four groups in turn on the points which they wished to raise.

He had thought it preferable not to direct them to discuss particular topics so that they were free to shape their conversation as they wished.

41. Rev Anne McClelland (Richmond Inter Faith Group) reported first for her group. Their question was: What are we doing when we meet together for inter faith worship? There was a whole range of different possibilities. Firstly, we might be present at the religious observance of another community: not just as "observers", and more than as "listeners". We were rather more: we were "attenders", and trying to empathise with what was happening. Secondly, we might be meeting to express a shared need, for example to pray for peace at the time of the Gulf War, wanting to express through prayer our shared concerns, having to use the ways to which we were each accustomed but sharing in the experience of being together to pray. Thirdly, there might be an event at which people came together at local level to express a sense of community and a desire in some way to express a shared sense of the sacred. This could be an event where we felt "at home" together, coming from our different faith communities as "a community of faith". In these circumstances there could be an existential kind of worship and a real sense of sharing together in spiritual terms which was a source of hope.

42. Mrs Jean Potter (World Congress of Faiths), speaking for the second group, said that it had recognised there were tensions within our own religious communities. It was therefore not surprising that there were tensions between different communities. What was the point of trying to come together for shared worship or prayer? People must want to worship or pray together, perhaps through a common concern for peace or for the homeless. They might come together to pray, to listen to one another rather than pray together. There could be two different formats. In the first each religious group might offer its own contribution in turn, with others listening to it even if they were not able to participate fully in it. Alternatively, an annual event might take place at different places of worship each year with communities acting as "host" in turn, with others as "guests". There had been a stress on the positive role of shared silence. In discussion the group had evolved a formula which said that people of the way are also on the way, but must not be in the way and none of them must think that they have the only way!

43. Sheila Crosskey (International Association for Religious Freedom), speaking for the third group, said it had begun by considering the case of individuals attempting to make rapport with another household of faith through attending their place of worship. Perhaps inter faith events were easier held in a neutral setting. There was a tension between the two poles on the one hand of exploring individual spiritual pathways and, on the other, our community religious structures, with particular ethnic, social or even political overtones and with which our identities as members of religious communities were linked. There could be tension and a sense of mutual threat between these two poles. We all needed spiritual education. Could we meet together as corporate bodies at a faith community level, or only as individual religious pilgrims? Did we look forward to a new plural world-wide society in which our earth had shrunk and a new kind of role for inter faith worship would take shape?

44. Rev Dr Clinton Bennett (Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland), speaking for the fourth group, said that it had begun by considering how diverse were the concepts and understanding of worship held in different faith traditions. This meant that it was very difficult to organise public events on a "top down" basis if integrity and individual freedom were to be safeguarded. It was different if events emerged from some common shared experience or enabled people to come together to pray, not to pray together. There had therefore not been much enthusiasm in this group for "mega" events

organised at top level. There was more support for the kind of prayer and spiritual sharing which arose among neighbours, friends, or in a local community, looking for ways of expressing shared human needs, perhaps with people coming together at times of bereavement or at occasions of personal or family celebration. The group had identified two areas for further exploration. Firstly, was it possible to develop resources to help us in offering one another "cross faith" spiritual support at that level of "being human" together at a neighbourhood or local community level? Secondly, could we usefully explore together our different concepts and understandings of "worship" and of "prayer", including the use of symbols and the question of venue or location for any shared event?

45. Bishop Jim Thompson said that a very helpful range of points had been tabled from the different groups. These could perhaps be grouped together under four headings:

- (a) what were we doing when we came together to worship?
- (b) the tension which could exist in relation to our own religious communities;
- (c) the advantage of basing participation in shared events at an individual level rather than at a faith community level, and the increased tensions which arose in the latter case;
- (d) the evident lack of enthusiasm for "mega top-down" events and the preference for concentrating on more intimate smaller groups coming together as a community of faith rather than as faith communities.

46. He suggested addressing this fourth point first. Were the differences between our understanding of worship and prayer too great an obstacle for joint "mega events" to be successful?

47. Mr David Potter (World Congress of Faiths) spoke in support of the Commonwealth Day Observance. It was a way of showing that the Commonwealth was a multi faith community and was an important expression of this. He did not believe that inter faith events worked well if they were held for their own sake, rather than in order to give expression to some specific need to come together in this way, for example in a local civic service. Dr Pauline Webb said that big occasions of this kind could give an important sign and could be an important affirmation. The fact that the Queen personally wanted the event to be held at Westminster Abbey was itself important in providing official endorsement for inter faith events. Mr Bernard Godwin said that he attended whenever he could. It was important to bear in mind that the congregation in the nave of the Abbey was made up very largely of children from schools. They were excited to have an opportunity to see the Queen. The musical performers enjoyed the chance to take part in a national event. For the children there was a strong sense of occasion and they took away with them some of the significance of people coming together in this way. After a recent Observance, he had visited an inner city school and had taken with him copies of the order of service. The fact that the High Commissioner for Pakistan had read from the Quran in Westminster Abbey at this event had clearly been significant for the Muslim children in the school. The broadcasting of the service made a considerable impact round the world. He recalled the Queen's Christmas broadcast of 1987 when she had spoken warmly of the event. Rabbi Hugo Gryn said that events of this kind did have an institutional significance. What alternative way would there be to demonstrate the varied character of the Commonwealth? He knew that local inter faith groups often found it helpful to have, once a year, or every two

years, some public event which marked the coming together of people of different faiths. What form should this take if we were proclaiming ourselves to be people of faith? Any shared event required some degree of compromise. But in places like Cardiff, Wolverhampton and Wellingborough some people of faith wanted others to see them coming together in some religious way. There was a real need in current circumstances for public signals which gave people hope and expressed in a concrete way the possibility of building a community together.

48. Bishop Jim Thompson said that one of the issues raised in the discussion groups had been how smaller scale events of this kind could be arranged with integrity.

49. Mrs Ivy Gutridge (Wolverhampton Inter Faith Group) said that she believed there was a need for smaller occasions as well as larger-scale ones. It was important for people to come together in an inter faith setting. At some point in developing inter faith contact a need would be felt for people to come together to pray, perhaps only to share silence. It was only after the Wolverhampton Inter Faith Group had been in existence for six years and had held a conference with the title, "Can We Pray Together?", that it was decided that inter faith prayer could take place. Symbols and rituals could cause difficulty, but it was felt that as people of faith they could and should come together to pray for peace. It had been possible because the people concerned already knew one another. She stressed that this was on the basis of coming together to pray, not of praying together. Prayers were offered in the appropriate language for each faith. There was a need for people present to be clear as to what was happening and to understand what was being said in order to decide if they could authentically share in prayer. To enable this, a printed order of service was provided with English translations where appropriate. She believed that in coming together it was often best to begin with silence.

50. Bishop Jim Thompson said that it was clear that it was important to build up mutual confidence and trust if there was to be a sense of community which could be expressed with integrity.

51. Ms Sajda Khokher (Bradford Interfaith Concord Society) said that she believed that this was most important. Inter faith work began with building relationships and building up trust. There were a lot of hurdles to cross and many challenges to be faced in gaining this trust. It was important not to rush to hold acts of inter faith worship and prayer which many people did not want even if they were ready to involve themselves in inter faith relationships. She herself was uncomfortable with the Westminster Abbey Commonwealth Day Observance. Clearly there was pressure on communities to be seen to participate in this. It was important for people to be free to decide whether or not they could participate in any particular event comfortably and with integrity. Rev Nigel Pounce (Wolverhampton Inter Faith Group) spoke of sharing at a personal level an awareness of the importance to one another of prayer. This might not involve praying together. He mentioned a local shopkeeper, Mr Patel, who was never able to attend any inter faith event because of business commitments. But when an Afro-Caribbean neighbour died they were both at the bedside. As the man's parish priest, Nigel prayed a Christian prayer of commendation. Quite naturally and spontaneously, Mr Patel joined in with a Hindu Mantra. Subsequently, they had both been able to share their joy at the release of Terry Waite, an event for which, as Mr Patel said, they had both been praying. They had been doing so separately and in their own ways, but in one sense together. Bishop Charles Henderson (Roman Catholic Committee for Other Faiths) said that there was a natural concern at the possibility of causing offence to one another as a result of our ignorance of what might do so and of what would be seen as an intrusion. He felt at ease

at Network meetings precisely because he now knew those who were there. But there was a need to develop an understanding of what we could say to someone of another faith community, for example if that person had suffered a bereavement, in ways which would express our sympathy and yet be sensitive to the faith of the other person. This was an area in which we needed to provide more information and guidance.

52. Bishop Jim Thompson suggested that Bishop Henderson might offer some comments on the next topic of how we worked within our own faith communities with the tensions which could arise over inter faith issues. Bishop Henderson said that when he had been asked six years previously to form a committee within the Roman Catholic Church to look at relations with people of other faiths, he had initially called together those Catholics who were teaching about other faiths in higher education. He had been surprised to discover how many there were. He was aware of his own ignorance about other faith traditions and the expert knowledge which they could provide. After some discussion, it had been decided that the first priority for the Committee was to educate people within the Roman Catholic Church on what the Church taught about attitudes to people of other faiths, and also to produce a series of simple leaflets conveying some basic information about the different faiths now to be found in this country. Education was a most important aspect of inter faith work. At the same time, the basis of inter faith relations was human friendship, and mutual respect provided the essential foundation for this. Canon Richard Orchard (Derby Multi Faith Group) speculated on why Roman Catholics were often able to enter more confidently into the area of relationships with other faiths than other Christians. It was perhaps because they were more positive about the place of natural theology. In each tradition, where we tried to confine revelation to our scriptures, then it was more difficult for us to open ourselves up to other faith communities and he hoped that there was a resource in each tradition in terms of natural theology. Mrs Jean Potter said that she was a great believer in the value of sowing seeds. Over a period of time one could persuade, for example, a new vicar to move to a more open position on issues of this kind. When working for the Girl Guides, which was a religiously based movement, she had been responsible for helping Guiders who had thought of guiding as a Christian organisation to move on to explore ways in which Girl Guides from different religious backgrounds could come together in pursuit of the goals of the movement to promote its members' physical, intellectual and spiritual growth. How could spiritual growth be promoted in a multi faith context? She had worked with Jewish and Muslim Guiders on ways in which guides of different faiths could come together in shared acts of worship which would be acceptable to all those involved. It was a question of looking in practical terms at how people who wanted to come together to worship, arising from their sisterhood in guiding, could do so with integrity in this way.

53. Bishop Jim Thompson said that it had been evident from the valuable contribution from the Mayor of Newham, Councillor Amarjit Singh, that he had found great support from his spiritual adviser from within the Sikh community in his work in building bridges with others within the borough. Did other faith communities provide similar support for those involved in work of this kind?

54. Mr Om Parkash Sharma (National Council of Hindu Temples) said that, within the Hindu community, everyone was welcome since it believed that the whole world was one family (even if there were sometimes family quarrels). The Hindu tradition saw other faiths and their symbols as expressions of a universal faith. So there was full support from the Hindu community for those working to improve community relationships. Rabbi Hugo Gryn said that, within the Jewish community, there were some concerns that inter faith activities might provide opportunities for "soul-snatching". A recent advertisement in

the Times by "Jews for Jesus" had caused dismay within the Jewish community. There was a need for people involved in inter faith events to be secure in their own faith so that they could be present at gatherings of this kind without a sense of threat to their own identity. Certainly many within the Jewish community were uncomfortable about the idea of inter faith worship, even if they supported in principle the development of inter faith relations more generally. There was a need to find ways of celebrating our differences together on a basis of trust. Trust needed to be offered with sincerity from both sides. Otherwise real trust would be absent. Rabbi Albert Friedlander (World Conference on Religion and Peace) spoke about being in Coventry Cathedral the previous Sunday where he read intercessory prayers written by Canon Paul Oestreicher giving thanks for various aspects of the Jewish tradition, including the work of Rabbi Leo Baeck and Jewish humour. The Ann Frank Exhibition was opening in the Cathedral on that day, and the display could be seen by worshippers in the Cathedral. This showed a degree of security in their faith on the part of the Christian congregation. Yet there had been problems in the Jewish community when this same exhibition was shown in a Reform synagogue, to which Orthodox Jewish parents were reluctant to let their children go in order to see the exhibition. The recent correspondence in The Times and in The Independent sparked off by controversy about the "Jews for Jesus" advertisement and the Decade of Evangelism, showed the need for people of good faith to come together to work for better inter faith relationships and to be ready to worship together without feeling that their faith was impaired by this. Rev Joe Stephens (Birmingham Inter Faith Council) spoke of the embarrassment which some Christians in Birmingham felt about efforts by other Christians at proselytising among other faith communities. There was a concern that developments of this kind within the context of the Decade of Evangelism could undermine the good work which had been done over the years in building up relationships between different faith communities and this was being resisted ecumenically. Sheila Crosskey said that she vividly recalled the night of the destruction of the old Coventry Cathedral on Thursday 14 November 1940. She had been very moved to hear at this meeting of the steps towards reconciliation which had taken place in the rebuilt cathedral.

55. Bishop Jim Thompson said that there were points from the first group which there had not been time to discuss. But, as had been said, there were occasions when people chose to come together in empathy with one another as "attenders" at one another's places of worship. It might be a situation in which there was a desire to express a shared need to express concern for peace or for community together. Again, through involvement in inter faith work we might find a community being created where we felt at home together. There had been a series of splendid contributions during the day, which had often been very moving, and they had underlined the extent to which we lived in times which were both exciting and painful. In all sorts of small ways changes were taking place in human relationships as we worked through how to respond to our desire to know and to understand one another better, and to find ways in which to share our varied senses of the sacred. In inter faith work, we were operating at the edge of the "Great Taboo" against coming together in this way and which had been so destructive in the past. It was, as Rabbi Hugo Gryn had stressed, security in our own faith which enabled us to share openly with others. Those who were unwilling to become involved in the pilgrimage of inter faith understanding were held back by their fearfulness. Those who were committed to it needed to uphold one another in their efforts to promote it. He invited those present to share together in a sign of mutual support and encouragement.

56. The meeting closed at 4.30 pm.

OCCASIONS OF INTER FAITH WORSHIP INVOLVING CHRISTIANS

a. The local or regional Scouts are planning for the annual St George's Day service, and come to the minister asking that the service should include some acknowledgement of the presence of 'Indian boys' in the movement. On inquiry it turns out that all these boys are Hindu and Sikh, and the Scout leaders assume that some 'prayers from their books' may be appropriate.

Should such prayers be included? If so, how are the Indian boys likely to feel? If they are included, how are they to be selected? Who should read them, and in what language?

b. A children's charity wants to celebrate its jubilee with a service in the cathedral, and in discussion with the precentor its officials point out that the number of Asian families among its clients is steadily growing. Again the 'Asian families' concerned are Muslim, Sikh and Hindu.

Is it possible to involve some representatives of the Asian families in the service? Since they represent at least three different religious traditions can any significant elements from their faiths be included without unbalancing the service?

c. The new mayor is a Sikh, but has asked for a Christian chaplain and a civic service in the parish church to mark his year of office. Nevertheless it is clear that he would be glad if some affirming reference to his own faith could be included in the worship. He suggests a reading from the Guru Granth Sahib.

Is this request acceptable? What will it mean as part of a Christian service? If it is refused what impression is being given about the place of Sikhs in civic life and of Christian tolerance? If the next mayor asks for a service in the mosque or synagogue of which she or he is a member, how should Christian councillors respond?

d. It is being suggested by some in the city that the annual Remembrance Day service in the Cathedral should include participation by representatives of the Hindu, Muslim, Sikh and Jewish communities whose members also lost their lives in the wars of this century. The city's Muslim community is quite large and the leading imam would be prepared to give a short address, as the Methodist and Roman Catholic leaders have done in different years. **Would this be acceptable? If the imam is invited to speak who will represent the smaller numbers of Hindus and Sikhs and the tiny Jewish community?**

e. Disaster has struck in the area, and the death-toll includes people of many faiths. The clergy are expected to reflect this fact in the memorial service for the victims which will take place in the local park. Civic dignitaries expect that the leaders of other faiths will be asked to take part.

How can this be made an occasion which expresses the grief of the whole local community including those nurtured outside the Christian tradition?

Revd Dr Christopher Lamb
January 1992

1992 (June)

“The Good Life”

**Note of Plenary Meeting of The Inter Faith Network for the United Kingdom
held on Thursday 25 June, at 5-7 Tavistock Place, London WC1**

1. Bishop Jim Thompson in the chair, introduced the topic of "The Good Life". The intention was to reflect on the kind of life which our religious traditions invited us to lead. To make this more concrete, the speakers were invited to focus, in each case, on a particular historical figure within their tradition (other than the founder) who exemplified for them the kind of virtues and ideals which the tradition commended. Unfortunately one of the three planned speakers, Mrs Nighat Mirza, Headmistress of the Muslim Girls School in Bradford, had sent a message that morning to say that she very much regretted that she was unable to travel to London on that day as a result of unexpected difficulties. Both the other speakers would be well known to members of the Network. The first would be Dr Natubhai Shah, Founder President of Jain Samaj Europe, who had been involved with the Network from the first planning meetings and was a member of its Executive Committee.

2. Dr Natubhai Shah began by offering a Jain prayer which he pointed out was couched in universal terms. He said that perhaps the term "The Good Life" was ambiguous. To some it might conjure up an image of indulgence in wine, women and song! But that was not the kind of "Good Life" with which we were concerned in the Network. The person about whom he had chosen to speak was very far from that kind of self-indulgence. He had decided to speak about Vijay Vallabh, a Jain monk, partly because he was a great influence on Dr Shah's own life. At his cremation in Bombay in 1954 more than 200,000 people had been present from all communities and faiths. That indicated the influence which Vijay Vallabh had exerted on an enormous number of people and the way in which his life embodied a message reaching beyond the barriers of caste and creed. He hoped those present knew something about Jainism and about the way in which Jains understood the meaning of this life in which the soul is attached to a material body, the goal of purification of the soul to which Jains aspired and the way in which Jains regulated their lifestyle to help make progress towards that goal. Vijay Vallabh, like Mahavira (the founder of Jainism) and his successors, followed the lifestyle of a Jain monk in pursuing wholeheartedly the goal of purifying his soul through the traditional practices of celibacy, austerity, meditation and study. The religious life involved not only the mind but control of the body as well and so he assiduously practised the technique of kayotsarga, the control of the physical body.

3. Vijay Vallabh was born in 1870 at a time when India was ruled by the British, and Hinduism and Jainism were at a low ebb with various social evils and unnecessary customs, for example in relation to dowries, disrespect of women, the consumption of alcohol, poverty and illiteracy. Vijay Vallabh fought hard to reform and improve the situation and was concerned for the welfare not only of Jains but of all communities whether poor or rich, Hindu, Muslim or Jain, male or female. He travelled thousands of miles on foot and was involved in the religious ceremonies of countless temples. But he also had a particular concern for improving social welfare and for establishing educational institutions. In spite of some opposition from other orthodox monks who believed that social welfare and education were not monastic tasks, he carried on welfare activities for the laity and his followers. He led the austere life of a Jain sadhu, putting

into practice all the principles prescribed by the Jain scriptures. He believed that it was no use merely preaching religion to people who were socially and psychologically unprepared to receive it. First the bread and butter and the wherewithal to get this and then the religion. Only an understanding and happy mind could absorb and live up to the great tenets of Jain philosophy and to create this context was a lifetime's work for this great philosopher.

4. Many stories were told about these three aspects of his work: the traditionally religious, the social and the educational. It was said that Vijay Vallabh's spiritual accomplishments were such that whenever he gave his blessing to a certain project it was bound to succeed. His word never failed. For example, in 1939 at a great ceremony, thousands of people had gathered and black clouds threatened a torrential downpour. Vijay Vallabh had given a smiling assurance that all would be well, and indeed it proved to be so: the skies cleared and the threat of rain disappeared. Many other similar stories were told about his spiritual powers and Dr Shah mentioned some of these. Vijay Vallabh's calm serenity and courage found particular expression in the blessing he gave to the struggle for freedom. He was respected by Gandhi and urged people to wear the khadi as a sign of their commitment to the authentic values of traditional India which Gandhi was seeking to restore. He would not speak against the Raj as such for he saw his role as a Jain monk as a spiritual guide but his heroism came to the fore during the partition years. At that time, he was in what is now Pakistan and people urged him to move to India, but he would not run away. When his sangh ordered him to return he obeyed on one condition: "I will not go until all my brothers have returned to safety." He spent many years in the Punjab preaching his gospel to all the communities. In New Delhi a large complex, the Vallabh Smarak, is currently under construction and will have educational facilities, a library and guest houses together with a beautiful temple.

5. Vijay Vallabh's great interest in social and educational welfare schemes was based on his understanding that people would not be interested in religion until they had begun to experience happiness. For this it was important that the barriers between rich and poor, Jains and non-Jains, different communities and creeds should be overcome. It was also important that people should be well fed and well educated. He encouraged Jains to set up many educational institutions such as Atmanand College and Mahavira Jain Vidhyalaya from which thousands of young people, including Dr Shah himself, had graduated. Innumerable schools and other institutions begun under his inspiration had endured. He had a concern for health care but laid greater stress on education because of the transforming effect that he saw that it could have throughout society. He was able to persuade people to give generously in support of these schemes: the impact of his sermons was such that people contributed their savings in different ways, some by labour, and some by missing a meal. His role in the education of women was also well known. He was the inspiration behind a variety of employment projects. He stressed the importance of people from different Jain sects working together and the Jain Centre in Leicester followed this approach. He always stressed the importance of the Jain teaching of ahimsa, or harmlessness. He showed friendship to all and malice to none. He demonstrated his non-attachment to materialism and exemplified the Jain doctrine of anekantavada or "non one-sidedness". He believed in following the true path of sanctification rather than in sectarian differences. In his last years he said to an audience in Bombay: "I am neither a Jain, nor a Hindu, nor a Jew, nor a Christian, nor a Buddhist. I am a person, a follower of Mahavir, who seeks justice for all and the

welfare of all living beings".

6. Bishop Jim Thompson thanked Dr Shah for his most interesting presentation. He invited Rabbi Hugo Gryn to offer his presentation from the Jewish tradition.

7. Rabbi Hugo Gryn said that it was a pleasing coincidence that the individual that he had selected, Leo Baeck, was an almost exact contemporary of Vijay Vallabh about whom Dr Shah had spoken. He had brought with him a photograph of Leo Baeck and some of his books. He was born in 1873 just three years after Vijay Vallabh and had died in 1956, two years after him. It was good to be reflecting on figures from our own century: there was sometimes an assumption that spiritual giants had only lived in the dim and distant past. But there had been spiritual giants in our own times and it was a fortunate community, and an even more fortunate individual, who had the good fortune to benefit from association with them. Leo Baeck was one of the genuine spiritual giants of the Jewish people in the twentieth century. In London there was a Leo Baeck College which trained rabbis, in Haifa a Leo Baeck School and a Leo Baeck Institute in New York with branches in many other parts of the world.

8. Rabbi Gryn began by quoting from Leo Baeck's book "The Essence of Judaism" which had been a response to a book published earlier called "The Essence of Christianity" by Adolph Harnack, which had argued that Christianity had superseded Judaism. The book had been published in 1912 having been written some years earlier. In it Leo Baeck said: "The Jews have always been a minority, but a minority is compelled to think: that is the blessing of its status. The conviction of the many is based on the weight of possession, the conviction of the few is expressed in the energy of constant searching and finding". Dr Baeck's own great heroes and models were the prophets of the Hebrew Bible. "The most significant feature of the vision of the prophet was its intuitive and practical character. They present neither a philosophy nor a theology. They indulge in neither shrewd argument nor scholarly construction. What compels them to think is an ethical urge. They are overwhelmed by an irresistible truth and in that way they gain their simplicity. They speak because they must speak and what they say was given to them by God". Elsewhere Dr Baeck wrote: "With this faith in the commanding God there has come into the world opposition to any sort of ethical opportunism. This faith cannot compromise: it cannot be linked to anything but the good. God gives commandments, not advice. He says: thou shalt and thou shalt not. Judaism is a religion which was to establish this great either/or". "To the Jew, the unity of God finds its essential expression in the unity of the ethical. Whoever realises this one and only law, acknowledges God as the One. This is the crux of monotheism, and just as monotheism means the one God, so it also also means one command, one righteousness". In response to Harnack's assertion that Judaism was too attached to the present world, Leo Baeck quoted the saying "he to whom this life does not appear to be great and worth living can have no true desire for the future life". On the nature of community he wrote: "In the view of Judaism, human society is a moral unity which all individuals share equally with each other. Before God, this community is responsible not only if one of its members dies of hunger or cold, but equally so if a soul freezes or a conscience perishes". He insisted that the community had an obligation to develop the spiritual life of all of its members. He also noted that ideals could become too general. "It runs the risk of gazing solely upon the future, and not man's duty here and now. The commandment is plain. It demands that the decision be made primarily by Israel itself".

He defined religion as follows: "Religion is to be rooted in conscience and in the fear of God. It has to have the strength of resistance against all powers and multitudes which seek only to rule and oppress. Never be tired of the ideal. You see the future and you call men towards it". That, for Leo Baeck was the essence of Judaism.

9. Rabbi Gryn then turned to Leo Baeck's life. By 1912 Leo Baeck moved from his small rural community to the post of Rabbi in Berlin. In the succeeding years, in addition to being the leader and teacher of his community, he became National President in Germany of B'nai B'rith and was responsible for the training of rabbis and teachers. He developed friendships with Martin Buber, Albert Einstein and Franz Rosenzweig. In 1933 the world of Leo Baeck's youth collapsed: the Nazis came to power. He understood at once the significance of this. He began to organise self-help organisations for Jews and, recognising that they would need to leave Germany, took steps to arrange this. He was arrested five times. In 1936 his wife died. He prepared a special prayer for use on the Day of Atonement in his synagogue but was arrested that morning. Many years later, the text of this prayer had been adapted for use in the present High Holy Day prayer book of the Reform Synagogues in this country: "We stand before God. We bow to Him alone and therefore we stand upright before our fellow men. We worship Him alone and remain firm in all our troubles. Humbly we trust in Him and He shows us the path that lies before us which is our future". Leo Baeck's daughter and her family came to London as refugees. In the summer of 1939 Leo Baeck arranged transport for his students and for children to London and came with them, but then went back to Berlin, saying: "I want to be the last Jew to leave Germany". In 1943 he was finally arrested and put into the Theresienstadt concentration camp. A fellow prisoner, H G Adler, wrote of the way he was universally respected. "He never withdrew from the camp, but it did not seem to exist near him. None of its filth could touch him. Peace emanated from him. He could be gentle but he could also speak with zealous anger for he knew the demands of the hour. His condition oppressed and saddened him but could not break him. He was incomparable. He exerted his influence against the captors particularly through the purity of his own example. He was a shining beacon in the salt tear ocean of despair". He was put on the list of those to be sent to Auschwitz, and was then over 70 and could not possibly have survived, but by a strange twist of fate another prisoner with a similar name was put on the transport. Leo Baeck was not sent, but as far as the Nazis were concerned, they had eliminated him. He survived the war and in May 1945 came to London. He started to teach, holding regular Monday morning seminars and organising the German-Jewish community here. He collaborated with Victor Gollancz in 1948 to organise medical help for the Arabs as well as for the Jews in the Middle East conflict. He continued to make return visits to Germany, saying "We cannot live on a heritage of hatred". In November 1956 he died in London of cancer.

10. Rabbi Gryn said that he had studied with Leo Baeck and had become a rabbi at his prompting. He recalled a number of instances of Leo Baeck's thoughtfulness and willingness to give himself to other people. Rabbi Gryn got engaged in 1956 and Leo Baeck promised to officiate at the wedding. But he did not live to do so. However, just before he died, he took the trouble to write a letter commending another rabbi to take the wedding service in his place. Rabbi Gryn displayed the silver kiddush cup which was Leo Baeck's posthumous wedding present to himself and his wife. To conclude, he summarised Leo Baeck's virtues. He was a man who lived absolutely what he taught and

preached. He was literally a survivor, as a personal survivor of the Nazi years in Germany. But his books had also survived, part of these had been written in a prison camp on toilet paper. He held on to his faith, his spirit, his values and never abdicated decency. In the Jewish tradition there was a saying that "the memory of a righteous person is a blessing". Leo Baeck was someone who understood what "The Good Life" was and never gave up on the living of it and whose memory was indeed a blessing.

11. Bishop Jim Thompson thanked Rabbi Gryn for this moving tribute to his former teacher. After lunch there would be an opportunity in small groups to share more personal experiences and reflections on what "The Good Life" meant to us in our different traditions. This was intended to meet the request which had been made for more opportunity for small group discussion on these occasions.

12. During the buffet lunch which followed, the Network's fifth birthday was celebrated with a birthday cake formally cut jointly by the co-Chairs and Vice-Chairs. Dr Mughram Al-Ghamdi, Mr Indarjit Singh and Mr Om Parkash Sharma then each spoke warmly of the contribution which the Network had made to building understanding between different faith communities and pledged their continuing support for it.

13. After lunch discussion took place in small groups. During the subsequent break for tea, a presentation was made to Ms Fiona Wynne who would be leaving the Network staff at the end of August to join the West Yorkshire Police, as an expression of deep appreciation for the contribution which she had made to the Network during nearly three years as a member of its staff.

14. When the meeting resumed in plenary session Rabbi Hugo Gryn invited representatives of each of the small groups to report on their discussions. He recalled the saying of Jacob Rudin that "when we are dead and people weep for us and grieve, let it be because we touched their lives with beauty and simplicity. Let it not be said that life was good to us, but rather that we were good to life".

15. Rev Trevor Shannon said that among the eight members of the first group, there were at least eight definitions of the good life! The group had started by reflecting on whether it was possible to identify people as having lived "the good life" only after they were dead. Could we detect spiritual greatness now? Was it only internal strength created within us by prayer and meditation which protected us against what is going on around us? How far did it call us into action? There had been discussion about Gandhi's life and teaching and his role in encouraging passive resistance to British rule. But what were we called upon to do if our oppressors showed no sign of taking any notice of passive resistance and used superior force against us? Perhaps the nature of the good depended on the circumstances in which we found ourselves? The good life did not seem to be a passive phenomenon: to have lived a good life one must have been productive. But what did this mean in a world where some people would never work? Perhaps we created the good life by the way we dealt with what happened to us. For three quarters of the world's population the good life would mean an assurance of the next meal: they would be living this life in hunger and poverty. Was it right to have doubts about our faith? If we did not doubt sometimes would we not then be fanatics? The conclusion of the group was that as individuals they experienced the good life from time to time but in fragmentary ways. One member of the group had asserted that he

did not know what the good life meant and that the phrase was too trite.

16. Mr Om Parkash Sharma said that his group had a most interesting discussion and there had been general agreement that a primary requirement of the good life was a readiness to help the needy. He asked Ms Fiona Wynne to offer a more detailed report. She said that the group had spent a lot of time reflecting on teachers, parents and other people who had been important in their own lives. Parents and teachers were of crucial importance in passing on values to others. They talked about individuals, like Mother Teresa, who had lived lives of service and had helped to provide welfare facilities such as hospitals and had provided inspiration for others. Perhaps the key to the good life was the attitude with which one approached life. How did we live our love for others? Our faith needed to embrace the whole of our lives.

17. Sister Margaret Shepherd said that a number of common characteristics had been identified among those who had influenced members of her group personally. As in the previous group, the significance of families and teachers had been recognised. There had been sharing within the group at a deep personal level about the struggle to be good and to do good. There had been an emphasis on the importance of personal integrity and honesty. She had been heartened by the extent of agreement on what constituted goodness in our lives. The importance of the "ordinary" life and of those who had encouraged and influenced us had been the main theme rather than that of outstanding public figures.

18. Rev Anne McClelland said that the group had spent a good deal of time defining the good life. It was a question of "being". It was a quality of life which tried to secure the delicate balance between the spiritual and the material in living out our lives. There was a recognition of the pressure on us from advertising and elsewhere towards a greater materialism. The group had expressed concern about the level of injustice within society both locally and globally. It was not possible to ignore the damage which was being done in some cases by religion. There was a need to become involved in political activity if the burden of injustice was to be eased. Two members of the group had spoken of particular experiences which had led them to their present work and commitment to promoting inter faith understanding. In one case this involved an encounter with a priest in Lebanon working to build trust between different faiths and across political boundaries. Another person had been encouraged at a time of personal loneliness by a basket of fruit brought to them by people of four or five different faiths. It was often the actions of ordinary people that counted most for us.

19. Mr Indarjit Singh said that the youngest member of the group (who had been unable to stay for the final session) had brought up the theme of the environment and the damage humanity had done and was doing to this. What was at issue was not just the good life, but life itself. We needed to be penitent for how we had damaged our earthly home. There had been discussion of the concept of stewardship with suggestions that the concept of servanthood might be better. There was a need to work with nature rather than against nature. We were now suffering from the effects of our greed. Often the fruits of scientific research were misused. There had been discussion about role models and the role of the family and concern about the way in which family life had deteriorated and young people were not being given the kind of direction and inspiration they needed. There was some suggestion that this particular age did not lend itself to

the production of role models. It was interesting to reflect that the prophets to whom we looked back had been fortunate enough to live before the age of the tabloid press! He asked Mrs Ivy Gutridge to add some further comments arising from her contribution to the group's discussion. She said that there had been discussion about the significance of sacrifice, instancing Albert Schweitzer who had given up the prospect of a musical career to go out to serve as a medical missionary in Africa, and Mother Teresa and her sisters had also been mentioned. It was important not to put on pedestals the people who had lived lives of humility, but to let their lives of sacrifice inspire our own. We all knew people who had inspired us to try to live a better life. There was a link here with the care of people and the care of the earth. We had to sacrifice some of our own lifestyle if others were to have proper lives. She had been struck by the phrase "sacrifice of praise" within the Hebrew and Christian scriptures. It was a concept which deserved careful reflection.

20. Rabbi Hugo Gryn thanked those who had presented an account of the discussion in their groups. He mentioned his own regret at hearing on the radio recently a member of the Police Federation talk about his resentment of the "do-gooders" in society. What a pity it was that this had become such a negative phrase. All our religious traditions were asking us to be "do-gooders" which was much better than being "do-badders". He believed that "do-gooders" should be taken seriously and had an important role to perform. We all had role models. Who should they be? If you wanted to know about the values of a particular community you needed to know what kind of person mothers in that community hoped and prayed that their children would grow up to be like. Was it the business tycoon, the powerful person, or the person who lived a life of service to the community? His own community had always been healthiest when the scholar was its hero: that was sadly less so today. The day's discussion had been a useful contribution to the Network's project of exploring our "shared values" and what we meant by "the good" in our different traditions.

21. Rabbi Hugo Gryn closed the meeting at 4.15 pm by thanking all those who had attended, come to the meeting and the Network staff for the arrangements which they had made for it.

1993

Inter Faith Relations in Britain: the Agenda for the '90s

NB: Only a summary of the 1993 meeting could be found on file at the time of scanning.

SUMMARY OF PLENARY MEETING OF THE INTER FAITH NETWORK

HELD AT 6.00pm ON TUESDAY 6 JULY 1993

AT THE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS HOUSE, 229 GREAT PORTLAND STREET
LONDON W1

The plenary was on "Inter Faith Relations in Britain : the Agenda for the '90s". It was chaired by Rabbi Hugo Gryn and the panellists were: Most Ven Vajiragnana, Sister Margaret Shepherd, Mr Gurdave Singh, Dr Manazir Ahsan. Panel presentations were followed by general discussion. In the course of the presentations and discussion, the following observations and suggestions were made:

General observations

Ours is a complex and painful century, punctuated by wars, and oppression and polarization between cultures. The last three years, with developments such as the collapse of communism, have seen an escalated pace of social change and a rise in many areas of the world of xenophobia, nationalism, war, racism and anti semitism. In response to such dangerous currents, it is vital that we draw on our different faith traditions to create a more harmonious society: to combat ignorance and prejudice, and speak out in cases of persecution, to foster understanding and build up relationships of trust. We must find multiple ways of building good relations between different faiths, and together set standards of humanity at its best.

Specific suggestions for inter faith work in the 90s and beyond

(a) Publicising inter faith work

It is important to publicise initiatives well via good media coverage, speakers, etc. The new Network "code" has an important role to play in spurring discussion of the issues. We need to find as many ways as possible of promoting it.

(b) Develop inter faith work further within all the faith communities

Network affiliates need to take a lead in promoting awareness of inter faith issues within their particular faith communities.

(c) Work to tackle discrimination

We must tackle discrimination in society as whole against particular groups on the grounds of religion. Legal steps may be necessary as part of this.

(d) Tackling prejudice within our own communities

Inter faith work cannot thrive if we still allow prejudice within our own communities to go untackled. As well as fighting prejudice against us, we must try to educate our own communities and, in particular, prevent the production of literature which is prejudiced and inflammatory.

(e) Education

Several participants stressed the importance of ensuring good religious education in schools. The importance of inter faith harmony and cooperation needs bringing home to children in schools, and via youth organisations, religious communities. Adults also need education - the importance of visiting each others places of worship to learn was stressed.

(f) Youth

Young people themselves have an important role to play in inter faith work. There is a need to train young leaders from different faiths so they can present their own faith clearly, understand the faiths of others, and the issues at stake in inter faith affairs. We need to educate young "ambassadors" for inter faith harmony.

(g) Women

Women from the various faith communities also need to be drawn more fully into inter faith work. The Network should build on its recent initiatives accomplishments in this area.

(h) Multicultural versus bilateral inter faith dialogue

Dialogue between all faiths is important, but there is a special role for dialogue between specific faiths, eg Judaism and Christianity or Islam and Hinduism because they have particular issues and histories to tackle. This will be very important for the coming years.

1994

Religion on Radio and Television

RELIGION ON RADIO AND TELEVISION

**A REPORT ON
THE INTER FAITH NETWORK'S
1994 NATIONAL MEETING**

**held on Thursday 24 November
at the Myddleton Conference Rooms
LSE Rosebery Hall, Rosebery Avenue, London EC1**

**RELIGION ON
RADIO AND TELEVISION**

**REPORT ON THE
1994
AUTUMN NATIONAL MEETING**

OF

THE INTER FAITH NETWORK FOR THE UK

Since the Inter Faith Network began in 1987, one topic which has regularly surfaced in discussion among affiliates has been the nature and quality of coverage of religion on radio and television. This meeting was held in response to the general desire to find out more about the area and to discuss some of the key issues with programme makers and regulators. The morning session was chaired by Network Co-Chair, Mr Indarjit Singh, and the afternoon session by his fellow Co-Chair, Rt Rev Roy Williamson. The day was attended by 70 delegates from organisations affiliated to the Network. The programme was as follows:

Religious programming and the radio and television industries in the UK

Overviews from Paul Brown, Head of Regulation, The Radio Authority and from Rachel Viney, Religious Broadcasting Officer of the Independent Television Commission

Open forum

What do we think should be the aims of religious programming and regulation?

Challenges facing multi faith programme makers and presenters

Rev Roger Hutchings, Methodist Minister and Series Producer for the ITV programme "Sunday Matters" produced by Roger Bolton Productions

Mike Wooldridge, BBC Religious Affairs and Community Relations Correspondent

Facing the camera

Bina Vasdev, who featured in the recent Everyman programme on Bhaktivedanta Manor

Responding to media requests: community perspectives I

Rona Hart, Press and Public Relations Officer, Board of Deputies of British Jews

Responding to requests: community perspectives II

Iqbal Sacranie, UK Action Committee on Islamic Affairs and Inner Cities Religious Council

Open Forum: What kind of religious programmes on radio and television do we hope for? How can faith communities and inter faith organisations work in partnership with the media to create good religious programming? Janet Lee (Deputy Head of Regulation, Radio Authority), joined the panellists in the Open Forum at the end of the day in place of Paul Brown.

This report gives you the key issues raised by participants during the day, plus transcripts of the main presentations, amplified from additional materials provided where indicated. For further information on any area covered in the talks of Rachel Viney and Paul Brown, please contact respectively the Radio Authority (0171 430 2724) or The Independent Television Commission (0171 255 3000). Other useful numbers are the Broadcasting Complaints Commission (0171 630 1966) and the Broadcasting Standards Council (0171 233 0544). BBC Religious Programmes can be contacted via BBC North (0161 200 2020).

Key Points Arising from the Day

A Mutual Learning Process

The day gave programme makers a chance to hear how faith communities and inter faith groups experience being on the receiving end of coverage and of requests for assistance. It also gave the latter a chance to gain an understanding of some of the challenges faced by programme makers and "regulators".

The Issue of "Representativeness"

A number of participants expressed concern that "unrepresentative" members of their faith community seem to be used by the media. Rachel Viney said that broadcasters need to do more to check out the credentials of those who appeared on programmes. Broadcasters are always hungry for raw material and want fluent spokespeople. It would be helpful to identify people who were able to speak authoritatively and well and for faith communities to recommend these people to broadcasters. It is not easy to find people who will both do well on the media and carry the confidence of their communities, but it is important to do so.

The Importance of Media Skills Training for Faith Communities and Inter Faith Organisations

There is at present a shortage of minority faith tradition spokespeople willing or able to respond to media requests. Rabbi Hugo Gryn emphasized that it is important for broadcasters to do more to make members of minority communities feel more comfortable with programme making and to help them learn how to handle the media and for the media themselves to do more talent spotting. At the same time, there is a need for faith communities to develop ways of training members to be spokespeople and to develop their media skills. Members of faith communities often do not feel sufficiently competent or confident to take part in programmes. Interviewers can manipulate an inexperienced interviewee or even an experienced one, so training is important. Rt Rev Roy Williamson referred to the offers which have communicated to the Network by the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church to make available their well resourced training facilities to people of other faiths. This is going to be explored by the Network office.

Other points raised during the day included the following:

- * Indarjit Singh noted that religious broadcasting on television in Britain is much better than in other countries, but at the same time some faiths may feel they do not get their fair share of time. He said the meeting had been given an idea of how the faith communities themselves can start initiatives which will help to change this.
- * Fairness and balance in programmes and editorial comment needs to be kept under close scrutiny and programmes should not be exploitative. A number of the presenters

explained what mechanisms are in place to ensure this.

- * There should be more positive programmes like the recent one about work in the Jewish community on child care and care for old people. There is a need to make good news into news and not to focus so much on disagreement. Mike Wooldridge said if people wanted to achieve coverage of positive things it might be wise to avoid the label "good news"! You need to concentrate on finding ways to demonstrate that the viewers or listeners curiosity could be engaged by a particular item of positive news. There is a need to make good news interesting news and preferably to find a "peg" to hang the story on.
- * Religious programmes should be shown at times when members of the relevant faith community are actually able to see them (not late at night, at crack of dawn, or when the community in question are likely to be at their place of worship). Roger Hutchings stressed that where scheduling seems inappropriate is it is very important to write in to say so.
- * It would be good to have more broadcasting on the nature of religious experience which examines the nature of the mind and similar topics. In the new broadcasting world of "sound bites" we run the risk of losing real religion. We could be left just with news reporting, not the tackling in depth of religious issues. Rachel Viney gave examples demonstrating that there is still room on television for this kind of programme. It is always a good idea to write in to praise a worthwhile programme. Complimentary letters carry at least as much weight as complaints. Mike Wooldridge gave other example but said that it is difficult to attract sizeable audiences for programmes of this kind.
- * There is a pressing need for the media and others to stop misusing the word "fundamentalism".
- * It is important for programme makers to let those who take part in a programme know when it is going to be broadcast or if it is not going to be broadcast at all.
- * Editing should not distort what the contributor has said. This is a difficult area, and a number of the speakers clarified what is "good practice".
- * Religious affairs and community relations are quite different things. For example, most Buddhists in Britain are not members of an ethnic minority.
- * There is a tendency for faith communities to start by highlighting the failures of the media, since the media tend to highlight the failures of faith communities. But we need to recognize that many of those working in the media are trying to do their job well.
- * Improvements in the handling of sensitive issues are noticeable. A local inter faith group participant mentioned that when Mrs Gandhi was murdered he was appalled at seeing on television the shot of a Sikh in Southall rejoicing and waving his kirpan in the air. Why had this unrepresentative incident been selected? In Nottingham all the different faiths had met together in the Hindu temple to pray for peace both in the local and world community, but that was not covered. However, when Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated Central Television

came to the Nottingham temple and filmed a similar event for their Midlands News programme.

- * Journalists need to consider the common good. There is a need for ethical standards in reporting and to make sure that reports are not based on mere allegations, for example about sexuality. Roger Hutchings stressed that programme makers are concerned about "the common good" even if from time to time they made mistakes. Rt Rev Roy Williamson said that the media is often more interested in controversy than consensus, but while this is true it is not the whole truth. He was glad that testimony had been given to the positive work which the media did. There are a lot of people around to whom representations can be made and who are willing to help.

- * A number of participants expressed anxiety about the focus in religious programming on controversy. Roger Hutchings said that a lot of difficult decisions have to be taken about which stories to follow and how to handle them. There is a need to ensure that the viewer's interest will be engaged. Sometimes fierce arguments do make good television.

Paul Brown, Deputy Chief Executive and Head of Regulation at the Radio Authority

There are two main types of radio service in the UK:

Publicly funded: the BBC, which broadcasts under the requirements of a Royal Charter. Its governors are appointed by the Secretary of State at the Department of National Heritage. It has five UK-wide services, national services in Wales, Scotland and Ulster, and nearly 40 county-wide services.

Commercial: all the others. These are licensed by the Radio Authority whose principal duty, under the Broadcasting Act 1990, is to enhance listeners choice, and whose members are also appointed by the Secretary of State at the Department of National Heritage. At the moment there are 2 national services; 150 licensed local services; 10 satellite services, one additional (side band) service beginning early next year; and an average of around 20 restricted radio services broadcasting in various locations in any one month.

Changes: Numerous new radio services are appearing because digitisation and computers are improving the use of spectrum resource and reducing the cost of radio broadcasting and because of the easing of government restrictions. A 100% rise in advertising revenue has attracted more investors to the commercial radio industry and meant more money to spend on programmes. Changes have meant that:

- * Five years ago there were four national services. Now there are eight: BBC 1,2, 3, and 4 and BBC Radio 5 Live; Classic FM; and Atlantic 252. These will be joined by Talk Radio UK in February 1995.
- * Just over five years ago there were two London-wide commercial radio services. Now there are nine, and four more coming in mid 1995. Outside London, smaller audience bases mean slower change, but there is similar growth. Manchester had only one city-wide commercial service in 1988 but now has five, plus overlaps from surrounding areas and a number of more localised services in the area.

Commercial Radio's share of all UK listening overtook the BBC's for the first time last month due to a sharp decline in Radio 1 listening over the last year and an increase in Commercial Radio listening. Present shares of listenership are:

BBC Radio 1: 11.8%	National Commercial 10.7% of which	
BBC Radio 2: 12.9%	Atlantic 4.3%	
BBC Radio 3: 1.1%	Classic FM 2.8%	
BBC Radio 4: 10.5%	Virgin 3.6%	
BBC Radio 5: 2.4%	Local Commercial 38.3%	
BBC Local 9.9%		
BBC total= 48.6%	Commercial total= 49.0%	Other= 2.4%

Religious Broadcasting:

The BBC continues to broadcast a wide range of excellent religious output on all its radio services, while bearing in mind the demographics of relevant listeners. It has to perform the difficult balancing act of broadcasting "unpopular" programmes which are judged to be valuable to society, while also trying to generate a sufficiently large audience to justify the licence fee.

Commercial Radio overall pays less attention to religious broadcasting than it did, and there is no statutory requirement that programmes should include religion. On the other hand, there are now ethnic minority services which include more output about faiths other than Christian than was previously available. There is also a growth of specialist stations which could well include religious ones. London is due to get a Christian station in 1995. The Broadcasting Act prevents licensing of any national religious station.

Regulation: The Broadcasting Act 1990 requires two main things of religious programmes:

- * programmes must not denigrate other faiths
- * listeners must not be exploited.

The Radio Authority regulates the commercial or independent sector of radio. BBC radio is regulated by the BBC itself. Both the BBC and commercial radio are also subject to the rulings of two complaints bodies: the Broadcasting Complaints Commission (BCC) which deals with complaints about unfairness and the Broadcasting Standards Council (BSC) which deals with standards of taste and decency and looks at such things as levels of violence in programming. These may soon be just one body. These days all regulation in the commercial sector is done retrospectively. That is to say, complaints are lodged and examined in relation to the statutory or charter requirements and the various codes produced by people like the Radio Authority and the BSC. There is no advance regulation where the projected output of a station is looked at in advance and where someone says to the broadcaster that it cannot do whatever it is. The Radio Authority's Code is particularly important for regulation of both advertising and programmes in the commercial sector.

[From information separately supplied about the Radio Authority Code: On advertising: relevant sections indicate that licensees do not have to carry religious advertisements if they do not wish to do so. If religious advertising is carried it is subject to central clearance and must take care not to exploit the vulnerability of any particular category of listener. Further, "references to minority groups should not be unkind or hurtful (Code rule 9); references to religious or political beliefs should not be deprecating or hurtful" (9); advertisements "must not exploit the superstitious and must not, without justifiable reason, play on fear" (11) and must not "include any material which might reasonably be construed by ethnic minorities to be hurtful or tasteless (22). Advertisements must not denigrate other religious faiths or philosophies of life, claim that a particular religion is the "only" or "true" faith (9, appendix 7) or directly exhort listeners to change their religious behaviour (15, appendix 7). No advertisements can be accepted from bodies who practise or advocate illegal behaviour or whose rites or other forms of collective observance are not normally directly accessible to the general public. All advertisements must clearly identify the advertiser or the religious organisation on whose behalf the advertisement is being broadcast.

On programmes the RA Code amplifies the relevant sections of the Broadcasting Act 1990 (Section 90, ci and ii) warns broadcasters against exploiting listener's susceptibilities by such routes as preying on their fears (Code, 7.9). It says that the identity of religious bodies featured

in religious programmes must be made clear to the listener (7.2); the belief and practice of religious groups must not be misrepresented and programmes about religion must be fair and accurate (7.3); religious programmes should reflect and may proclaim the worship, thought and actions of the mainstream religious traditions present in the UK, recognising these are mainly, though not exclusively, Christian (7.5) but religious programmes broadcast to a particular geographical area must be sensitive to the religious makeup of the area served (7.8). Programmes may be used "to propound and propagate religious belief. However, neither the programmes themselves, nor any follow-up material may be used to recruit members for any religious faith or denomination in a way contrary to the requirements of section 90(2)(c)(i) of the Broadcasting Act 1990 (7.6). Programmes and follow up material must not denigrate or attack the beliefs of other people (7.6) and the religious views and beliefs of a particular religion or denomination must not be abused. The Code says "Britain contains communities with different faiths and cultures, each with their own particular religious sensitivities. All broadcasters must make themselves aware of these sensitivities lest they give unintentional offence to these communities (7.11). Full copies of the Radio Authority's Code covering advertising and programmes can be obtained by ringing 0171 430 2724.]

Additional Points made in response to questions:

- * Programmes cannot not make sweeping claims without including a counter view. They cannot threaten damnation to those who do not join a particular religion, nor exploit the emotions of the listener, nor canvass for financial support on the basis of a promise of salvation. No sanctions have been exercised to date in relation to a religious programme, but the sanctions exist and stations can be fined or have their licence revoked.
- * Religious claims can be made, but have to be aired alongside counter claims. No organisation can buy air time just to put their own claims out insulated from disagreement. To date, broadcasters have been respecting these guidelines but there might be a need to reconsider the position if more aggressive religious broadcasting develops.

Religious Programming and the Television Industry in the UK

Rachel Viney, Religious Broadcasting Officer, Independent Television Commission

Overview

Television in the United Kingdom consists of 4 - possibly soon to be 5 - terrestrial channels, and a large and growing number of cable and satellite services. By September 1994 there were over 70 satellite services in force; there were 69 cable franchises operating, delivering a variety of channels. I intend to concentrate mainly on those services free to viewers at the point of delivery, that is: the terrestrial channels, BBC1, BBC2, ITV and Channel 4. There may soon be a fifth Channel, Channel 5, for which applications are currently being invited by the ITC.

Funding

BBC1 and BBC2 are funded from the licence fee, ITV and Channel 4 predominantly from advertising. Programme sponsorship is a recent and growing source of revenue, though still small compared to that from advertising. ITV consists of 15 regional companies, plus the breakfast time service. These are all commercial companies which operate under licence from the ITC. Channel 4 is provided by the Channel 4 Corporation, a non-profit-making body, under licence from the ITC. Since the beginning of 1993, C4 has sold its own advertising, but is protected by a safety net from ITV if its revenue should fall below 14% of total qualifying revenue. If, however, Channel 4's revenue exceeds 14%, it has to pay half of the excess to the ITC which then distributes it to the ITV companies. The latter happened last year - to Channel 4's considerable annoyance! Satellite and cable companies, almost without exception, derive the majority of their revenue from subscriptions, with advertising accounting for a relatively small part of income.

Independent Production

The BBC and ITV are required by law to allocate not less than 25% of their broadcasting time to independent productions, that is programmes made by production companies which are not broadcasters. The BBC commissions independents or produces its own programmes in house - a mixed economy if you like. In ITV the situation is more complex. Traditionally ITV companies were all producer-broadcasters, making and transmitting programmes for their own regions, and contributing programmes they had made in house to the ITV network. Since the beginning of 1993, however, ITV contains a number of licensees who commission all, or the vast majority, of their programmes from independent producers. Other ITV companies remain producer-broadcasters, though they too may commission some programmes from independents. Since its establishment in 1982 Channel 4 has acquired or commissioned programmes from a wide range of sources, including independents.

Scheduling and Commissioning

Programmes shown by the ITV companies in their own regions are made or commissioned by each individual company. Programmes shown on the ITV network - that is the programmes which are shared by all ITV companies and which account for over 70% of ITV's audience and revenue - are commissioned and scheduled by the ITV Network Centre. Proposals for programmes for the network may be submitted by an ITV company, by an independent producer

direct to the Centre, or by an ITV company and an independent working together.

Regulation

The BBC combines its programme making and regulatory functions, and deals with complaints - although complaints about its programmes, like those of Independent Television, may also be considered by the BSC and BCC, the complaints bodies whose particular functions Paul Brown has already outlined. The ITV companies, Channel 4 and all other commercial television services which originate in the UK, operate under licence from the ITC, which then regulates them through its licences and codes of practice on programme content, advertising, sponsorship and technical standards. The ITC is not a broadcaster or programme maker - it has no editorial involvement in programmes prior to their transmission, and does not preview programmes. Instead it acts after the event, should a programme or advertisement be in breach of its codes, and may apply one of a range of sanctions available to it under the Broadcasting Act 1990. These include: formal warnings, forbidding repeats, imposing financial penalties, shortening (or in extreme circumstances) revoking a licence. The ITC is the only regulatory body with the power to impose sanctions. The ITC also carries out audience research into viewer satisfaction with the range of programme output, and in specific areas. Earlier this year, for example, the ITC published a major survey into opinion about religious programmes, *Seeing is Believing*, which specifically sought the views of a number of minority religious traditions in the UK.

Complaints and Sanctions

Complaints about programmes on commercial channels may be made direct to the channel concerned or to the ITC. The ITC does not only act on complaints, but may intervene on its own initiative as a result of its own monitoring of programmes, should there appear to have been a breach of one of its codes. It publishes a quarterly summary of complaints and interventions. The BBC is self-regulating but has its own internal complaints unit. If someone has a complaint about ITV, C4 or a cable or satellite station they may write to the relevant broadcasting organisation or to the ITC or to both.

Religious Broadcasting

If you were to go through the Radio Times one week and mark up all the religious programmes on BBC Television, ITV, Channel 4 and BBC national radio channels, you would end up with a long list of programmes, covering a wide range of formats, speakers and subject matter - just on the national channels, let alone regional ITV and BBC or local radio. And all these programmes, whose combined cost over a year amounts to many millions of pounds, are paid for, not by faith groups or wealthy individuals, but by the broadcasters from the revenue gathered from all of us. Why is all this religious broadcasting available? The answer has much to do with the vision of public service broadcasting articulated by the first Director General of the BBC, John Reith, who in the days when there was one radio channel serving the nation, believed that broadcasting should be organised for the good of the public, offering the best of everything to everybody. That everything included religion as a matter of course, a convention which continued as broadcasting expanded to include not only more radio channels, but BBC Television and ITV. The latter, though funded by advertising, continued the public service tradition by maintaining the editorial independence of the broadcasters through the separation of advertising and programming, and offering a diverse range of programmes, including religion.

In the early days of broadcasting, 'religion' was more or less synonymous with 'Christianity', a

situation which did not change materially until the mid 1970's, when the Central Religious Advisory Committee (CRAC), in a submission to the Annan Committee, recommended that one of main aims of religious broadcasting should be to 'reflect the worship, thought and action of the mainstream religious traditions in Great Britain, recognising that these are mainly, though not exclusively, Christian'. CRAC at that time was itself an exclusively Christian body though shortly afterwards it obtained its first member from another tradition, Rabbi Hugo Gryn. CRAC continues its role as a body advising both BBC and ITC on policy matters relating to religion and reviewing programme output after transmission. Currently its membership reflects a range of Christian denominations and the Hindu, Muslim and Jewish traditions. The importance of that recommendation to Annan should not be underestimated, although you may want to discuss the extent to which that policy has in fact been implemented. In that recommendation you can see the continuation of the idea of religious broadcasting on public channels being for everybody. Nevertheless Christianity remains the starting point for much religious broadcasting - and Sunday is still the day on which BBC1 and ITV broadcast most of their religious output, including acts of worship and factual coverage of religious or moral issues in the form of programmes like Everyman, Heart of the Matter, and the current ITV offering, Sunday Matters.

From the beginning of 1993, ITV, as a result of changes in the Broadcasting Act 1990, ceased to broadcast a regular religious programme in or close to peak viewing time. The BBC continues to broadcast Songs of Praise early on Sunday evenings. The ITC is on record as regretting ITV's decision and has brought to the companies' attention the decline of 62% in the audience for religious programmes across the ITV network from 1992 to 1993.

Religious Broadcasting and the ITC

The Broadcasting Act 1990, under which the ITC was established, contains a number of provisions relating to religious broadcasting. Section 6(1)(d) requires the ITC to do all it can to secure that licensees exercise 'due responsibility' with regard to religious programmes, which should not include any improper exploitation of viewers' susceptibilities or improper treatment of the religious views and beliefs of those belonging to a particular religion or religious denomination. These requirements apply to all licensed services. The Act also places a specific requirement on ITV to devote 'a sufficient amount of time' to religious programmes. The ITC has interpreted this as a licence requirement of a minimum of 2 hours of religion per week. In fact many licensees exceed this because the ITV network provides two hours of output to which they add religious programmes made for their own individual regions. Regional religious programmes are an important part of the ITV picture and something to bear in mind when you are thinking about coverage of your group on ITV.

Schedule 2 Part II(2) of the Act disqualifies religious bodies from owning a Channel 3 licence, but does permit them, subject to the ITC's discretion, to own a licence for a licensable programme service, which could be a channel available on cable or satellite (details available from the Cable and Satellite Division of the ITC).

Channel 4, though not explicitly required by the Act to show religious programmes, is committed by its licence to transmit a minimum of one hour per week of religion. Channel 4 has a special remit under the Act to appeal to tastes and interests not generally catered for by ITV and to be innovative in the form and content of its programmes.

Cable and satellite channels cannot be required to show religious programmes, although that does not of course prevent them from doing so.

The Act also repeals a prohibition in previous legislation forbidding advertising by religious groups on ITV and Channel 4. To date there have been only one or two religious advertisements.

The ITC Programme Code

This provides detailed guidance implementing the legislation on religious programming and other relevant sections of the Act. The Code includes restrictions on appeals for funds for religious purposes, a prohibition on direct recruitment to a particular religion except on services which are owned by religious bodies, and requirements on ITV and Channel 4 to reflect the worship thought and action of the mainstream religious traditions represented in the UK. Regional ITV companies are required to reflect the religious makeup of the area they serve. Licensees are required to all they can to ensure that religious programmes are accurate and fair and that religious beliefs are not misrepresented. The Code is designed to be applicable to all religious groups.

An example of the Code in action was the ITC's upholding of complaints against Channel 4's programme "The Pope's Divisions" which included strong criticism of the current Pope. The ITC found the programme to be unfair: not because it was critical, but because the strong views put forward by the presenter were not balanced by alternative views. Channel 4 have now agreed to broadcast a more positive programme about Catholicism.

Additional Points made in Response to Questions:

- * Is "mainstream" a numerical or qualitative definition? RV said perhaps it is not the best word to use. The ITC has to keep in touch with the changing patterns of religious life in Britain. The ITC does not operate percentage quotas and there could be problems, for example the Salvation Army is not numerically large but has a high public profile. It is particularly important for regional television companies to reflect the religious makeup of their region.
- * In response to the point that misrepresentation and stereotyping can be a problem in broadcasting, RV referred to the report "Seeing is Believing" which found that minority communities' main worries were over the handling of news and current affairs items and that there was a perception of religious programming as largely owned by Christians. The report also noted criticisms of the choice of people to appear on behalf of religious groups.
- * In the bids for TV commercial stations licensees, there had been an initial quality threshold which had to be met but then the winning bid had been settled strictly in terms of the money offered by the contractor. The ITC had been quite frank about its concern over the absence of religious television programmes on ITV in peak time. But the ITC had more limited powers than the IBA which preceded it which was the "broadcaster" whereas ITC was not. The IBA could look at schedules and preview programmes. The ITC did neither. It provided a post broadcast rather than a pre-broadcast check, but had tough powers to impose sanctions in the event of a breach of its Codes or Licences.

Information Offered at the Request of the Chair by Zab Chughtai (BBC)

Ms Chughtai works for the BBC and has been working with BBC Religious Programming on a project which the Chairman asked if she would describe for the meeting. She explained that The BBC remains committed to religious broadcasting at peak time both on television and radio and said that "The religious department of the BBC also recognises that Sunday is not a day of worship for all faiths. In light of this, it is striving to represent different faith communities in order to accurately reflect the diverse religious, spiritual and moral issues that concern today's multi-faith, multi - racial Britain. Faith communities demand of programme-makers fair and representative religious reporting. Programme-makers operate in a context where budgets and allocated schedules can impose constraints on religious output. The BBC's religious department is currently involved in a detailed analysis of programme strategy. Strategy for multi-faith programming is a key element of our current review. This involves an ongoing process of dialogue between the BBC's religious department and faith communities. The first part of our initiative was to hold a 2 day seminar at the BBC inviting programme - makers and individuals from different faith communities to discuss the role of faith in religious communities programming. Speakers from the Muslim, Hindu, Jewish, Sikh, Christian, Buddhist and Humanist communities were invited to air their criticisms and concerns. This informed, engaging and frank dialogue is currently being edited into booklet form by the religious programming department of the BBC and a further half day seminar is proposed. This will then be followed by a survey detailing the viewing preferences of faith communities. The culmination of this ongoing dialogue will be a comprehensive policy report."

Challenges facing Multi Faith Programme Makers and Presenters - I

Rev Roger Hutchings, Methodist Minister and Series Producer for the ITV Programme "Sunday Matters" produced by Roger Bolton Productions.

Thank you for the invitation to be present today, and to speak to you. My involvement with religious broadcasting in the United Kingdom goes back about twenty five years. I began as a volunteer reporter on local radio in Merseyside. A few years later I became a staff producer with the BBC religious department in Manchester. I remember vividly the ambience or style of some of the early staff meetings I attended in London's Broadcasting House. I found myself, at about 32, one of the youngest people present, in a group which was almost entirely male. Further, they were all (with the variety inherent in such a statement) Christians, and probably the majority were Anglican clergymen - against whom, by the way, I am no more or less violently prejudiced than any other Methodist minister! I remember that two of them smoked pipes - which perhaps added to my prejudices!

In those days - twenty years ago - virtually every programme produced in the BBC domestic religious department was in some sense confessional, and Christian. The one solid exception - and the programme which brought me into network production in the first place, was Radio 4's "Sunday Programme", the northern editions of which I produced for a number of years. In

theory, "Sunday" was able to report stories on a multi-faith basis. In practice, there were in those days a number of problems, with which I'm sure you're entirely familiar. First, the entire production team except the presenter were Christians. (The presenter was what is rather oddly known as a non-religious Jew, whose profound ignorance of simple religious issues could sometimes be infuriating, but often meant he asked straight questions the listener might well have had in mind.) Second, the lines of communication we had with the religious communities were almost entirely Christian, and in those days there were few if any sources of non-Christian religious news. I hasten to add I'm not suggesting there were no stories from non-Christian communities, but press and news releases didn't arrive on my desk, and there weren't sufficient resources, in terms of reporters or researchers, to dig them out. Third, the powers-that-be, those who kept an eye or ear on what we were doing, were substantially Christian, and the most weighty complaints were those which came about because one of our reports might have been regarded as antagonistic to received Christian wisdom, or critical of church leaders in some way.

In 1994, much has changed - there are more young faces, and many more women than there used to be in production jobs - but much hasn't changed at all! If you think about the God Slots on radio and television, you are still contemplating a substantially confessional and Christian body of output - and arguably, in terms of the ground-rules laid down by the Central Religious Advisory Committee and endorsed in various reports, that's OK. In any case, I'm not really here to argue that particular case. At the edges, the reality of a multi-faith community has begun to be reflected. The 9.15 am slot on BBC television, for example, has broadcast a number of series which in one way or another have looked at the belief and life of most of the major world faiths. Speakers on Radio 4's Thought for the Day, once entirely Christian, now include members of other communities, and on series like Seeds of Faith, late on Sunday nights, there have been Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus and Jews. Everyman and Heart of the Matter have always had a broad canvas. On ITV, there have been a few attempts to broadcast worship from non Christian sources - though that's not happened for quite a while. Other series - and these include the major prime-time transmissions like the (now defunct) Highway on ITV, or Songs of Praise on BBC - have remained Christian.

For me personally, life has moved on. I now work for an independent production company, on contract to the ITV Network, and I shall leave to Mike Wooldridge the up-dating of what religious news and current affairs now does within the BBC. My own relationship with BBC Religious Broadcasting continues as a contributor, and of course I'm free to draw on my years there, in Songs of Praise and elsewhere, in answering questions. But the main reason I was asked to be here today was my involvement with 'Sunday Matters', which, in case you're not aware of it, is the two-part magazine which surrounds Morning Worship on ITV on Sunday mornings. As such, it constitutes the whole of the religious output of ITV as required under the latest Broadcasting Act. The proposal we at Roger Bolton Productions made for 'Sunday Matters' included a strong commitment to dealing with topical issues, and to reflecting the life of all the main faith communities. I hope that by describing some of the background and experiences of 'Sunday Matters', I can reveal some of the realities which producers face.

First, let me undermine what may be your view of some vast production team. I'm here today because I care about what you're trying to do. Meanwhile, back at my office in Camden, there are just three people left working on this week's programme - the Producer, the Assistant Producer, and a Researcher. Backing them up are two 'fixers' who issue contracts, organise

transport, book hotels and film crews, keep the books and pay the bills - and one 'runner', a sort of all-purpose errand person without whom every production would collapse! And that's it to get together an hour's magazine programme which will contain about eight or nine items, three of which will be filmed.

Second, let me also undermine what may be your view of the financial resources behind a television series. The sums involved in television are large, and a series like 'Sunday Matters' costs more than £42,000 an ITV hour (which lasts about 54 minutes). To put it another way, that's not much short of £1,000 a minute. By the time you've paid for equipment, crew, location, set and so on, about £400 per week is available to pay for people to come to our studio off Trafalgar Square. If we employ one professional musician at professional MU rates, we've broken our budget!

Third, you may think that production teams have huge back-up in the form of cuttings from the papers, press releases, and various forms of reference library. Well, again, you'd be only partly right. My three production staff who are beavering away today have the UK Christian Handbook, Crockford's, and various contact lists including the Inter Faith Network. Piles of newspapers litter the floor and the desks, and there are more in the office cupboards. But if back cuttings are needed to research an item or story, we have to pay an outside company to supply them. Each of us has our own contacts from this and previous jobs, of course, and over the years those who've been involved in religious programming have quite extensive access to people around the country. But broadly, all we have are our wits, and, of course, our constantly busy telephones.

Fourth, let me disabuse you of any idea of permanence in all this. In the BBC's Religious Broadcasting Department, there are dozens of permanent, or nearly-permanent staff, and the continuity between editions of a series, or between runs of a series when they return after a break, is quite good. Unfortunately, when it comes to 'Sunday Matters', things are very different. Roger Bolton Productions is the only independent production company in Britain with a track record and specialist staff with long experience in religious programming. (It has been making Heart of the Matter with Joan Bakewell for the BBC for several years past, though it will cease to do so in the spring.) I am currently working on a six month contract, and in the independent world, that's quite a long contract. What's happened in the industry is that the short-contract has become the norm for lots of people. So, 'Sunday Matters' began to be planned last July. The team were all together at the beginning of August. The Producers are both experienced in religious broadcasting, but others have had to learn a great deal very fast, before our first programme on September 11th. It's now the second half of November, and we have only six programmes left to make. Two weeks into January, the team will no longer exist, and another new team, this time working out of studios in Nottingham, will take over on Sunday mornings. I can't tell you much about what they intend to do, because I don't know. Three months later, another team will take over. 'Sunday Matters' may return later next year.

I'm sorry if some of that is well known to you, but I hope it sets the context clearly for any questions or comments you may have in a few minutes. I'll use the rest of my time quickly to sketch some of what we're trying to do, and what we hope we have achieved.

I was determined if possible to make sure that the production team included people of non-Christian background. That proved quite hard, because of course I was looking for television

experience, for religious awareness, and for journalistic skills. I don't believe, in case anyone wants to ask this question, that it's necessary for people who work in religious programmes to be active believers or worshippers: all one looks for is a genuine, open-minded interest in the whole religious field. Anyway, eventually I hired one Jew and one Hindu among the production people, and a Hindu runner. The Hindu Assistant Producer was also very knowledgeable about Islam because of other projects she had worked on, but unfortunately she left us to go to another company for what she hoped would be a better contract, and I brought in another ex-Christian at that point! In about four weeks, the team had to get the necessary contacts together. I have to say I was deeply impressed with what they achieved.

Let me briefly digress at this point. Why are there not more practicing, knowledgeable believers of various faiths available to join programme teams? I wish I knew for sure. Part of it may be the kind of industry broadcasting has become, but it's hard to see how. It may be that the very lack of multi-faith religious programming has discouraged some who would have moved in that direction. Only the BBC runs serious training schemes, and some of those are positively aimed at minority groups. But the fact remains that the grapevines by which much of the industry works don't at present reveal too many religious specialists who are other than Christian by background or conviction.

I'll mention briefly some of the week-by-week decisions which have to be taken. Obviously one of the major decisions to be made for any series is who will present the programmes. We wanted someone who was confident on live transmissions, and someone known to the viewer - and preferably liked! Sue Cook has proved a good choice. She was brought up in an actively Christian home, but has no religious belief of her own. I felt, and still feel, that that is almost a positive advantage. She after all represents the viewer, Mr or Ms Average, in the questions she asks and the introductions she writes for each item. But there are moments of laughter. Like when she asked me to explain to her the relationship between an Archdeacon and an Archbishop! It's interesting, though, that there can still be slips of the tongue - like referring to 'our' churches: who does that mean? It's in the little moments that the remaining prejudices or inequalities of treatment are classically revealed.

Nevertheless, what we've aimed for is a situation where stories are judged on the merits, with no bias towards a particular faith group. I don't claim we have succeeded: that's for others to judge - including yourselves. But the aim has been to ensure that 'we' are no longer Christian and 'they' are no longer all the rest. We wanted to press our questions just as carefully whichever faith-context we were working in. And we've tried too to involve different faiths in some of the issue-based debates that 'Sunday Matters' has contained.

Some of the decisions about items have been careful, but difficult. I judge that one of the major issues of prejudice in this country at present is that Muslims are often said to be 'extremists', and the whole Muslim community, because of various stories like the oft-quoted Salman Rushdie affair, is perceived with suspicion. A few weeks before 'Sunday Matters' was on the air, ITV broadcast a super little item about a Muslim pharmacist in Yorkshire. What made it powerful was that it portrayed, without comment, the daily rituals of washing and prayer that were a part of his life. I decided that if possible we would follow that up by making some features about British Islam. There was a problem, though. None of us felt we knew enough to brief a reporter or take the necessary decisions. We searched for, and found, a young woman reporter who worked on

Sunshine Radio, and who was a devout Muslim, and asked her to report for us. So far, we've made one feature about the custom of women veiling their faces, and another about the role of the mosque. It is, as far as we know, the first time a network programme in Britain has contained items about Muslims made and reported by a Muslim. ITV were pleased with that initiative - but many of you will realise that it's been a long time coming!

Otherwise, I can point to a feature about the Swaminarayan temple and complex in north London, a piece about Diwali, an interview with Indarjit Singh last week, together with a hymn to celebrate Guru Nanak's birthday. We've had Messianic Jews arguing with Orthodox Jews, and a cantor and choir singing for us. We've encountered Catholic, Anglican, United Reformed, Methodist, Salvationist and Baptist Christians. We've had imams on film and in the studio. I certainly wouldn't want to claim we've got it right, but no single edition of the 'Sunday Matters' has been without at least one non-Christian item, and there have often been two or three. My team tell me that in all this, they've received plenty of advice, help and contacts made freely available - many of them through the Inter Faith Network. I'm very grateful. And in a few minutes when Mike Wooldridge has spoken from his perspective, I'll be glad to respond to any comments or questions. Thank you.

Challenges Facing Multi Faith Programme Makers and Presenters - II

Mike Wooldridge, the BBC's Religious Affairs and Community Relations Correspondent, but speaking on this occasion in a personal capacity.

I was in South Africa, as the BBC Correspondent based in Johannesburg, for two years. Before that I was East Africa Correspondent based in Nairobi for seven years. Nairobi was always regarded by the BBC as one of the most mobile posts on earth so I was sent at a moment's notice on trips to West Africa, to North Africa, to the Middle East, to the Gulf, to India and even further field to stand in for or help out colleagues when there were particularly troubled times or for specific events and conferences. In the course of news reporting from all of those areas, I often of course found myself covering the religious dimension of stories, such as the activities of church leaders on either side of the apartheid divide in South Africa. One important question was how conflicts, like that in Sudan or the earlier one in Chad (indeed all of those conflicts across what is called the "faultline" in Africa) were driven by religion and how far they were driven by politics, by territorial concern and by issues of ethnicity.

I had covered some similar things in previous years and also when I worked in Uganda with Voluntary Service Overseas. But it was in my time in Nairobi and Johannesburg that I was exposed for the first time in a sustained way to the strength of feelings of different faiths: to that whole inter play between faith and politics. It was also the first time that I encountered a vibrancy and fervency in worship that I certainly had not experienced in my own up bringing in Dorset and Norfolk. I remember this about both the Christianity and the Islam that I encountered in Africa and also about my first proper exposure to Judaism in Israel and to Hinduism and Sikhism in India. This experience of vibrancy and fervency was also to be true of an experience of Buddhism

later in Thailand. An image arose in my mind then, long before I was in any way specialising in religion, was of religion as "theatre": a sort of theatrical framework embracing and fashioning on its stage all other aspects of life such as commerce, education, arts. I think it is easier to have that view of religion and of the influence of religion in society in the parts of the world where I was working, because obviously there religion tends to play a much bigger part in national life. Even the very poorest people, with so few resources of their own, will go to enormous lengths and spend what little they have to celebrate their religion. This is so different from our much more secularised societies in the West with our consumerist "off the shelf" approach to religion.

Now, none of this will be new to anyone here, but I mention it because of the effect that it had on me. It aroused in me a very considerable interest in religious issues while I was working as a general news correspondent and I imagine sub consciously is why I wound up doing the job that I am doing now (even after four years still very much working with L-plates on). In this job I discovered very quickly what a complex field of reporting religion is and I discovered that interest (although I hope I have a high level of interest) is by no means the same thing as expertise. I hope though that my background has helped me a lot in my reporting of religion now, not only still travelling as I do to other parts of the world, but also religion in multi-faith Britain.

This brings me to what I actually do now - to the daily job and how you, I hope, might be able to help me to do it better. I cover religious affairs but also community relations. We had a full time specialist Community Relations Correspondent, I think probably in the late 70's, and even in the early 80's (John Clare, who I remember doing the job extremely well). Since then this huge subject area has been bolted on to various people's jobs. It was added to the Education Correspondent job, I think, and then to the Local Government Correspondent job. Then when I came back they added it to mine. It is a job I share very much and quite rightly so with a number of other correspondents. I really only report a part of community relations and race relations. Today the Education Correspondent, the Urban Affairs and the Home Affairs Correspondent also cover race relations. The Home Affairs Correspondent, for example, very much concentrates on immigration and the policing aspects of community relations. The Education Correspondent obviously concentrates on what tends to happen in our schools, and the Urban Affairs Correspondent focuses on issues like housing and how they affect race relations. My own focus tends to be on race relations and religious communities and also on particular anti-racist initiatives like those mounted by bodies like the Commission for Racial Equality or the Anti-Racist Alliance or the Anti Nazi League. Those are areas of specialisation for me. As I say, in practice there is a good deal of overlapping between us all and you might find yourselves having contact with a good number of BBC Correspondents on the community relations side. As you can imagine, the news coverage of religion and the programme making about religion take up an enormous amount of my time and leave me, I regret to say, precious little time for the kind of attention I would like to devote to expanding our community relations coverage.

On the religious side, mine is very much a hybrid job: a combination of reporting for news bulletins and current affairs programmes, contributing to the output of the religious broadcasting departments (the Sunday programme in particular), and periodic special programmes and series. I do a fair amount for the World Service, including their weekly programme "Focus on Faith" occasional documentary programmes and series. I do mainly radio, but some television as well. I do a good deal for local radio, at present. However, I am personally very pleased that the BBC

have just appointed a new specialist, Richard Staples, for religious affairs coverage for the local radio network.

What do I actually do? Most of this will be obvious to you. Perhaps the core of the job is straight news reporting which may be as brief as 35 or 40 seconds. It's generous if I have a minute. Actually, there is little harder to do than a 40 second report on a complex religious issue for the programme BBC radio has for 12-16 year olds, "In the News". It's quite the most challenging thing I do. You can probably imagine why. Another major part of the job is what we call "two ways" where I am interviewed by the presenter of a programme, hauled in to explain or to interpret a story that might be in our news bulletin already or in the newspapers. I might get reasonable notice of that, in which case there is time to ring up people like you (and some of the faces here today are people I have certainly rung to get a quick piece of advice before I have to go on a programme). Or I might have very little notice indeed. In the case of Radio 5 Live this is increasingly the case. To give one example of this last moment situation, it was flashed on the Press Association that the Duchess of Kent was becoming a Roman Catholic. Nothing else, just that one sentence if I remember. I just happened to be walking dangerously close to the PM programme at that moment and they had got just about 2 minutes left. They hauled me in within 30 seconds to attempt to explain why the Duchess of Kent had become a Catholic. Similarly, there wasn't a great deal longer to gather information to explain the other day something of the background to the cult deaths in Switzerland connected with the Order of the Solar Temple.

I hope this gives you an idea of the circumstances of reality of how so much of our work is done (and the work also of other correspondents in all fields). But it also of course applies increasingly to you as contributors or potential contributors. There is certainly a perception amongst broadcasters that there is a growing appetite in the public for instant news, for instant analysis and there is an increasing competition on the airwaves in radio and television and the need to do things in as cost effective way as possible. I would suggest you could find yourselves pulled on to programmes similarly at short notice increasingly.

Who may you find getting in touch with you? Well, it might be me as a correspondent or my opposite number, Andrew Burroughs, who principally works for television at the moment (though with "bi media" approaches in the BBC we will become more interchangeable I think) or producers on programmes. Should you hear someone from the trendy news areas of the BBC saying that they are coming to you for a "doughnut", that is maybe a piece of jargon that I hope won't give you the wrong idea and which I will explain shortly! If you are approached, it is likely to be for contributions, for the straight interviews and also of course to contribute to features and documentary programmes with a much longer gestation period. There is much more live radio now and more and more talk shows such as News Talk on Radio 5 Live and After Hours, also on Radio 5 Live. I have found they have a very healthy appetite for religious discussion. Just to give you an example, there was a programme on religion, conflict and politics between midnight and 2am a couple of weeks ago in which I took part together with practitioners of religion. It was a particularly good and particularly lively discussion and I wondered if anyone was listening. To my surprise quite a lot of people called in during the programme. It was quite contentious.

Increasingly, on programmes like Today PM and the Five Live programmes, I go out as correspondent and talk to participants at a place where a story is happening or at a place that illustrates a story that is in the news or where an event might be taking place (this is what is

known as a "doughnut"). If I can just give you examples of that. On Tuesday of this week, there was a launch of a new Churches' initiative on homelessness. We did such an item. There was one just a couple of weeks ago outside the West London Synagogue with Rabbi Hugo Gryn and a colleague of his taking part, and in the end I think we had all of 1 minute and 49 seconds in which to consider the implications of the terrorism threat warning that was given by the Metropolitan Police. Just before that there was the Preston report on women in Judaism for which again we did a similar thing outside the Chief Rabbi's synagogue and I remember well we had 2 minutes and 50 seconds but unfortunately we had three participants with me in that one. So that was a similar challenge. So these are things that you will hear us doing and probably find yourselves caught up in doing which require quite a discipline.

In all of the haste and rough and tumble of daily or hourly journalism, we can obviously lay ourselves open to charges of distortion, of over simplification, and of sensationalising and failing to give proper context. I will of course concede that sometimes that charge is certainly justified. I am only too aware of all the difficulties that arise over the shorthand labelling that shortage of time often requires. Particular difficulties tend to arise over that word "fundamentalism" coming up in most of the major faiths. But I certainly know that within each of the major faith communities there is a debate about the use of that word "fundamentalism". I do not think that we are alone in this. There are those who are very happy to be known as "fundamentalists" in its proper sense, in its sense of wanting to be known as adherents to an orthodox faith. But I certainly fully recognise that there are contexts in which "extremists" would be a better word to use.

It is in our longer programmes that we hope to provide the context that we are often charged with not doing. These are programmes like "Special Assignment", "File on Four" on Radio 4, the one off documentaries, and series like "Who Believes in Britain?". That series was trying to look at the experience of faith around the country in six programmes and it was followed up by the series "Believing in Britain" which looked at perspectives of followers of different faiths on matters like the creation, good and evil or destiny. Depending on the scheduling of such programmes, of course, the radio audience can be pretty small, and I think that we are having to look ever more carefully at the production resources we put into those programmes. There is the need to be cost effective. I hope it won't happen too much, but I fear there could be something of a trend away from these constructed documentaries.

Although we do go to very considerable lengths in the BBC to be comprehensive, to be balanced within each programme or certainly within a series of programmes, to do justice to all view points, I appreciate that those longer programmes, those documentaries can also be prone to the charge of distortion and perhaps even more because of their greater length, they have the greater chance of exposing raw nerves and clearly can be washing dirty linen in public to even a greater degree than in the short news report. I know that this concern about the washing of dirty linen is felt by the most established of all religions in this country, Christianity, and of course it is felt so much more keenly by other religious communities that have established themselves here so much more recently. Shouldn't we be softer on such communities? Aren't they more vulnerable? Aren't they more likely to be targeted, if not verbally, even physically, for something that might appear on radio and television? We are only too well aware of our responsibility in this area. It affects perhaps the vocabulary we use and the need not to sensationalise, but I don't think it should lead us to run away from certain subjects. Obviously the inter faith movement also exists

to contain such threats to people arising out of the exposure of religious tensions and the bringing to this country of religious tensions that may exist elsewhere where in the world. I know that you have had your successes in that: particularly, say, after the Ayodyah incident in India.

There can on the face of it be a clash between what you are about in the inter faith movement, what the practitioners of each faith are about and what we are about in journalism with the pressure we feel of the need for disclosure. But I have a feeling that there is a greater compatibility here than you might have realised. I know, for example, (through making programmes about it) that the inter faith movement itself has grown through the stage of politeness and courtesy to a great deal of frankness and overcoming of much of the earlier mutual suspicion, and I hope the same will be true of how each faith community is prepared to see itself in the media. We are certainly, I think, reaching the stage where we are wishing to have more people of a wider range of faiths having their views represented on topical current affairs issues. I believe that is happening, although not by any means to a satisfactory extent. Programme makers certainly still want a Bishop in the first instance, (they want some Bishops more than others), and they often come to me for names and recommendations. But I think that culture is changing and quite often I find that programme makers are specifically saying "we do not want, we are not just looking for, an extremist view point to sensationalise. We do want somebody who will be moderate and who will be as representative as possible of the view of a faith". I think that search for a representative voice is a difficult one. It can be misleading. Why should any one person be more representative of Islam or Hinduism than they are of Christianity? And of course it would be very difficult where a hierarchical structure is much less obvious and I think it would also be good for all faiths, Christianity included, if we were prepared to look for, and make use of, lay opinion rather more than we do. That is a slow educational process.

Let me give some instances of where I see the views of people of different faiths being sought, aside from purely religious issues. These include, for example, ecological and environmental issues, race relations issues, science, economy, issues surrounding work ethics, wealth creation and so on. I find that programme makers within the BBC are coming to me, wanting to have different faith perspectives on those issues. You may not realise that: they are not yet on the airwaves but it is beginning to happen. I think that is important. I was personally surprised not to hear more non-Christian voices when the stories about the arms trade and the politics of aid were happening a couple of weeks ago. I felt that there should be, but that is a two way process. It is not just us seeking you out: those of non-Christian faith need to come to us, by holding press conferences, issuing press releases, ringing people like me to get on the airwaves at those times.

Just a final thought on the washing of dirty linen that I mentioned, and it is on sex. Now inevitably the story of the vicar in Norfolk who wants to marry for a third time and who, in the rather circumspect language of the stories in the papers in the past couple days, has broken an undertaking to live alone in the vicarage, has been a big talking point. I don't doubt there will be many who say "there goes the press again, obsessed with sex." But I do think that there is more to it than that and not least because I saw a letter in one of the papers today suggesting there is a big issue of double standards here with the Churches willing, for example, quite rightly, to accommodate a Bishop who has had a conviction for a homosexual act in his past and yet this vicar in Norfolk who finds himself facing dismissal. Now I happened to do an interview earlier this week with Bishop Roy Williamson and he agreed that it had been to the cost of the church and the clergy that it had tended to sweep sexual issues under the carpet and I would certainly

suggest that it is an issue that society generally, not just people of faith, is having a great difficulty in getting to grips with to-day. I think of that "date rape" case in the papers to-day as well and I think of our programme making, some of which I have been involved in, about the clash (and this applies to non-Christian faiths as well) between three different generations, between people who are British born, between those who were immigrants to this country, on matters of sex. You might say this is best dealt with within the Mosque, within the Synagogue, within Churches and within the family. You might certainly want to argue particularly, but I am not sure personally, that we have too much sex on the airwaves. I would almost say that we haven't had enough. I think, of course, it is agreed that it is a subject that needs sensitive reporting but it is one we can dangerously brush under the carpet. So I would just add it to that list of other subjects that I think that we need to share perspectives on. I will stop there other than to say that you and particularly the inter faith movement are obviously about trying to create a pluralist society. We in the media find ourselves increasingly, and I hope as actively as possible and in as much depth as possible, reporting the events of a pluralist society. That might seem incompatible with what you are about but I would certainly want to argue that it is not.

Questions and Concerns relating to one or both of the Hutchings and Wooldridge Presentations

- * The use of the term "non-Christian" is unhelpful and possibly insulting because it defines people's identity in terms of what they are not. The expression "faiths other than Christian" is better.
- * Very complex issues have to be dealt with in a very short space of time. Is it not important to find ways of getting more time to be able to treat a complex issue in a more rounded way? MW said that there is no escape from the tight use of time. If communities want to get their view points across they can do so to wider audiences and more effectively within the context of news broadcasts. But this means focusing on the content of "sound-bites" and making sure the desired message is conveyed adequately and accurately. There is some risk that a single individual might mistakenly be seen as an authoritative "representative" of a community so it is important to be careful how an individual is introduced.
- * Could RH comment on the unfortunate bad-tempered argument in the previous week's edition dealing with the question of Messianic Jews? RH said it had not been intended to provoke a violent argument between the two speakers about Messianic Jews: they had simply ignored the interviewer and verbally attacked one another. He did not think either had represented their respective community well but it had made riveting television.

"Facing the Camera"

Bina Vasdev, a Hindu teacher from Derby

I'd like to say that it's a great honour for me to be here amongst you all today to share my experiences of being involved in making the Everyman programme which was broadcast about a month ago. My involvement came through studying for a masters' degree in Religious Studies at the University of Derby. One of the researchers on the project contacted the University and Paul Weller of the Religious, Resource and Research Centre recommended my name because I was doing a final dissertation on the Bhaktivedanta Manor. The BBC then phoned me up and said they were looking for an ordinary Hindu family that was willing to travel long distance for the festival which celebrates the birth of Krishna. Their definition of ordinary was that they were looking for a family that were not ISKCON members and were not very close to the Manor.

We had a lengthy chat but the researcher, Amanda, hadn't said to me that it was me she was looking for and she asked me if there was anyone in Derby who was willing to travel. I said I would ask the local community if there was anybody, though we don't have an awfully large community in Derby. But we found that the BBC was pushed for time and Amanda was constantly on the phone to me. Then the producer of the programme decided that they wanted to come down and visit me and have a chat to me on the issue and I think, reading between the lines, they had already made their minds up that they wanted me and they wanted to come and visit me and talk to me about it. So they came and we had a lengthy chat with them and towards the end they said would I like to participate and help us out with this programme. I said I had not done anything like this before but if they thought I was capable then I was willing to do so. But I was concerned, because obviously I wanted to know which areas of the research they wanted me to cover. I only got very general guidelines about the areas of research during the two hour chat with the researcher (of which I would say an hour was just talking about my family and I wasn't sure whether I was to talk about my family on this programme.)

We arranged that they would come back on the Sunday, which gave me only two days to prepare. I had asked them to come at about 11 o'clock on Sunday but to my amazement they were outside my door at 9 am - probably thinking I'd do a runner on them! They were sitting in their cars waiting for me to draw the curtains. Luckily, they said they were willing to stay in the car until 11 if necessary. Once they came in I discovered to my surprise that my home was going to be turned into a mini studio. They were setting things up while I got ready for the interview. The interview itself was three quarters of an hour long. I wasn't aware of the questions they were going to ask but they were not difficult questions as I'd already done a little bit of work and research on the Manor anyway. From there they wanted to move on to filming a festival which involves the brother and sister relationship and I couldn't understand why they wanted to do the filming on that, but that's what they wanted so we went off to my brother's house and we must have been there two and an half hours. It was action, replay, stop and it was very tiring I must admit. I wanted my sister to travel down with me so somehow they needed to introduce my sister into the programme.

From my brother's we moved to my sister's home and we were then there together, for about an hour with all this action replay again. Then they wanted to film the local temple and the congregation there on a Sunday. By this time I was fed up and very, very tired. I wanted to see the back of them but I didn't have it in me to say I was tired and to just leave me alone. But I was sitting in the temple and I can remember the cameras taking me from all sorts of angles but I did understand that they had their duties to do. Then it was quarter to six that evening when they actually left me and they said they would come back in just over a week's time. Again they were very sharp in turning up that morning, and we were filmed doing various rituals and prayers before leaving for the journey and picking up my sister. We filmed from Derby coming down to Letchmore Heath and it took us something like 5-6 hours stopping and filming on the way. Once we were in the temple we were privileged because we were getting special treatment, being let in the back and everybody being pushed aside. That was very enjoyable! That particular evening was extremely enjoyable and obviously the thousands and thousands of people who turned up couldn't understand why we were looked after so well and if it hadn't been for that I don't think I would have made it in to the actual temple till the following morning as it was absolutely packed. Obviously the expenses were paid and everything and my children were loving it. At about half past one that morning we were brought into a hotel and left and I was sorry that it was all over and we had to say goodbye.

One of my concerns was that I was asked to sign a form to say I agreed for this programme to be shown on the day that it was going to be ready. But I wasn't given a preview of the programme so I wasn't sure what to expect on the day. Another concern was about me possibly offending some members of the community, (who might not think I was representative). However when I was actually performing or participating I didn't feel that I was representing the Hindu community in any way at all because the programme makers had explained that it was an ordinary Hindu family they were looking for and one person talking about how they practice and follow the Hindu faith: not how every Hindu family follows it. So my voice was not intended to be the voice of every Hindu in Britain. Even so, I have to confess that on the night the programme was broadcast I chickened out: I wasn't able to watch it myself because I was frightened I might see something that I would regret on the programme. However we recorded it and after the positive feedback that I got the following day from my colleagues, friends and relatives I managed to sit down the following evening and watch the programme which I found was very well put together. It was well balanced and very enjoyable and the feedback from not only the Hindu community but also from the local communities was that it was a very positive and a very enjoyable programme.

I had been concerned that because I'd signed this form permitting broadcast that something that I wasn't happy with could have occurred during the two solid days of filming and ended up in the film. If they'd shown something that I wasn't happy with, such as a comment I'd made without thinking, and it had been shown it could have been a disastrous moment for me. But obviously the programme makers were very careful and they had selected parts of my interview and put it together very well. But again I would stress that I didn't feel as though I was representing the Hindu community or the Manor itself although the Manor wrote to me and was grateful for my contribution towards their issues. But I don't think I was contributing to the Hindu community or to the issues about the Manor. It was just my personal voice and how my family acted or followed the Hindu faith. But obviously the programme must have led people to believe that I was a voice of the Hindus in Britain. I felt that was not the fault of the programme though because

throughout the programme there was never any indication that Bina Vasdev is the voice of the Hindu community in Britain. So if people, not just the Hindu community but some other communities as well, were made to feel or felt that I was the choice of the Hindu community that would be a concern but it was no fault of the programmer. Other than that concern I thoroughly enjoyed the experience and I would do it again if I was approached.

Community Perspectives - I

Rona Hart, Press and Public Relations Officer, Board of Deputies of British Jews

I thought perhaps I would begin by saying something about the Board of Deputies and what it is. It was set up in 1760 on the accession of George III, and it is the body that represents the British Jewish community. There are about 400 deputies, men and women, for all communities including religious communities, Orthodox, Liberal and Reform across the country. There are also deputies who represent organisations such as the Jewish Students and the Association of Jewish Ex-Servicemen and so on. The Board has a small staff, of which I am a member, and we are the ones who are a sort of connection between the deputies who represent the community and the wider community on a day-to-day basis.

I have been given three questions to approach: What sort of television and radio requests do we handle? How do we forward requests to appropriate contacts within the Jewish communities? What difficulties we encounter in this work that you feel the programme makers should be aware of.

Beginning with what sort of radio and television requests we handle: well anything and everything. I've been asked if I could urgently find a Rabbi with a sense of humour, and can we also interview somebody on the bombing at Balfour House which we did, and in both cases I think we found somebody. It can be anything in between and we try desperately to find the right person to fill the niche. Obviously sometimes we don't succeed and I was thinking of that just now with the issue raised earlier about last Sunday's "Sunday Matters" programme argument between the Messianic Rabbi in Brighton and someone from the Jewish community. The man who was Director of Operation Judaism would have been our first choice to go on the programme but he didn't want to go on. I think Sunday Matters did approach him and the programme approached us too, but we all felt that it would not be appropriate for someone from the Board of Deputies to go on in opposition at that point. Perhaps we got it wrong, I don't know. One is always juggling with such questions. We will try and find the right person for the right comment and it may be to do with racism, to do with anti-semitism, to do with Neo-Nazis in Europe: anything that people want to find out is there a Jewish opinion. Another thing we got asked about was when the City of York was planning a fireworks display in Clifford's Tower: where Jews had been burned to death some centuries ago. We were asked what Jews thought about this. I called a member of the small local Jewish community there and he said he felt he wouldn't go himself but he would have no objection to others going. Sometimes you try and find a consensus. There's

usually several Jewish opinions on everything as I'm sure you know and sometimes we will attempt to find a balance or say why don't you approach this and that person and you can get perhaps a rounded view. I find most of the approaches we get are very sympathetic.

One problem relates, I think, to extremism and "fundamentalism". From a media point of view, it can sometimes be much more entertaining to have an extremist view and this means extremists can get a lot of coverage. I think that's why sometimes they look like they're a greater part of the community than they in fact are. When you are terribly sensible (and the Board of Deputies set up in 1760 are terribly sensible!), people who make programmes and feel that people being terribly sensible isn't much fun in media terms are less keen to use you. But you get "terribly sensible" because you get cautious. And you get cautious for good reasons. Sometimes we go on and we're asked: Are the Jews furious because there has been some incident? If we say "Yes we're furious" you know what the headlines are going to be. And if we say "Well actually, there are two sides to this" we won't get quoted at all.

We get requests from newspapers as well. We've had questions about the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*: could we make a comment on that? What do Jews think about all sorts of things such as ecology and transplants? Quite often there is an answer. We are a lay body, so if the matters get intricate and the question is the sort where the answer can only be supplied by a qualified person then we will contact the Chief Rabbi's office or another religious or ecumenical body and we'll try to get the right answer from them. The Board is not a religious organisation but forwards requests to appropriate contacts within Jewish communities.

An example of a complex issue is the proposed North West London Eruv. An Eruv is a kind of special legal zone in areas which allows Orthodox Jews to carry things on the Sabbath which they otherwise could not. It's a sort of set up which makes the whole area count as your own home and your own domain. The Eruv has generated a lot of amazing emotion really, considering what it is. The issue is something on which I would simply put people in touch with the spokesman for the Eruv. We also had people asking us to put them in touch with people who are opponents of it, including those within the Jewish community. We would not take sides on something like this: we would just say this is the person to contact for this point of view and this is the one for the other. We are in touch with the Council of Christian Jews and with the Israel Embassy and sometimes we forward an enquiry in that way. Sometimes people seem to think that we know every single thing that happens in Israel and will ask us what's going on there, who were the people in the bus who were blown up and questions like that which we would not be able to answer or which we would forward.

Another question I've been asked to speak to is: What difficulties do you encounter in this work, what pressures do you feel the programme makers should be aware of? Hours in a day basically. It's always a rush, one appreciates that. It's the news so it's got to be right now and so that is a problem. I can't always get hold of the person I want right now. If it's the President of the Board of Deputies who is particularly involved, he's a QC, and involved with legislation concerning race hatred. He'd be by far the best speaker on anything in that area, but I can't always get him right at the minute. Martin Gilbert is another one we contact. He's a wonderful historian. He might be the best possible speaker, but you might not be able to get him right now and that, as a press officer, is my problem. The phones are ringing and you're dashing about.

One of the problems I feel sometimes, is that religious programmes or programmes about a faith community are made by people who are perhaps not that involved and not that knowledgeable or caring and they become superficial. You get the quaint part of it, the nice cosy part of it, and sometimes they leave the disturbing parts and the challenging parts alone. I would like to see perhaps a little bit more searching in depth to do with religious programmes. I also feel from the Jewish community that the community might feel the same. We're losing a lot of people who are just not religious any more. They go to Sunday school and they have perhaps a child's eye view of religion which they then reject, but they don't go about find out about their religion in a serious adult way, the way they would apply themselves if they wanted to be a mathematician or something. Perhaps the media can get to the places that the others cannot reach. Through the media you might just reach someone who would never set a foot in a mosque or a church or a synagogue, but who saw something, and said "Oh I didn't know about that I'm interested". I wonder if we sometimes take enough notice of that and use all the opportunities.

Community Perspectives - II

Iqbal Sacranie, UK Action Committee on Islamic Affairs

I was not as privileged as Rona Hart in having been given three questions to lead through the discussion this afternoon. However, the subject matter and the issues which were raised by Rona are very much similar for Muslims. However, Muslims are at a disadvantage as we do not have a central organisation representing us in the same way as the Jewish community does. We may be 2-3 million in numbers, but sadly at present there is no central organisation or body that we feel represents the entire community. The reality is that we have 3-4 major organisations and if you were to put them together then perhaps you could get some sort of balanced view of the Muslim community in the UK.

Now bearing this in mind, how do we feel the media projects the Muslim community and Islam? It is very important that the projection of the community should be balanced and should reflect the community's standing and its contribution to national life. But the view that always comes into our mind is that the Muslim community and Islam have not been projected in a very balanced way. This is partly due, I think, to the background of the community in this country: the very limited openings we have to the media, and the dearth of relevant information available about Islam and the Muslim community to the community itself. However, over the last few years, especially after the crisis relating to the Satanic Verses, we have found that the Muslim community has been more and more coming on to the media and presenting its views of how the community feels.

The media can contact any particular organisation. I happen to represent the UK Action Committee on Islamic Affairs which is an umbrella body. It does not claim that it is representing the entire Muslim community but we feel that the members who are on our committee do provide a good cross section of representatives from across the country. When the media approach us I must make sure the subject matter is within our Committee's brief. The issue of The Satanic Verses was dealt with by our Committee which was especially concerned with the question: how

should the Muslim community coordinate their activities to show the insult and the hurt felt by the publishing of the book? Therefore on any questions relating to that issues we were, you could say, qualified to represent the views of the community. But when it comes to issues like education then naturally I would direct questions to an educationalist member of the community or to the umbrella body representing various Muslim educational institutions and organisations in the country which could deal with issues about education. When we have a crisis like the Gulf Crisis when there was no particular organisation dealing with it then one would express the view of the community on the issue, making it very clear that this is the view of the Committee on that particular matter.

There are sometimes specialist subjects, like the issue of vaccination against measles which came up only two weeks ago. Now when the media were in touch with us, we immediately said that this was a very specialist subject, on which there was a need for the view of an Islamic scholar. But the media do not necessarily go to that specialist. On the vaccination issue they approached an organisation which told them Muslims could not accept vaccinations. The reasons that they were given were, I later discovered, not right, but the message that was immediately conveyed in the media headlines was that Muslims were advised against vaccination. It transpired after a couple of days when we managed to find out more details from the Department of Health about what was behind the vaccination controversy that the Muslim position was very much in line with that of the Jewish community and other religious communities: that is, we do not believe that the human tissue should be used in vaccination, but in the circumstances we should weigh the benefits and the disadvantages of accepting vaccinations. The Muslim scholars decided that people should be advised that they were permitted to accept vaccination. This was a very important matter. It was an example which highlights that when there are media reports concerning the Muslim community the attitude that is being projected is not necessarily filtered through from the community. It very much concerns us because we are part of the wider community and people generally form their views about the Muslim community from what they hear and see in the media. If they hear basically negative views about the Muslim community's attitudes that reinforces in their minds a negative view of our community which suffers as a result. These are the consequences of having headlines which do not accurately reflect what the community feels about an issue.

The other area about which we are concerned is radio and TV programmes requests. If you are called in to give an interview and it is recorded then there is a slight benefit in that you have a chance to rehearse for the questions that you are to be asked. Naturally the interviewer would ask the same question in different ways to see whether you give an answer in more or less the same terms. But out of a very long interview of say 20 to 25 minutes, especially if it is for a news broadcast, only half a minute or perhaps 20 or 15 seconds of what you have said is actually used in the programme. When you finally watch the programme, you may think "That is nothing to do with what I was talking about". A sentence can be picked out in isolation from the rest of what you said and immediately you wonder what an editor is for. It is well and good for the programme if the sentence they use can be sensationalised in a way which creates a bit of news, nothing like good news but something that gives a negative image. But what about the effect on the person who has actually appeared on that programme and on the image of the community at large? It can be quite bad, and then the responsibility for this placed on the organisation, and on the individual is so much greater. That is why many members of the community would be very reluctant to appear on this sort of programme.

When I initially became involved in a number of interviews I had no experience of the media. I was basically involved in community work. There was a degree of hesitancy on my part, because I had seen how Muslims and Islam had been depicted in the media. But I was given a very good guideline by my colleagues in the community who said "If you are saying something which is representing the community's views, something with an honest view, something which is very fair and balanced about the community then there is nothing to be afraid about, so come forward and present your views." I believe that there is a case that irrespective of how the media project my views I have a duty to be ready to be interviewed and say what I have to say. It is up to the media to project that view in a fair and balanced way. Then one learns from experience and it will get slightly easier. On the other hand when it came to live programmes, live reporting, I felt a bit more comfortable because I was sure that whatever I had to say would be seen on television or heard on radio. Whatever I was saying would not be censored or cut down into very little pieces. So very rarely would I refuse an invitation to appear in a live programme if it related to my subject. But if it was a recording I would have second thoughts about it.

These are some of the concerns that I have experienced from being on the Committee and appearing on appearing on various programmes. Certainly I think that there is a greater need for training for community members, and especially for community leaders who appear on programmes. I think this would certainly help us to project ourselves in a more professional way given the power of the media, especially when the media look for someone who can be used to make statements or to project himself in a very strong manner. The same question can be asked but basically in different ways until you get more heated and come out with a very strong answer which is not really very constructive at the end of the day. I have personally experienced this but come what may even if I am asked the same question ten times one has to stick to one's calm and reasonable answer. I hope these reflections have been useful.

**Inter Faith Network for the UK (Registered Charity No 296773)
5/7 Tavistock Place, London WC1H 9SN, Tel 0171 388 0008**

1995 (Summer)

Places of Worship:
The practicalities and
politics of sacred space
in multi faith Britain

PLACES OF WORSHIP

THE PRACTICALITIES AND POLITICS OF SACRED SPACE IN MULTI FAITH BRITAIN

A Report of

The Inter Faith Network

Summer National Meeting

**held on 27 June 1995
at the Central Library, Birmingham**

**PLACES OF WORSHIP:
THE PRACTICALITIES AND POLITICS OF SACRED SPACE
IN MULTI FAITH BRITAIN**

Over the last thirty years, Britain's religious composition has changed dramatically. The long established Christian and Jewish communities have been joined by communities representing the Baha'i; Buddhist; Hindu; Jain; Muslim; Sikh; and Zoroastrian faiths. For all faith communities, the provision of appropriate places of worship is an issue of great importance: both community places of worship and places for worship or meditation in shared public spaces, such as airports and hospitals.

At the Inter Faith Network's 1995 Summer National Meeting, representatives of the various faith communities and inter faith organisations came together to reflect on some of the questions surrounding the provision of adequate worship space in multi faith Britain. This report gives you the key issues raised by participants during the day, plus transcripts of the main presentations. The meeting was chaired by Rt Rev Roy Williamson, Anglican Bishop of Southwark and Network Co-Chair.

The Inter Faith Network was founded in 1987 to link the major faith communities in Britain, to foster good relations between them and to draw on the resources of people of faith as we work to make a reality of our shared citizenship. It now links 9 faiths and nearly 70 organisations including: representative bodies from the different faith communities; national inter faith organisations; local inter faith groups; academic institutions and bodies concerned with multi faith education. It acts as a central information and contact point for people wanting information or advice on inter faith affairs, or to be put in touch with particular faith communities; fosters inter faith cooperation on issues of social concern; provides a twice yearly forum where social and religious questions of concern to the different faith communities in Britain can be examined together, and with the help of experts in relevant fields; organises seminars and conferences on specific topics; and publishes materials to assist inter faith work and to help people needing information about the multi faith make up of this country.

Further information about the Network's work and its publications can be obtained from:

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Registered Charity No. 296773

Places of Worship: The Practicalities and Politics of Sacred Space in Multi Faith Britain

The Day Programme

The Changing Pattern of Worship.... Space Provision in Britain	Paul Weller, (Director of the University of Derby Religious Resource and Research Centre)
A Planner's Eye View.....	Mr Emrys Jones (Assistant Director of Planning Control, Birmingham City Council)
Creating Worship and Community.. Space: A Southall Sikh Perspective	Mr Jaspal Singh Bhambra (General Secretary of the Ramgarhia Sabha, Southall)
Lessons from the Bhaktivedanta..... Hindu Temple Situation	Mr Vipin Aery (Secretary, National Council of Hindu Temples)
The Establishing of Mosques in..... North West England	Mr Abdul Hamid Qureshi (Director, Lancashire Council of Mosques),
Provision for Worship in Civic..... Contexts and Public Places in Multi Faith Britain	Dr Sophie Gilliat (Researcher, University of Warwick)

--- Open Forum ---

Key Points of the Day

The key points about worship space provision made in discussion in the course of the day were:-

- ▶ A place to worship is a basic need for most religious traditions
- ▶ Worship places are often also very positive additions to our public spaces
- ▶ Multi faith worship spaces are relatively new to Britain, but will become increasingly important in our public places
- ▶ Communities have much to gain from co-operating with another and exchanging their experience on the planning and worship space provision front
- ▶ Preliminary dialogue and consultation with the local community is helpful when a planning application is being prepared
- ▶ It is vital to understand relevant planning regulations and it would be helpful if planning officers would engage in informal discussions beforehand with the applicant so that any concerns which they have about a planning application can be dealt with before it is formally presented
- ▶ Planning policies vary between localities and it would be helpful if a "code of practice" for planning applications for places of worship could be agreed among local authorities
- ▶ Misunderstandings often arise about funding because of the distinction which has to be drawn in support from public funds between the provision of space for community use and space for use for prayer. Only community space can receive public funding
- ▶ Maintenance costs can be crippling for those communities who have converted old buildings after finding it too difficult initially to raise sufficient funds to purpose build
- ▶ An organised approach should be made to the insurance industry to see what might be done to make insurance more readily available for places of worship: particularly those of minority communities
- ▶ There is an increasing need to think through the appropriate structural arrangements in a multi-faith society in areas such as hospitals chaplaincy. Even though many Christian chaplains have been helpful in ensuring that there is access and adequate worship space for other faith communities, it is not appropriate for these arrangements to be dependent on "grace and favour". There should be institutional provision rather than reliance on a sympathetic attitude on the part of a "gatekeeper". Also, the particular traditional pattern of "chaplaincy" within the Christian Churches is not one which is historically common in other faiths. Other faith communities will have their own particular contributions to make, rooted in their own traditions.

The Changing Patterns of Worship Space Provision In Britain

Paul Weller

Head of the University of Derby's Religious Resource and Research Centre
and Editor of *Religions in the UK: a Multi-Faith Directory*"

Introduction

For this talk, I have been given a brief to sketch:

- How the religious demographics of Britain have changed in the past fifty years
- How this change is reflected in the numbers and kinds of places of worship
- Some examples of the variety of places of worship
- Some examples of purpose-built multi-faith provision

I will concentrate on the first two of these tasks, and especially upon the second. This is because others during the day will be giving more detail on examples of places of worship which are both multi-faith and in individual traditions. My discussion of places of worship will concentrate on England and Wales for which more data is readily available than for Scotland and Northern Ireland.

However, while the bulk of this talk will focus on the changing patterns of worship space provision in England and Wales over the past fifty years, I think it is important to put contemporary issues into the kind of perspective supplied by the broader historical context. From this context one can trace a variety of patterns that have varying contemporary relevance.

Competition, Takeover and Displacement

It is important, I think, to begin by reminding ourselves that not all religious traditions use buildings for their worship. From archaeological and some written evidence it appears that the pre-Christian indigenous religious traditions of the British Isles often did not make buildings for worship. Rather, they created a sacred geography and topography composed of sacred groves and stones, hills and rivers. This tradition is continued today by neo-Pagan groups such as the Druids who worship in the open air, seeing no need for constructed places of worship.

When Christianity began to displace the old traditions, it was common practice for Christian Churches to be built upon the sites of previous religious significance. This was one strategy that was used to wean people who were not fully converted to the new tradition. It worked by enabling them to continue many of their former practices and orientations, but with the focus of a new Christian building. The architecture of ancient parish churches also reflects this approach to places of worship, with pre-Christian symbolism sometimes being built into the structure by the stone masons. Thus many ancient Christian places of worship combine both pagan topographical features and Christian buildings. The best known of these is at Glastonbury, where the ruined

Abbey of today stands on a site associated with both Christianity and Paganism and where the area has also become a pilgrimage focus for many concerned with a renewal of spirituality in the modern world. But famous examples aside, one only needs to investigate a little about the sites of most old village churches to see some connection with the previous religious traditions.

Monopoly and Nationalisation

Christianity became the predominant religion of the British Isles, and was formally "established" in England and Wales. It came to have a monopoly on religious building and, given the relationship between religion and rulers, this monopoly was backed up by potential or actual force. Monopoly seemed the only practical way because the religious, social, political and intellectual context was one in which most people could not conceive how there could be a clear distinction between civil society and a Christian commonwealth without it leading to the threat of anarchy. In England, with King Henry VIII's break from the Papacy, this monopoly of religious buildings was also effectively nationalised. The ensuing history of the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries was one of successive attempts to maintain this monopoly - either for the newly independent English Church or in projects for the restoration of Roman Catholicism or the attempted establishment of Presbyterian Christianity.

With the restoration of the monarchy, the history of places of worship became one of restrictions for religious buildings of those Christian believers who did not belong to the dominant tradition such as Roman Catholics and the new Nonconformist Christian groups of the Protestant Reformation: the Congregationalists, the Baptists, the Methodists and others. In 1644, the Conventicle Act had made it illegal for more than five people over the age of sixteen (other than members of the same household) to meet together for worship unless according to the rites of the Church of England's *Book of Common Prayer*. At various points in the following centuries these and other similar provisions were ameliorated - especially for Nonconformist Christians - by a variety of Royal Indulgences, the 1689 Act of Toleration and other measures. But it was as late as 1812 that the Conventicle Act was repealed and, in the same year, the Places of Religious Worship Act continued earlier legislative restrictions according to which it was an offence to teach or preach in any premises where the doors were locked. In 1855, the Liberty of Worship Act allowed congregations of more than twenty to meet in private homes or, occasionally in other buildings, without certification as a place of worship. In the course of the nineteenth century, various restrictions upon the ability of religious groups other than the established Church of England to own property were also removed.

This history is important for understanding the inherited pattern of religious buildings in English and Welsh society - both in terms of the geographical spread and distribution of buildings of the various Christian traditions and in terms of the law and practice which governs the use of these buildings. As a result of this inheritance, the buildings of the Established Church are governed by Canon Law which is part of the law of England administered through ecclesiastical courts. Many other Christian places of worship are governed by Trust Deeds, some of which are individual and some of which are consolidated into standard national denominational Trusts which set out what can and cannot be done in these buildings.

Religious Demographics

The contemporary religious situation, at least in urban if not so much in many rural areas, has, however, changed dramatically. Alongside churches and chapels there are now gurdwaras, mandirs, mosques, viharas and other religious buildings. This literal change in the religious skyline reflects the demographic changes since the end of the Second World War.

You will all be acutely aware that questions surrounding the size of the various religious communities and their distribution are very sensitive and contentious. A few glances at the handbook *Britain*, produced by Her Majesty's Stationery Office, are enough to show that, apart from the Christian and Jewish data, the religious statistics which it quotes owe more to unvalidated "guestimation" and/or community claims, than to the sober appraisal of objective evidence. I have also already put my own head on the chopping-block of public debate about figures as editor of *Religions in the UK: A Multi-Faith Directory*. At this juncture I cannot go beyond referring you to what is contained in the relevant pages of *Religions in the UK*, although I can also recommend to you a forthcoming volume on *Statistics on UK Religious Communities* which will be published through the University of Warwick's Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations and which contains papers presented at a seminar held last year as part of the University of Derby's Religious Resource and Research Centre "Religions and Statistics Project".

For the moment, suffice it to say that, from a position at the end of the Second World War where the Jewish community was the only substantial minority community, we are now in a position where the Muslim community is the largest minority religion, with well over 1,000,000 members and where, together with the Jewish community, there are now also substantial Sikh and Hindu communities of some hundreds of thousands. We also have a Buddhist community, the size of which is extremely difficult to estimate but which, if Chinese people are generally included, could be as high as around 100,000; and smaller groups of Jains, Baha'is and Zoroastrians of some thousands each.

New Communities and Old Buildings

The Jewish community was the first other than the Christian community to establish places of worship in Britain. This came about in the seventeenth century, following Jewish readmission to England during the period of the Commonwealth. The oldest synagogue in current use is the Bevis Marks synagogue in London which was built in 1701. As other communities began to emerge, the first Sikh Gurdwara was established in Putney, in London, in 1911.

But it was in the wake of the major post-World War II migrations of new Commonwealth citizens that the patterns of places of worship began to change significantly. Initially, migrants were primarily concerned with making a living and sending finance back home. But as immigration rules changed and families were brought in to join the early migrants, the significance of religious life - and thus the provision of worship facilities - began to emerge as a community concern. People began to look for premises in which to meet. Lacking the economic means to buy or, still less, to build new facilities, and faced with prejudice and misunderstanding from the wider population, many minority religious groups turned in hope to Christian places of worship to find hospitality for both their special and regular occasions of worship.

This phase coincided with a continuing numerical decline of the traditional Christian Churches resulting in the closure of a number of their buildings, particularly in those inner city areas where traditional Christianity had become weak. As a result, minority religious organisations sought to purchase formerly Christian places of worship. This gave rise to considerable discussion and heart-searching among the Christian community, with the case of the purchase in Southampton of a former Anglican church for use as a Sikh Gurdwara focusing much of the debate. For insecure Christians it was tangible evidence of a coming displacement of Christianity's social significance. It also has to be said that for many minority ethnic groups within the Christian Church such sales were met with puzzlement. The Churches with predominantly black Christian membership and leadership could not understand why such redundant Churches were not transferred to them as fellow Christians since they also needed places of worship.

In addition to purchasing redundant church buildings, minority religious groups began to convert dwelling-houses and to purchase old warehouses, cinemas and other public buildings as well as, in one or two cases, to build their own buildings. Some of the planning issues that arose in that context will be addressed by later speakers. At this time it was often the case that groups which would normally have remained separate on grounds of ethnicity, caste or sect within their religion, found that in the new situation, with the pressure of smaller total numbers and the consequent limitations of economic resources, they needed to club together to create premises for common use within the community. Further diversification into sectarian and ethnically based groups has only occurred with increasing relative security and prosperity and in areas with the greatest numerical concentrations. Such economic factors have also been influential in bringing about rationalisation and the ecumenical sharing of buildings within the Christian community, especially in the inner urban areas.

Certified Buildings

The tables which follow give some insight into the changing patterns of worship space provision as found in the Annual Register of Statistics of the Registrar General in the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys. This is not published, but it contains cumulative totals relating to three categories of buildings:

1. Buildings of all religious bodies that are "certified" as places of worship (this excludes buildings of the Church of England or the Church in Wales which are technically not certified buildings).
2. Churches and chapels of the Church of England and the Church in Wales.
3. Buildings of religious bodies that are registered for the lawful solemnisation of marriages (with all such registered buildings also being "certified" or being buildings of the C of E or C in W).

The legislative framework for this is the Places of Worship Registration Act passed in 1855. This involves the "certification" of places of worship, a procedure which is not compulsory but which has benefits. Provided the worship held in the building is accessible to outsiders it can bring exemption from local taxation - an exemption which extends to associated buildings of the place of worship even if used for purposes other than religious worship. It is also the basis for an application to become a registered building for the solemnisation of marriages. In addition certification frees a place of worship from the need to register itself under the 1960 Charities Act.

It places it under the terms of the 1860 Ecclesiastical Courts Jurisdiction Act which enables sanctions against "riotous, violent and indecent behaviour" in the building.

Church of England and Church in Wales buildings are not certified - they are "recorded". Certification for other traditions is a matter for the Registrar General of the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys. The Registrar needs to be satisfied that the organisation is religious and that its buildings are being used for "religious worship." This is done by submitting to the local Superintendent Registrar of Births, Marriages and Deaths, two copies of a document signed by an owner, occupier, minister or member of a building's congregation, declaring an intention to use this building for the purposes of worship and naming the religious tradition concerned. The Superintendent Registrar forwards this to the Registrar General who grants certification through the Superintendent Registrar if he is satisfied that the certified place is to be used "wholly or predominantly" for worship by an identifiable and settled group.

Since places of worship do not have to be certified, the total numbers certified may not give a completely accurate picture of the actual numbers of places of worship for each tradition. Indeed, in his book *Asian Traditions and English Law* (1990) Sebastian Poulter comments that "The Registrar General's records suggest that only a relatively small percentage of the mosques, temples and gurdwaras in England have so far been registered under the Act." With respect to the earlier years in which records were kept this is likely to have been the case, particularly given that not all the minority traditions knew of the procedures for certification. Also, statistics on certified buildings tend not to include house-based places of worship.

The relationship between the actual numbers of places of worship and the numbers certified and recorded as such has undoubtedly become closer in recent years as increasing numbers of buildings in minority religious traditions have sought certification. However, since there is still not complete correspondence between the numbers of certified and recorded places of worship and the actual numbers of places of worship in Britain, Table 2 presents figures from the research done for the 1993 edition of *Religions in the UK: A Multi-Faith Directory*. But it is important to make clear that these figures also have limitations and qualifications. For example, they exclude a small number of places of worship in each religious group which did not wish to be in the directory and they also reflect a degree of ambiguity in the classification of what are places of worship (where organisations have not made this clear).

Trends in Provision

[for tables please see the appendix to this paper]

All the tables, except *Table 2*, contain figures from the General Registrar's Office annual statistics. Each of these tables has columns of figures, beginning with the earliest cumulative figures that its office in Southport holds, namely, those for 1972.

Table 2 contains different data, namely, that which has been derived from *Religions in the UK: A Multi-Faith Directory* (University of Derby, Derby, 1993). This table contains several variations from the 1994 cumulative figures of the Registrar General's statistics. As has already been pointed out, the figures derived from the directory are subject to a number of general limitations and

qualifications. In the case of the figures for Jewish synagogues in *Table 2*, the highest rate of request not to appear in *Religions in the UK* came from Jewish organisations who were concerned about the security implications of such appearance. In the case of the figures for Muslim mosques, the *Religions in the UK* figures includes prayer houses that are unlikely to have official certification as places of worship.

In addition to these variations it will be noted that, whereas the Registrar General's figures conflate all other religions than Christian (and a number of Christian-related bodies appearing separately in the Registrar General's figures), Jewish, Muslim and Sikh, into a cumulative category entitled "Other (Eastern) Bodies", the *Religions in the UK* figures distinguish between Baha'i, Buddhist, Hindu, Jain and Zoroastrian places of worship, according to definitions outlined at the foot of the table.

However, it is from the tables containing the Registrar General's cumulative totals over a period of years that one can discern the trends in the provision of places of worship. From *Table 1*, it will be seen that the overall number of certified and recorded Christian Trinitarian, Non-Trinitarian and Christian-related churches has shown a consistent pattern of decline over the period surveyed, while Muslim mosques, Sikh gurdwaras, and places of worship of "Other (Eastern) Bodies" have more or less consistently increased across the whole period. This is also true of Jewish synagogues, perhaps surprisingly in view of the community's generally acknowledged demographic decline.

Nonetheless, these bald national figures hide a number of variations. For example, *Table 3* shows clearly that the main decline in the numbers of certified and recorded Christian places of worship has been among the Trinitarian Christian traditions, with the exception of the Roman Catholic tradition which has seen some small increase over the same period. Among the non-Trinitarian groups, the more traditional bodies such as the Unitarians and Quakers have also reflected the pattern of decline found among the Anglican and traditional Free Churches, while the numbers of certified places of worship in the "Related" Jehovah's Witnesses tradition have grown significantly, making the total trend among the Non-Trinitarian Churches one of growth. The "Other Christian" category has also expanded the number of its certified places of worship. This sector includes the Pentecostalist and Independent churches as well as the burgeoning black-led Churches. Tables 3-8 show the regional detail for these groupings.

Regional variations are of considerable significance when Tables 9-12 are examined because they reflect the geographical distributions and concentrations of people within the minority religious traditions. Thus the 1994 concentrations of over 100 mosques in each case in Yorkshire and Humberside, the North-West and the West Midlands, reflect the main areas of Muslim settlement. The dominant concentration of almost 200 synagogues in the London area underlines the importance of London for the Jewish community in England, while the 60 and 43 synagogues in the North-West and the South-East, respectively, demonstrate the clear provincial centres of the Jewish community. The 42 Gurdwaras in the West Midlands testify to the large Sikh settlement in that area. As has been noted, however, the "Other (Eastern) Bodies" category includes all those other traditions that are separately featured in *Religions in the UK* - namely, Baha'is, Buddhists, Hindus, Jains and Zoroastrians - so that it is difficult to deduce much of significance from the regional variations in this category.

Places of Worship and Some Issues, Internal and External

Given that these tables provide some quantitative idea of the contemporary picture together with an indication of trends in the provision of certified and recorded places of worship over the past two decades or so, it is also important to note a number of qualitative issues that have emerged in the context of this changing scene.

For example, there are a range of internal issues concerning the funding, use and control of religious buildings. What have been the implications where places of worship have been funded by foreign financial sources and what have been the implications of local funding provision? Are buildings to be used for religious worship alone or also for wider community needs? If funding applications were put to local authorities and charities for developing the community use of buildings how were these applications considered in relation to the building's other use for worship? Where does the ultimate control of the buildings lie? With elected committees? With the users? With the funders, whether locally or abroad? Or with whom?

These complex and sensitive questions aside, it is undoubtedly the case that places of worship often play pivotal roles as a physical resource and focus for the local communities in which they are set. For example, the University of Derby's Religious Resource and Research Centre has recently been conducting a very interesting pilot research and development project into the actual and potential uses of places of worship as settings for health promotion. In acting as a mirror to the places of worship, this project has underlined the sheer extent and range of the community activities to be found within places of worship. The Department of the Environment's Inner Cities Religious Council has also recognised the economic and networking potential of places of worship within the total voluntary sector scene in any city or town.

Places of worship are therefore highly significant buildings in terms of what they signify religiously by pointing to the sources and goals of their religious traditions; what they signify about the established presence and geographical belonging of their traditions of faith to the national and local society; and their role as actual or potential community resources within local neighbourhoods.

**CERTIFIED AND RECORDED CHRISTIAN (TRINITARIAN AND NON-TRINITARIAN & CHRISTIAN-RELATED), JEWISH, MUSLIM, SIKH AND "OTHER (EASTERN)" PLACES OF WORSHIP IN ENGLAND AND WALES
on 30th June in Relevant Years**

	1972	1975	1980	1985	1990	1994
Christian & Related	47638	47139	45378	45129	44922	44731
Jewish Synagogues	320	348	335	351	355	357
Muslim Mosques	79	90	193	314	452	487
Sikh Gurdwaras	40	59	90	129	149	166
Other (Eastern) Bodies	222	217	219	264	305	331

Table 2

**APPROXIMATE NUMBERS OF PLACES OF WORSHIP IN THE UK
IN THE BUDDHIST, HINDU, JAIN, JEWISH, MUSLIM AND SIKH TRADITIONS
As Found in *Religions in the UK: A Multi-Faith Directory*, University of Derby, 1993.**

	UK	England	Scotland	Wales	Northern Ireland
Buddhist *	130	115	8	5	2
Hindu	130	122	5	1	2
Jain	3	3	0	0	0
Jewish	320	305	10	4	1
Muslim	650	606	24	19	1
Sikh	180	172	6	2	0

* This Buddhist figure includes details of all centres, viharas, monasteries and other publicly accessible Buddhist buildings.

The Baha'is do not have one of their Houses of Worship in the UK, but *Religions in the UK* contains details of four Baha'i Centres as publicly accessible buildings.

The Zoroastrians do not have any Fire Temples in the UK, but Zoroastrian House in London has a room which is used for worship.

Table 3

**RECORDED (CHURCH OF ENGLAND AND CHURCH IN WALES) AND CERTIFIED (ALL OTHERS)
CHRISTIAN TRINITARIAN, NON-TRINITARIAN AND "RELATED" PLACES OF WORSHIP IN
ENGLAND AND WALES
on 30th June in Relevant Years**

	1972	1975	1980	1985	1990	1994
Christian & related	47683	47139	45378	45129	44922	44731
<i>Trinitarian</i>						
Anglican	17046	16901	16721	16614	16563	16538
Traditional Free Church	21059	20237	18655	18117	17668	17309
Roman Catholic	3502	3585	3630	3673	3693	3697
<i>Non-Trinitarian</i>						
Unitarian	192	199	186	186	178	178
Society of Friends	368	368	355	358	365	362
Jehovah's Witnesses	652	723	759	809	872	902
<i>Other</i>						
"Other Christian"	4864	5126	5072	5372	5583	5745

Table 4

**CERTIFIED AND RECORDED TRINITARIAN CHRISTIAN CHURCHES IN ENGLAND AND WALES IN
ENGLAND AND WALES
on 30th June in Relevant Years**

	1972	1975	1980	1985	1990	1994
Northern	3373	2938	2625	2589	2586	2530
Yorks & Hum	4373	4208	4015	3951	3904	3833
North-Western	4648	4426	4268	4227	4216	4197
East Midlands	3449	4106	3966	3916	3908	3879
West Midlands	3910	3896	3744	3749	2760	3778
East Anglia	2919	2891	2744	2728	2709	2693
London	3385	3386	3317	3304	3288	3312
South East	7984	7740	7576	7618	7582	7605
South West	6217	6097	5899	5837	5762	5718
Wales	6213	6261	5924	5857	5972	5748
TOTALS	46471	45849	44078	43776	43507	43293

Table 5

**RECORDED CHURCH OF ENGLAND AND CHURCH IN WALES CHURCHES
IN ENGLAND AND WALES
on 30th June in Relevant Years**

	1972	1975	1980	1985	1990	1994
Northern	1131	930	921	914	916	917
Yorks & Hum	1531	1413	1403	1395	1396	1378
North-West	1253	1183	1171	1169	1167	1169
East Midlands	1476	1828	1821	1798	1794	1790
West Midlands	1627	1602	1592	1591	1591	1592
East Anglia	1534	1509	1470	1466	1468	1462
London	1032	1036	1003	984	962	960
South East	3370	3300	3276	3266	3255	3266
South West	2646	2590	2566	2543	2536	2543
Wales	1446	1510	1498	1488	1478	1461
TOTALS	17046	16901	16721	16614	16563	16538

Table 6

**CERTIFIED ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCHES IN ENGLAND AND WALES
on 30th June in Relevant Years**

	1972	1975	1980	1985	1990	1994
Northern	332	307	312	316	314	314
Yorks & Hum	320	348	352	353	348	347
North-Western	685	682	688	694	693	690
East Midlands	169	196	199	203	204	204
West Midlands	287	292	293	295	297	299
East Anglia	91	91	96	99	102	103
London	396	408	408	410	414	415
South East	708	718	738	753	757	759
South West	281	314	309	315	322	327
Wales	233	229	235	235	242	243
TOTALS	3502	3585	3630	3673	3693	3697

Table 7

**CERTIFIED TRINITARIAN FREE CHURCHES
IN ENGLAND AND WALES
on 30th June in Relevant Years**

	1972	1975	1980	1985	1990	1994
Northern	1643	1305	1102	1052	1033	966
Yorks & Hum	2084	1997	1831	1745	1685	1628
North-West	1961	1828	1697	1626	1599	1568
East Midlands	1499	1732	1584	1532	1500	1465
West Midlands	1542	1501	1363	1318	1287	1271
East Anglia	1147	1129	1004	975	938	921
London	1282	1239	1176	1145	1128	1118
South East	2990	2792	2611	2593	2552	2531
South West	2862	2701	2519	2443	2346	2283
Wales	4049	4013	3768	3688	3600	3558
TOTAL	21059	20237	18655	18117	17668	17309

Table 8

**CERTIFIED "OTHER CHRISTIAN BODIES" PLACES OF WORSHIP
IN ENGLAND AND WALES
on 30th June in Relevant Years**

	1972	1975	1980	1985	1990	1994
Northern	267	296	290	307	323	333
Yorks & Hum	438	450	429	458	475	480
North-Western	749	733	712	738	757	770
East Midlands	305	350	362	383	410	420
West Midlands	454	501	496	545	585	616
East Anglia	147	162	174	188	201	207
London	675	703	730	765	784	819
South East	916	930	951	1006	1018	1049
South West	428	492	505	536	558	565
Wales	485	509	423	446	472	486
TOTAL	4864	5126	5072	5372	5583	5745

Table 9

**CERTIFIED MUSLIM MOSQUES IN ENGLAND AND WALES
on 30th June in Relevant Years**

	1972	1975	1980	1985	1990	1994
Northern	5	6	10	13	12	14
Yorks & Humb	20	20	36	63	90	3
North-West	18	25	51	76	97	113
East Midlands	2	3	6	16	22	28
West Midlands	12	12	36	59	96	109
East Anglia	1	1	3	5	7	7
London	12	11	31	44	62	72
South East	1	4	9	25	37	39
South West	2	2	3	5	5	6
Wales	6	6	8	8	12	14
TOTALS	79	90	193	314	452	487

Table 10

**CERTIFIED JEWISH SYNAGOGUES IN ENGLAND AND WALES
on 30th June in Relevant Years u**

	1972	1975	1980	1985	1990	1994
Northern	6	16	15	15	12	12
Yorks & Humb	24	21	17	18	15	14
North-West	60	60	56	59	60	60
East Midlands	4	5	5	5	4	4
West Midlands	8	9	9	9	9	9
East Anglia	2	2	2	2	2	2
London	161	180	176	187	194	197
South East	17	35	36	39	42	43
South West	5	9	10	10	10	10
Wales	12	11	9	7	7	6
TOTALS	320	348	335	351	355	357

Table 11

**CERTIFIED SIKH GURDWARAS IN ENGLAND AND WALES
on 30th June in Relevant Years**

	1972	1975	1980	1985	1990	1994
Northern	1	1	2	4	4	5
Yorks & Humb	3	10	14	19	23	23
North-Western	2	4	5	7	7	9
East Midlands	5	5	7	10	13	15
West Midlands	8	12	23	32	39	42
East Anglia	1	2	3	4	4	4
London	11	10	15	24	27	30
South East	5	10	14	21	24	28
South West	3	4	6	6	6	7
Wales	1	1	1	2	2	3
TOTALS	40	59	90	129	149	166

Table 12

**CERTIFIED "OTHER (EASTERN) BODIES" IN ENGLAND AND WALES
on 30th June in Relevant Years**

	1972	1975	1980	1985	1990	1994
Northern	12	9	9	11	13	12
Yorks & Humb	21	19	18	21	25	28
North-West	39	39	41	43	46	51
East Midlands	10	9	11	21	27	29
West Midlands	17	15	13	25	35	36
East Anglia	3	5	5	6	6	7
London	20	31	37	49	61	69
South East	59	64	57	63	68	73
South West	22	21	19	21	19	19
Wales	9	5	3	4	5	7
TOTALS	222	217	219	264	305	331

A Planner's Eye View

Mr Emrys Jones

Assistant Director, Department of Planning and Architecture,
Birmingham City Council

I am pleased to be able to welcome you to Birmingham. As Assistant Director in the Department of Planning and Architecture of Birmingham City Council, I am responsible for development control and dealing with planning applications. I have been asked to give a short talk about the approach adopted in Birmingham for considering planning applications for places of worship.

The Birmingham Context

First some background about Birmingham. The city grew considerably during the Industrial Revolution, with the addition of Welsh, Irish and Scottish communities. More recently communities have arrived from India, the Caribbean, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Greece, Africa, the Middle East and Vietnam. Together with many others they have made their home in Birmingham, which now has a population of just under 1 million of which approximately 22% (according to the 1991 Census) is drawn from minority ethnic communities. However, despite the presence of a diverse range of ethnic groups, cultures and faiths, we are all Brummies! In 1993 a festival was organised on the theme of "Together in Birmingham" to celebrate the City's rich ethnic and cultural diversity. As its contribution to the festival, the Department of Planning and Architecture published a short guide to 17 of the city's varied and distinctive religious buildings, entitled *Sacred Spaces*.

[The talk was illustrated at this point by slides of various places of worship in the City of Birmingham: St. Philip's Anglican Cathedral; St. Paul's Church, Jewellery Quarter; St. Chad's Roman Catholic Cathedral; Friends Meeting House, Bournville; Central Mosque, Belgrave Middleway; Dar-ul-Uloom Islamic Mosque, Golden Hillock Road, Small Heath; Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha Gurudwara Sikh Temple, Soho Road; Shri Geeta Bhavan Hindu Temple, Heathfield Road; Karma Ling Buddhist Vihara, Carlyle Road, Edgbaston; New Testament Church of God, Lozells; Hebrew Congregation Synagogue, Blucher Street; Church of St. Lazar, Bournville; Namdhari Sangat Temple in Coventry Road, Hay Mills (a converted cinema); Noor-Ul-Uloom Mosque in St. Oswald's Road, Small Heath (originally a converted dwelling, now much extended and altered); Dar-Ul-Uloom Mosque in Small Heath (a new purpose built structure to supplement a smaller converted facility: built on a main road location and making a major townscape contribution); Jamia Mosque, Shakespeare Street (a converted factory); Tilton Road School (a listed building but in poor repair where the Ahmadiyya Association have lodged a planning application for change of use of the school to a mosque and community centre.)]

As you have seen, the wide range of faiths in Birmingham is reflected in a wide range of buildings! Some places of worship are grand architectural statements built many years ago and may be listed historic buildings; others are more modest, even including converted factories and dwellings. To

a large extent this variety reflects changing religious demands in Birmingham and an increasing need for places of worship and for ancillary social, educational and community facilities on the part of a range of groups, particularly those representing minority ethnic communities. It is an irony that, at the same time, some churches are suffering from declining congregations and from the need to merge parishes, leading eventually to the closure and redundancy of church buildings.

Background to Planning Regulation

Planning legislation was first introduced in 1947 and the main current legislation dates from 1990. Planning permission is required for the erection of a building for public worship or religious instruction, such as a church, mosque, temple, sunday school, or madrassa. It is also required for a change of use of an existing building for the purpose of public worship or religious instruction, unless the building already falls within Class D1 - a non-residential institution (eg. public hall, library, school) under the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987. The use of Class D1 buildings for public worship would be a "permitted development". However, planning consent would still be required for any external alterations to the building and, were the building to be statutorily listed, (ie. of architectural or historic interest), listed building consent would be required for both internal and external alterations.

Types of Places of Worship and Special Criteria Relating to These

The planning policy for places of worship is contained within the Birmingham Unitary Development Plan. It was first adopted in 1972 and was significantly revised in 1981, being the subject of consultation with interested groups. It accords with "best practice" of the Royal Town Planning Institute Study on "Ethnic Minorities and the Planning System". The policy recognises four different types of facility:-

- (a) large purpose built establishments serving a wider area city/district and likely to be used by large numbers of people
- (b) converted premises, likely to be more modest establishment but which may again serve more than local area
- (c) local prayer houses - normally converted dwelling - serving only immediate local need
- (d) social, cultural or educational facilities

There are different criteria applied to these different categories:

For large purpose-built places of worship and/or religious instruction intended to serve a wide catchment area and/or to be used for festivals and ceremonies attracting large numbers of people, then:

- the site must be of sufficient size
- it must be located so as not to cause loss of amenity to occupiers of nearby dwellings by way of noise and disturbance
- particularly suitable sites are those adjoining main roads and/or on edge of commercial area
- the site must be capable of accommodating building of non-domestic scale and often of

non-traditional design

- it must provide adequate off street parking space (the amount of car parking to be provided is 1 space per 13.9 sq.m. where serving local needs or 1 space per 3.75 sq.m. where serving wider need).
- be sited so as to minimise impact on adjoining dwellings/visual amenity

For a *conversion of an existing building to provide places of worship serving more than just the needs of the immediate local population* the criteria are that:-

- in principle it may be appropriately sited in residential areas e.g. converted dwelling houses
- other commercial/industrial buildings may also be suitable for conversion eg. school, cinema, factory, warehouse
- except where the site adjoins busy traffic routes, car parking requirements may be relaxed
- detached dwelling/pairs of semi-detached houses are acceptable in principle
- end terrace/semi detached may be acceptable where a priest or other official occupies an adjoining property. If not, regard will be had to: the results of public participation exercise; the characteristics of local population (e.g. whether they are of the same faith/ethnic background); the position of the entrance; the nature of the surrounding area -(eg. a small cul-de-sac is unlikely to be acceptable); the likelihood of noise emanating from premises.

In the case of *local prayer houses* the criteria are that the premises are:-

- serving only immediate local or neighbourhood need
- generally smaller premises
- that most visitors would arrive by foot
- the same criteria as for other converted buildings
- use for weddings, festivals and funerals which are likely to attract larger numbers of people, may be restricted.

In the case of *social, cultural and educational facilities* the criteria are that these are:-

- most commonly educational establishments
- often activity is limited to certain hours eg. after school and weekends
- the same criteria as for converted buildings

A Planning Application Checklist

If you are thinking about a planning application, it may be helpful to bear in mind that before a planning application is presented you should take the following steps:-

- (a) Check whether there are policy guidelines and if so obtain a copy of them.
- (b) Obtain an informal view from the planning officer. If there are no policy guidelines arrange meeting with the planning officer.
- (c) Check that the site complies with current policy and explore any other issues e.g. the history of the site, the building line, its relationship to adjacent property, the position on access, and the amount of car parking.

- (d) Check what other consents may be required eg. listed building consent, building regulations.
- (e) Submit the planning application supported by good quality drawings and a full explanation of the proposal including the number of people to be using it, hours of use, etc.

The process which a planning application follows is a complex one and takes 8-12 weeks as a minimum, involving: public participation and consultation; negotiation where necessary; a report to the Planning Committee followed by its discussion and a decision. Conditions may be imposed, for example, limiting use to religious activities only and allowing no social use; restricting use for large festivals/funerals; or disallowing external sound reproduction/amplification equipment.

I hope that this brief summary has been helpful. There is a fuller account in the Birmingham City Council policy document of which copies are available from the Department of Planning and Architecture.

Points made in discussion following the presentations of Paul Weller and Emrys Jones

- (a) It would be helpful if a common "code of practice" on planning requirement for faith community buildings could be agreed among local authorities.
- (b) A preliminary dialogue and consultation with the local community is always helpful when a planning application is being prepared, particularly if there is an organised local community association, but this process needs to be carefully handled.
- (c) It is quite common for around 90% of recommendations by planning officials to local authority planning committees to be accepted. There is always a desire on the part of the local authority to see whether alternative proposals which would be more acceptable could be agreed in circumstances where a planning application cannot be granted as it stands.
- (d) A distinction is drawn between the provision of space for community use and space for use for prayer and worship. Public funds are available for the former but not the latter. Sometimes misunderstandings can arise over this.
- (e) There are particular problems in terms of maintenance costs for those communities which find it difficult to raise sufficient funds to undertake new building and have therefore bought old buildings. There are some limited possibilities of public help where old buildings are decaying - particularly if the building is a listed building in which case applications for funding can be made to English Heritage.
- (f) Many overseas visitors are surprised to discover that the cathedrals of England are not funded by the public purse in recognition of their civic role in the same way that they are, for example, in Germany.
- (g) Applications to hold gatherings for open air worship would be considered by local authorities in the light of their proposed frequency and location.
- (h) It is surprising that the figures for registered places of worship lump together "Other Eastern Bodies", rather than breaking them down by faith community;

The Experience of the Ramgarhia Sikh Community in Southall

Mr Jaspal Singh Bhambra

General Secretary of the Ramgarhia Sabha, Southall

The difficulties encountered by non-Christian faith immigrants to the United Kingdom are enormous. No doubt these immigrants are welcomed by industry, but lack of awareness of the needs of an immigrant community leaves various Government and local government officers confused and as a result their actions often appear discriminatory.

In terms of provision of sacred space, my own community's experience of seeking planning permission for a place of worship (Gurdwara), and social/inter faith centre and sport/recreational centre is one of eventual success but it has not been one of plain sailing.

The Planning History of three projects of the Ramgarhia Sabha, Southall

In 1970/71 a site at 53-57 Oswald Road, Southall was purchased by the newly established Ramgarhia Sabha. It consisted of an 'L' shaped rotted corrugated galvanised sheet-steel structure operating as a laundry business amidst a totally residential environment. This dilapidated site with heavy traffic of vans in and out at a commercial frequency was not at all conducive to a healthy environment, yet the existing business had planning permission to operate there. Planning application for a Sikh Gurdwara was lodged by the Ramgarhia Sabha.

The Planning Officer offered only vague comments on the proposed scheme and this made the Planning Committee's job doubly difficult. However, the application was approved by the Chairman of the Committee upon the use of his casting vote. The Chairman happened to be a Christian priest who realised the values underlying the project and the service this community could provide to its youth and elderly. He appreciated the approach and the practice of the Sikh faith as laid down by its founder, Guru Nanak.

In 1974/75 a second site known as Salvation Army Hall situated at 159 The Broadway, Southall was acquired by the Sabha to provide recreational activities and to assist inter faith co-operation and development. In 1986 this site became the target of an arson attack and was badly damaged by fire. The Sabha's management considered further development of this site and a scheme was designed to accommodate multiple use to: provide short stay accommodation to the needy; carry out interfaith work; allow commercial activity on the ground floor; and make space for car park facilities in the basement. This scheme received a negative response from a planning officer (unofficially) and due to the recession the project was shelved for a short period.

When the Broadway project proposal went ahead again, the Chairman of the Planning Committee, introducing the project said, "This is a beautiful building with an extremely important function. It is a focal point on the Broadway." However, there were further problems. There was opposition to the height of the planned building. The site fell on the wrong side of a boundary which defined the high and low plot ratio of the building site for planning purposes. This was

frustrating because there was a 5 storey building within the same block - some 30 metres to the right. It seemed to us that there was no sound explanation for not allowing the proposed project a high plot ratio. Further, the Committee approved the application "subject to G106 agreement". Again this was totally unnecessary. However, in line with the sixth Sikh Guru's teachings of 'compromising flexibility' the Sabha accepted the G106 agreement which required the Sabha to pay for the plantation of four trees and the provision of two cycle stands on the pavement in front of the building and which placed a restriction on the sale of the residential accommodation. Some of the Planning Committee appeared to have reservations. Fortunately, it was approved and in July 1993 planning permission was secured. Construction started in May 1994 and completion took place in May 1995.

The Sabha's third project, currently under construction, is in the green belt area. In practice, the site is bordered on one side by a Ministry of Works concrete mixing plant with towers of a steel frame construction about 20 metres high. It is a maintenance depot for the M4 motorway. The other two sides of the site are bordered by "travellers" whom the Council want to move but have no political will to do so. The fourth side is a common boundary with a school perimeter fence (with another 13/15 metre high building of great mass on the other side). When purchased, this site also included an uninhabitable and badly deteriorated listed building known as The Old Rectory.

When we put in a plan for use by the Sabha, the planning officer's initial response to the scheme was "What a wonderful proposal - I see no problems with the planning application". Yet, within weeks, "green belt" policies and other reasons were given for the officer's inability to recommend it for approval. A presentation to Planning Committee members was made, giving the full history of the land and referring to the Council's own policies for the development of the area, with the result that the Committee approved the application at its final meeting, contrary to the officer's recommendation for refusal. So, at that point, things looked good. Then, the application was "called in" by the Department of the Environment and rejected at appeal. Part of the Inspector's report read "The building is skilfully designed and the use is largely one which fits in with the green belt and other policies, but the mass of the building does not comply. Therefore the application is refused." We did not give up. The application was relogged within a few months with a reduced size of building and was approved, again with "G106 restrictions".

A Call for Flexibility, Foresight, and Planning Assistance

The struggle to achieve planning success for these three projects makes it abundantly clear that a great deal of time and energy is wasted in trying to justify regulations in a way which requires an in depth understanding and appreciation of these. Planning applications become entangled with "political" politics of the kind not seen, practised or displayed by our faith's founders. As I understand it, planning laws are made by the people who are elected "by the people, for the people" to provide a clean, healthy and enjoyable environment for the public at all levels and at all times for every aspect of life. Flexibility and foresight ought to be applied in their implementation. There should be flexibility in implementing the relevant laws and bye laws and due consideration should be given to the details of the case. I recommend that this meeting ought to set up a committee to help with planning problems in connection with "sacred space" and community development. A lot of aggravation might thus be saved.

Lessons from the Bhaktivedanta Manor Hindu Temple Situation

by Vipin Aery

Secretary, National Council of Hindu Temples

One of the main issues that greatly affect the minority communities in Britain is the provision of places for worship. It is the view of the National Council of Hindu Temple that the Hindu community has perhaps had the greatest difficulty in this area. There are about 100 Hindu temples in the country and most of them had to undergo difficulties in order to establish themselves.

Bhaktivedanta Manor has held a special status amongst all the temples in Britain practically from the day it opened about 25 years ago. It became popular during the 1970's with the Hindu community settling in this country and established its pattern of cultural and religious activities. This popularity caused problems. In 1986 the Hertsmere Borough Council (HBC) stated that the temple was 'too popular' and must therefore be closed to the public: a highly unusual step in the 20th century. The excuse was the planning laws.

There are indeed complex issues in this case. However, it is clear that religious needs and considerations have been subordinated in the interpretations of the planning laws. The greatest misunderstanding has arisen from the fact that local and central government have always expected Hindu establishments to operate exactly like other religious institutions. There is an absence of awareness of the nature of Bhaktivedanta Manor. The essence of the planning issue is that the current interpretation of planning law says that the college should not be a place of public worship. Yet Bhaktivedanta Manor was set up as a college for training priests, teachers and missionaries, and because it is a college, it absolutely requires a shrine with the installed Deities so the highest standards can be demonstrated to the students. The college also teaches courses in theology, and offers personal instruction, guidance and counselling to all those who come whether they be individuals (young or old) or families.

Hertsmere Borough Council alleges amenity problems. It has said that too many cars come through the village on Sundays and on festival days - even though that attendance was arranged with the Council in 1983. The Council disregarded the agreement and in 1987 issued an Enforcement Notice to ban public worship and festivals. The Government upheld the ban which came into effect on 16 March 1994.

Since traffic has always been stated to be the key problem, the Society purchased the land in the spring of 1994 at the back of the temple. An access drive could be built on this, which in turn will link the temple to the main road. This would completely bypass the local residents and the village. The Council's own planning officers recommended that permission be granted for this. One would think that this would be the end of the dispute. But no. The Council has raised all sorts of other problems - the green belt issue; the use of marquees on Janmashtami festival; the presence of a growing elderly Indian population; et cetera. How many communities would allow this sort of denigration?

In 1986 a vigorous campaign was initiated to safeguard the Manor from closure to the public.

This brought about a lot of activity in the Hindu community: many letter writing campaigns have been carried out; petitions consisting of thousands of signatures have been submitted to the Government; MPs have been lobbied - both here and abroad; many marches and demonstrations have taken place - the most successful of these being on 16 March 1994 when 36,000 British Hindus marched through the streets of London in protest.

The campaign has also brought about a greater awareness and understanding of ISKCON (the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, more commonly known as the Hare Krishna movement) as part of the mainstream Hindu tradition. It has rightfully eradicated, to some extent, the movement's 'cultish' or 'New Religious Movement' image. Can you imagine a Christian missionary preaching in India and being labelled as a member of a "cult" or a member of a "New Religious Movement"? No. But this has been the case with ISKCON, perhaps because a number of persons, not born into the Hindu tradition, have not only taken up the religion but are being trained for the priesthood, a phenomenon which has caused many concerns. In actuality, Hinduism does not try to convert people but simply attempts to share its spiritual values with them.

The campaign has also brought out heart warming support from other communities for which we are very grateful. This was very much evident at the Public Inquiry where many representatives from different faith communities gave evidence in support of the case of the Manor. The dispute has also demonstrated the negative aspects of the relationship between a minority community and its host. ISKCON, on many occasions, was told to move to Milton Keynes. It was even suggested that this would be more appropriate because the temple should be connected exclusively with the Hindu "townships" of Wembley or Southall. This kind of attitude is reminiscent of a different kind of regime.

Can the British public welcome a Hindu establishment in cosmopolitan Britain? After all the campaigning and positive work, we still do not know the answer. The result of the Inspector's inquiry is due in November from the Department of the Environment. But there is still time for more representations to be made by all those who feel that the resolution of this issue is of importance not just for Hindus but for the betterment of our society as a whole.

The Experience of the Muslim Community in Lancashire

Mr Abdul Hamid Qureshi

Director of Lancashire Council of Mosques

A building in itself has no meaning: it gains its meaning from the function which it performs. A mosque is not only a place of worship but is also a focal point for the Muslim community. It fulfils a further function of providing a place for education and for social activity.

Muslims make up about 5% of the population of Lancashire. At the time of the 1991 census Muslims in Lancashire numbered around 52,000: 20,000 with their family origins in India, (in some cases via East Africa); 27,000 with origins in Pakistan; 5,000 with origins in Bangladesh; and others coming originally from elsewhere.

There are 47 mosques in Lancashire and also 9 madrassas (or religious schools). In the early days of the Muslim community's presence in Lancashire there were problems in establishing mosques and community centres. Both the community itself and also local authorities then had less experience and knowledge than they have now. Though there are still problems and delays, there is now a more determined attempt to resolve problems and a desire to do so. One problem relates to the insurance of mosques. I have discovered that many religious buildings are not insured because of the high charges required by the insurance companies since they are considered high risk buildings. Some companies have even refused to offer insurance.

Mosques and other structures of worship and education have to serve all the community, with its varying needs. Youth, for example, is very important. In Blackburn, 30% of all those under 18 come from an ethnic minority background and 90% of these are Muslims. There are major issues surrounding the development of young people including the need for proper education, for employment opportunities and for development and training. The needs of women are also important. In principle, all women are free to go the mosque but men are obliged to pray in congregation. Hence mosques have been constructed primarily for men but mosque managements are now increasingly making provision for women to attend the mosque if they want to do so. This will clearly be a continuing trend.

Responding to religious needs means more than only focusing upon places of worship. For example, within the Muslim community when a person dies, they need to be buried as soon as possible. If a Muslim dies in the morning it is desirable for them to be buried by noon. Increasingly, coroners' offices and registration offices have become sensitive to these needs and in Blackburn additional weekend facilities have been provided. The health services are similarly becoming more sensitive to the needs of patients from a diversity of backgrounds.

It is my firm conviction that there is a need to build community together at a local level in a positive way and to address together the issues that face us and to work to overcome prejudices and to develop harmonious relationships based on an attitude of caring and shared human values. There is, I believe, a unique climate in favour of building in Britain the kind of community in which we all desire to live.

In discussion on the three presentations on faith community experience the following points were made:-

(a) It would be helpful if planning officers would engage in informal discussions beforehand with the applicant so that any concerns which they may have about a planning application could be dealt with before it is formally presented.

(b) The planning dispute involving Bhaktivedanta Manor has consumed a great deal of the community's energies and resources. Some £2 million has been spent which could have gone to much more fruitful use.

(c) It has to be recognised that some sensitive planning cases have to be dealt with at a political rather than a technical or legal level.

(d) There is a case for an organised approach to the insurance industry to see what can be done to make insurance more readily available for places of worship, particularly in minority communities.

(e) At the time of the tensions resulting from the destruction of the Ahyodha Mosque, there was a welcome declaration by religious and community leaders in Bradford that the different faith communities had undertaken to protect one another's places of worship. It could be helpful if leading figures in all areas take steps to meet each other and build relationships of trust which will allow them to act with similar unanimity if difficult circumstances arise again.

(f) There is a need for mosques and madrassas to become more sensitive to the needs of Muslim teenagers. Between the ages of 5 and 14 children attend classes in Bengali, Gujarati, and Urdu and on the Quran. But their teachers are often not well versed in English or in current English educational methods and this can result in a clash of expectations and attitudes.

(g) The Muslim community in Lancashire has regular and valuable meetings with the Bishop of Blackburn. Problems are arising in Lancashire in relation to young people within all communities with the use of soft drugs.

(h) There is a great deal to gain from communities co-operating with another and exchanging their experience.

Sacred Space in Hospitals and Prisons

Dr Sophie Gilliat

Researcher on the Project in the Department of Sociology of the University of Warwick on "The Church of England and Other Faiths" which is examining "civic religion" and chaplaincy in hospitals and prisons

I am hoping that many of you will by now have heard of the 'Church of England and Other Faiths Project' that I am working on at Warwick University. I mention this research project since it is from this background of looking at how religions other than Christianity are included within publicly funded chaplaincies and in civic religious occasions that I approach the topic of sacred space.

During the course of the project, I have been visiting prison and hospital chaplaincies and attending various civic ceremonial occasions, and all of these are contexts in which use of space for, and by, religious groups is a pertinent issue. Since time is somewhat limited today, I am leaving aside the question of sacred space in civic contexts, and instead the focus will be upon prison and hospital spaces as examples of multi-faith provision. This does not imply that issues of sacred space are any less important in civic religious settings as opposed to public institutions. On the contrary, issues bound up with suitable venues for communal multi-faith civic events, or appropriate street decorations at times of festival, raise numerous fascinating questions. It is simply due to the limitations of time that these issues have been left aside in order to concentrate more fully on the questions that arise in connection with sacred space in prisons and hospitals.

Prison Worship and Mediation Space

Imagine the situation of a large city prison where, of approximately eight hundred inmates, nearly one hundred are Muslim. This ratio is, in fact, an accurate picture of the religious make-up of one large northern prison. The Anglican Chaplain is charged with responsibility for facilitating the worship and pastoral care of members of all faiths in the jail, so it falls to him to arrange suitable permanent facilities for Friday prayers, Eid celebration, storage space for religious texts, prayer mats and other artifacts, not to mention facilities in the chaplaincy office for the visiting Imam.

This prison, with its large Muslim population, has the use on Fridays of what is known as a 'Multi-Faith Room'. This is large, modern, clean, carpeted, and appears well-suited to its designated use. Deprived of the familiarity of their places of worship and sacred spaces within their own communities, Muslim prisoners in this jail appear content with what has been provided in the multi-faith room.

In contrast, a different Chaplain and his Visiting Minister colleagues from other faiths are less than content with what has been set aside for members of other traditions in one large Midlands jail. The multi-faith room is cramped and dark, and the Visiting Ministers associated with the jail have noted its lack of atmosphere, dirty carpets, noisy location and general unsuitability as a venue for religious activity. Furthermore, it barely manages to contain the large number of Muslim inmates

wishing to participate in Friday prayers. Set against the background of these conditions in what is an old, over-crowded Victorian prison, 'other faith' facilities are overshadowed by the large, under-used Chapel which the Chaplain has constantly to defend, often unsuccessfully, against pressure by the prison authorities for more secular uses of it, such as for film shows and meetings.

Both Chaplains and Visiting Ministers face questions about the use of the sacred spaces in prison. The Midlands Chaplain wishes to maintain the Christian integrity and sanctity of the Chapel, and he finds himself wondering how this can best be achieved. Should he, as one prison Chaplain has done, partition the Chapel in half, leaving the altar and most of the pews in place while releasing the other half for use as a general recreation area? Or, should he, instead, consider setting aside space within the Chapel for use by other faiths as a way of preserving an exclusively religious use of the Chapel? This then raises potential issues for the Visiting Ministers. Should they hold group meetings in the Chapel, the prison's designated sacred space which carries an atmosphere conducive for prayer and reflection, unlike the symbolically neutral but generally unsuitable 'Multi-Faith Room', or does the ethos and symbolism that goes with the Chapel preclude such sharing of space? These dilemmas appear to be reducible to finding a balance between the character and atmosphere of a room, as against its symbolism and furnishing. The constraints of old Victorian prisons leave little room for manoeuvre on the part of the Chaplain, or the Visiting Ministers, and despite attempts on the part of the prison to adapt its provision of sacred space to reflect our multi-faith society, there are complicated physical and social constraints. This is especially the case in the context of the kind of local prison which experiences a high turnover of inmates being held in custody, and where the provision of permanent facilities may be considered to be less urgent.

By way of conclusion to this brief discussion of some of the challenging issues associated with sacred spaces in prisons, it is perhaps worth noting that Christian Chaplains are not the only defenders of religious spaces in the prison system. For historical reasons, a number of large Victorian prisons, particularly in London and in large Northern cities have permanent synagogues within their boundaries. In response to the questionnaire survey conducted as part of the Church of England and Other Faiths project, a number of prison Rabbis have commented on the diminishing influence they have on how prison synagogues are used. Since many Jewish Visiting Ministers are generally making short and irregular visits to prisons, it is even harder for them to monitor and control the uses to which synagogues may be put in their absence.

Prisons holding inmates serving long sentences have to find more permanent solutions to issues of sacred space in a multi-faith environment. HMP Dartmoor for example, has designated separate rooms for all the major traditions represented in the prison for use by Visiting Ministers and prisoners at times of festival, as well as for regular group meetings. The end result of the innovations at Dartmoor has been a small meditation room with a permanent Buddha rupa for use by Buddhist inmates; a mosque to accommodate Muslim prisoners, and additional rooms for Hindus, Jews and Sikhs. The chaplaincy's sacred spaces can indeed now be regarded as multi-faith in character. Moves in this direction are also being made at a category C prison in the East Midlands. Next-door to the large, well-furnished chapel is a specially designated mosque used only for Muslim gatherings. The notice on the door, and the decorations in the mosque appear effectively to convey the message that the area is for the exclusive use of Muslims. Being well-informed and sensitive to the needs of Muslim inmates, the Chaplain successfully negotiated with the prison authorities for the provision of sacred space for Muslims. New challenges now arise

as members of other faiths in the prison feel that their particular interests have been left out of the negotiating process. Further questions and challenges then have to be tackled which are bound up with equality of provision.

Some organisations and traditions have found a way of by-passing this potential role of the Chaplain as a broker for their sacred space provision by approaching prison authorities directly, and by putting forward their own initiatives. I am thinking in particular of a successful inauguration of Buddha Groves in a number of prisons, and with prospects for others in the future. Angulimala, the Buddhist Prison Chaplaincy Organisation, has successfully carved out a sacred 'Buddhist' space for inmates in the grounds of HMP Risley in Cheshire. The scale of the ceremony to mark the formal inauguration meant that few officers or prisoners would have been left unaware of the designated and protected character of the Buddha Grove.

Turning the focus from prisons, it has become clear that hospitals are no less significant as institutions where issues of sacred space warrant investigation. Shortly I will be talking of some multi-faith innovations which contrast in interesting ways with the initiatives that have taken place in prisons. Before doing so, however, it is perhaps worth mentioning that changing patterns of hospitalisation and medical techniques have had consequences for the use of hospital chapels. Today's hospital in-patient is likely to be a) much more seriously ill than their counterpart thirty years ago; b) only in hospital for a matter of days; c) likely to be wired-up to bed-side monitoring devices which limit their mobility. All these factors have increasingly made hospital chapels redundant. For example, the large chapel in a Coventry hospital which accommodates approximately 150 patients rarely sees a congregation of more than about six on an average Sunday.

However, despite these changes in hospital care patterns, a number of hospital chaplains are beginning to recognise that provision of sacred space is still important, not only for patients, but more particularly for their families. This is especially the case for the relatives of Muslim patients, many of whom appreciate suitable facilities in order to perform their prayers whilst visiting their sick relatives in hospital. To this end, the Chaplain of the Bradford Hospitals NHS Trust, Rev 'Seye Olumide, has re-named what was formerly known as the 'chapel', calling it instead a 'place of worship for people of all faiths'. While retaining some of the characteristics of a traditional Christian chapel, he has at the same time created a space in the hospital (in consultation with other faith leaders) which is accessible and inviting to members of all faiths, or none, who wish to find peace and quiet away from the comings and goings of a busy hospital ward.

Reflecting on some of the visits I have made to a number of hospitals for the Church of England and Other Faiths Project, it seems that in order for patients to benefit from 'sacred space', then these spaces or at least tokens of them, are in some sense increasingly having to come to the ward, rather than the patient setting off in search of the chapel or equivalent. For example, an Eid display was made by the Muslim children at St Luke's Hospital in Bradford for their ward at the end of the last Ramadan as a result of the initiative of the ward's play therapist. Eid came to them, rather than they going out to participate in a chaplaincy-based event. It appears then that the thinking behind the creation of the multi-faith place of worship in the hospital has to some extent permeated to other parts of the institution, and has made a positive impact on the awareness of the wider hospital community. The display in some sense brings a token of Islamic sacred space to the otherwise child-orientated decorations in the ward. Similarly, as a result of the contributions

of Muslim and Hindu Visiting Ministers to a hospital chaplaincy team in the Midlands, a number of small but significant tokens of sacred space have been brought to many of the wards, largely due to such things as religious posters and prayer calendars being placed on noticeboards. Each ward in this Midlands hospital has taken the initiative of indicating the direction for Muslim payers by placing an arrow on every ceiling in the hospital.

In large multi-faith cities, important adaptations and innovations are taking place in chaplaincy departments in response to the diversity of religions now found in Britain. Repeated calls for appropriate places of worship in which members of different traditions may pray or meditate are indications that sacred spaces are still perceived as important and positive features of public institutions. This recognition of the centrality of faith in the lives of those who find themselves in prison or hospital is translating itself into an awareness that spaces which embody and nurture religious identity are important for the spiritual well-being of hospital patients and prison inmates. Turning this awareness into something concrete, and I mean that literally, is the challenge for those chaplaincies just beginning the journey of transforming their sacred spaces into places appropriate for all faiths. Fortunately they have the pioneering examples of a number of prison and hospital chaplains to turn to for guidance and inspiration.

In discussion of Dr Gilliat's presentation the following points were made:-

(a) A great deal of constructive work has been done within prisons. but provision for the spiritual needs of prisoners is constrained by financial pressure. There is a need to make sure that all faith communities are able to play an appropriate role in the provision of this.

(b) Work has been undertaken at a trust hospital in Bradford to provide a multi-faith worship space. The symbolic presence of a place of worship is important not just for patients but also for relatives and staff. Staff rotas should enable them to attend worship celebrations. There is a need to look at the present pattern of provision and to think about the need to provide care for all the users of hospitals, but it will take many years to develop proper multi-faith provision.

(c) It is important to bear in mind pastoral work that can be done by doctors and staff who belong to different faith communities, but at present they have little involvement in the provision for hospital chaplaincy and pastoral care.

(d) The particular tradition of formal "chaplaincy" within the Christian churches is not a pattern which is historically common in other faiths. There is a need to think creatively about the kind of contribution which other faith communities can make and not assume that there is only one acceptable pattern of pastoral care.

(e) While the visiting ministers of other faiths receive expenses for visits to prisons and hospitals there is no provision for paying salaries to chaplains from other faiths and this needs to be reviewed.

(f) It is important for proper provision to be made in public facilities such as hospitals and prisons for ablutions prior to Muslim prayer.

(g) There is an increasing need to think through appropriate structural arrangements for spiritual or pastoral care in multi faith contexts. It is important for faith communities to consult and co-operate together if the contribution which they make to the development of arrangements to meet these needs in a more religiously diverse society is to be truly effective. Even though many Christian chaplaincies have been helpful in ensuring that there is access for other faith communities, it is not appropriate for these arrangements to be dependent on their "grace and favour". There should be institutional provision rather than reliance on a sympathetic attitude on the part of a "gatekeeper".

(h) Work has been carried out at the University of Derby on the provision for multi-faith chaplaincy in higher education institutions and a report on this will be available soon.

Bishop Roy Williamson drew the meeting to a close and said it had been most valuable. The Network's Executive Committee would reflect on what should be done to follow up a number of the points which had been raised.

MEMBER ORGANISATIONS OF THE INTER FAITH NETWORK

Representative Bodies: Afro West Indian United Council of Churches; Arya Pratinidhi Sabha (UK); Baha'i Community of the United Kingdom; Board of Deputies of British Jews; Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland Commission for Inter-Faith Relations; Buddhist Society; Council of African and Afro-Caribbean Churches (UK); Council of Mosques (UK and Eire); Friends of the Western Buddhist Order; Imams and Mosques Council (UK); Islamic Cultural Centre, Regent's Park, London; Jain Samaj Europe; Maha Bodhi Society of Sri Lanka (UK); National Council of Hindu Temples; Roman Catholic Committee for Other Faiths of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales; Sikh Council for Interfaith Relations (UK); Sikh Missionary Society; Swaminaryan Hindu Mission; Vishwa Hindu Parishad (UK); World Ahl ul-Bayt (AS) Islamic League; World Islamic Mission (UK); The Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe

Inter Faith Organisations: Council of Christians and Jews; International Association for Religious Freedom (British Members' Group); London Society of Jews and Christians; Standing Conference of Jews, Christians and Muslims in Europe; World Conference on Religion and Peace (UK and Ireland Chapter); World Congress of Faiths

Local Inter Faith Groups: Birmingham Fellowship of Faiths; Birmingham Inter-Faiths Council; Bradford Concord Inter Faith Society; Bristol Interfaith Group; Cambridge Inter-Faith Group; Cardiff Interfaith Association; Coventry Inter Faith Group; Derby Open Centre Multi-Faith Group; Dudley Council of Faiths; Edinburgh Interfaith Association; Glasgow Sharing of Faiths Group; Harrow Inter-Faith Council; Kirkless and Calderdale Inter-Faith Fellowship; Leeds Concord Inter-Faith Fellowship; Leicester Council of Faiths; Manchester Inter Faith Group; Medway Inter-Faith Group; Merseyside Inter Faith Group; Newham Association of Faiths; Nottingham Inter-Faith Group; Oxford Round Table of Religions; Peterborough Inter-Faith Council; Reading Inter-Faith Group; Redbridge Council of Faiths; Richmond Inter-Faith Group; Rochdale Interfaith Action; Tyne and Wear Community Relations Council Inter Faith Panel; Walsall Inter Faith Group; Waltham Forest All Faiths Group; Wellingborough Multi-Faith Group; Wolverhampton Inter-Faith Group

Education and Academic Bodies: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan; Centre for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations, Selly Oak, Birmingham; Centre for the Study of Judaism and Jewish-Christian Relations, Selly Oak, Birmingham; Community Religions Project, University of Leeds; Institute of Jainology; Islamic Foundation, Leicester, Multi Faith Center, Birmingham; Religious Education Council; Shap Working Party on World Religions in Education; Standing Conference on Inter-Faith Dialogue in Education; Study Centre for Christian-Jewish Relations, (Sisters of Sion); University of Derby Religious Resource and Research Centre

NETWORK OFFICERS

Co-chairs:	Rt Rev Roy Williamson (Bishop of Southwark) Mr Indarjit Singh (Chairman, Sikh Council for Inter Faith Relations)
Vice-chairs:	Dr. Mughram Al-Ghamdi (Director General, Islamic Cultural Centre, London) Mrs Ivy Guttridge MBE (Wolverhampton Inter Faith Group) Mrs Rosalind Preston OBE Mr. Om Parkash Sharma (President, National Council of Hindu Temples)
Treasurer:	Mr Ramesh Shah
Director:	Mr Brian Pearce

1995 (Autumn)

Building for the Future:
Young people and
interfaith relations

**BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE:
YOUNG PEOPLE AND INTER
FAITH RELATIONS**

**The 1995 Autumn National Meeting
of
The Inter Faith Network for the UK**

**Held on 16 November 1995
At the National Council of Voluntary Organisations, All Saints Street,
London N1**

**BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE:
YOUNG PEOPLE AND INTER
FAITH RELATIONS**

**The 1995 Autumn National Meeting
of
The Inter Faith Network for the UK**

Building for the Future: Young People and Inter Faith Relations

Today in Britain, Bahai's, Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Jains, Jews, Muslims, Sikhs, Zoroastrians, people of other faiths and of no formal affiliation live side by side. The Inter Faith Network was established in 1987 to foster good relations between them. Most of its work has involved the older age groups: faith community leaders, local inter faith group people, and others committed to building a society where we can practise our own faith with integrity but also build bridges of understanding with other faith communities. Yet good inter faith relations are just as vital among the younger age groups and that is where the future bridge builders are to be found. At this meeting, Network organisations and invited guests explored some of the areas where positive inter faith work is already going on with young people, and looked at areas of need for future work. The morning session was chaired by Network Co-Chair, Mr Indarjit Singh, and the afternoon session was chaired by Co-Chair Rt Rev Roy Williamson, Anglican Bishop of Southwark. The following précis report is based on contributions from the day's programme:

Opening Presentation

Building for the Future: A view from the Network: Dr Harriet Crabtree, Deputy Director of the Inter Faith Network

Session I - Making schools models for a positive multi faith society

Growing up in multi faith Britain: a sixth former's perspective: Ms Roopa Kaur, Sikh student at Dr Challoner's High School, Chalfont St Giles

Religious education, values, and school ethos: foundations of inter faith understanding?:

Mr David Jackson, RE Adviser of Schools, Bradford and involved in inspection work for Bradford Local Education Authority and OFSTED

A management response to the challenge of creating good inter faith relations in schools:

Mr Mohamed Sabur, Deputy Head, Villiers High School, Southall

Open Forum

Session II - "Young adults" inter faith programmes and initiatives

The Council of Christians and Jews "Young Leaders" programme: Revd Jonathan Gorsky, Education Officer of the Council of Christians and Jews

The international youth initiative of the World Conference on Religion and Peace: Mr Nersey Raston, WCRP's UK representative

Ways to work towards better inter faith understanding on campus: Ms Janhavi Ambekar, National Hindu Students Forum (UK)

(Mr Attasham Ali of Young Muslims UK obliged to withdraw through illness)

Open forum

Session III - Local inter faith youth initiatives

Tyne and Wear REC Inter Faith Panel: Mr Hari Shukla

Birmingham Council of Faiths: Mrs Ruth Tetlow and Ms Shaleen Meelu

Bradford Young People's Forum: Mr Mohammed Saliss
Group Discussion.

Session IV - Setting the Agenda for the Future

Open forum

OPENING PRESENTATION

BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE: A VIEW FROM THE NETWORK

Dr Harriet Crabtree

The Inter Faith Network was founded in 1987 to promote good inter faith relations between Britain's major faith communities. It does this in a variety of ways: by making information available to people working to build better inter faith relations; by arranging meetings and special events where members of different faiths can come together to discuss issues of common concern; and by helping on particular multi faith initiatives in public and private sector organisations. The Network now has over 70 member organisations and which are committed as part of their work to helping create a society where there is respect for religious identity and a mutual respect and understanding between faiths, even where there may be disagreement on particular beliefs or issues.

One of the Network's most important activities is its organisation of meetings. Even in the days of fax and e-mail, face to face encounter remains the starting place for longer term working relationships and friendships. Now, one of the things that is rather noticeable about many inter faith gatherings is the large number of older participants. This is of course not just true of inter faith gatherings - it is true of gatherings in lots of areas of life. Partly it reflects the fact that people in their teens, twenties and early thirties are usually in full time education, seeking work, embarking on new jobs and may be involved in raising young families. Time to participate in voluntary activities is often very limited and they have to prioritize. It is the older people who have more time to be involved in voluntary community projects or to play a role in their faith communities events. Some religious traditions even see old age as the special time for making a particular contributions to your religious community or to socially important causes.

Nonetheless, it is important that building good relations between people of different faiths is not seen as relevant only to the older generation and that the responsibility for this is not just left up to them. We are, I think, in what you might call an "all hands on deck" situation. Once upon a time, creating good inter religious relations in Britain would not have been viewed as an urgent matter. Getting it right would have been thought of a desirable optional extra: a luxury to be carried out if some well intentioned people had the time. I think we now see that good inter religious relations are not a luxury. Difficulties in other countries around the world, and the rise of religious discrimination and sporadic inter religious discord in our own country are bringing home to us the fact that getting on well with each other cannot be taken for granted by members of the different faith communities and we are also learning that when things go wrong between communities life becomes both conflict ridden and stressful. All of us suffer when our society becomes one where people are suspicious of each other and unable to work together on the things that could make life better.

Now, the good inter faith relations which are a necessity for a civilised and peaceful society in keeping with our different faith traditions will not come into being just by wishing. They are a necessity which has to be worked for, and making relationships better is, as each one of us knows, no simple task. If you look at the work ahead, you realise just how many areas of our life we have to tackle to improve matters. For example, we learn our patterns of behaviour very early

on, so one very important question is how religion is presented in schools and how schools and colleges can work to foster an ethos in which students of different faith traditions are encouraged to practise these with integrity but to respect those whose traditions differ from their own. The presentations of Roopa Kaur, David Jackson, and Mohammed Sabur focus on this and those of Hari Shukla, Ruth Tetlow and Shaleen Meelu look at how two local inter faith groups have been working to involve school students in inter faith initiatives.

The same kind of questions of ethos faced by schools are also relevant to youth clubs and groups and religious youth organisations. The Network has had a number of enquiries over the last few years from organisations like the National Youth Agency, Barnardos, and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award about how to develop in their work a greater understanding of the importance of religious identity among young members and how also to create an organisational ethos where they are encouraged to develop understanding of each other's different beliefs and cultural backgrounds and to discuss differences in a respectful and positive way. These kinds of organisations are realising that this is vital in a multi faith society.

When young people leave school and move beyond the youth group age the need to pay attention to inter faith and inter cultural issues does not lessen. Mohammed Saliss will be talking about their effect on young people in Bradford, especially on those who are young and unemployed. Inter religious issues are also pressing for many who are presently in institutions of higher education. Universities have not in the past paid much attention to the interaction on campus of organisations from different religions, but this has been thrown into sharp relief over the last two years by higher profile campaigning and proselytising by some groups and by the lack of any real guidelines for how religious affiliation should be responded to by institutions of higher education. The Network has had a sharp increase in enquiries from college chaplains and we will be talking with representatives from student religious organisations early next year to discuss ways forward. The presentations of Janhavi Ambekar, Jonathan Gorsky, and Nersey Raston will focus our thoughts on ways that people of the 18-30 age range can pioneer new ways to improve inter religious relations on campus and off.

It is perhaps particularly important that there is a chance for people in the sixth form and 18-30 age range to develop the kind of skills that will make them the new bridge builders. There need to be chances to learn more deeply about ones own faith, to come also to understand the basics of the other main faiths, and to gain what one might call "diplomatic" and managerial skills. While inter faith encounter must always be honest and not just an exercise in niceties and politenesses, nonetheless it is a form of encounter that needs sensitivity and skill and good planning and facilitating skills. Everyone who has been engaged in inter faith work knows this. Immense care has to be taken not to exclude people who should be part of the process, or define us in ways we would not want to be defined. Even the planning is more complex than for many areas of life: trying to work events round the festivals of all the major faiths, and so on.

We need to make sure that there are good opportunities to learn these inter faith skills so that the country is not short, in future, of what you might call inter faith "ambassadors". We are glad that a number of faith community representatives have brought younger members with them today and we welcome them especially. In the coming years it will be very important that all our faith communities develop ways to encourage a small number of such future bridge builders in their midst: ways which foster the personal faith of young members and at the same time encourage

them to develop an expertise in understanding their own faith tradition's resources for responding to other faiths and an understanding of the general multi faith nature of society around them and planning for their communities' future role in this.

The Network started this year by helping arrange an inter faith meeting for sixth formers of all Britain's major faiths to meet with the Archbishop of Canterbury, and we devoted today's National Meeting to the general theme of young people and inter faith relations. Both events have a particular connection with the 1995 United Nations International Year for Tolerance. Early next year, as I have mentioned, we will be exploring with leaders of student religious organisations the possible ways to build better inter faith relations on Britain's campuses. These three pieces of work for 1995-96 reflect our commitment to this area of work but we have limited resources for pursuing further specific initiatives. It is our hope that those of you who are with us today will share with us your own ideas for carrying the work ahead and will gain some fresh ideas about ways your organisation can help the work of strengthening good inter faith relations by inviting young people to be part of the process and giving them opportunities to develop their skills as bridge builders of the future.

SESSION I - MAKING SCHOOLS MODELS FOR A POSITIVE MULTI-FAITH SOCIETY

This session focused on ways in which schools might encourage attitudes of respect and mutual understanding between pupils from different faith backgrounds. Both the presentations and the discussion underlined the vital importance of the role of schools in establishing, at an early stage, appropriate attitudes towards those of other faiths.

GROWING UP IN MULTI FAITH BRITAIN: A SIXTH FORMER'S PERSPECTIVE **Ms Roopa Kaur, Sikh student at Dr Challoner's High School, Chalfont St Giles**

At the age of 6, I was plucked out of a life of luxury in my grandmother's arms and was brought to a cold, wintry England from a warm, sunny Kenya. For 3 years I lived in Birmingham and 8 years ago moved to my current home, a little country village in the heart of Buckinghamshire called Chalfont St Giles. Presently we are the only Indian family and certainly the only traditional Sikhs to have moved into this area. To find ourselves in such a situation and to attend a school where only a very small percentage of the pupils came from ethnic minorities was a truly daunting experience after the more multi-faith community that I was accustomed to in both Kenya and Birmingham.

For myself and my sister, settling into our new schools was relatively easy. Once dressed in our school uniforms, our long hair fashionably plaited, we appeared almost identical to the rest of the pupils. However, for my brother, initial barriers, which were formed mainly due to ignorance, meant many people were apprehensive about his obvious different physical appearance because of his turban.

For us, and especially for my brother, there were two ways in which we could deal with the

cautious reaction from fellow pupils. Either we could keep a low profile in the school and try to blend into the background, or we could become actively involved in the foreground and help to overcome this initial apprehension. We chose to join in with community life full swing, my brother became the first Sikh boy to join the football team, and so on. Whatever was available we tried to become involved. It worked, and soon people saw little difference between us and them.

However, racial tolerance, I believe, means more than just acceptance. It includes understanding of different faiths and respect. Today in the world we are witnessing many racial prejudices, injustices and sufferings, the majority of which are brought about by adults, by those people who were brought up with little or no knowledge about other faiths and have had no positive exposure to people from different backgrounds. This is a two-way problem here in Britain as it is not only the indigenous population who are guilty of being prejudiced and discriminating against minorities, but vice-versa is also true in many cases. People hold very misleading views about each other and these fallacies must be corrected if this country is to improve its inter-faith relations.

But how can we achieve this? Educating adults is a very difficult task. Unfortunately, although the media has tried to improve its coverage of world faiths and cultures, much of what is broadcast on programmes is still very stereotypical and does little to improve the images of many of the minority faith groups. In my opinion, the most effective way of dispersing some of these fallacies is through schools and creating a strong positive impact on children as well as young adults like myself. Hopefully ideas will filter through to parents and will not only benefit society tomorrow, but will create an immediate effect today. Without trying to sound arrogant, I believe that parents can learn just as much from us as we can from them.

But how can good inter-faith relations begin at school? One obvious factor is religious education. Weekly lessons aim to create a balanced education for all. However, I think that it is only relatively recently that measures have been introduced to ensure that all pupils receive this. Speaking from my experience, I was only given a religious input during years 8 and 9 in school. During these lessons we learnt mainly about Christianity, in particular the names of the various chapters and components of the bible. In years 10 and 11 we discussed only moral issues such as human rights, animal rights and capital punishment but did not include the study of any religions. At the age of 12, learning only the theory work about Christianity had a limited significance and the majority of the information had already been told to us through various previous assemblies and talks. The complete omission of any traditional religious education during GCSE years meant that many remained ignorant about some of the world faiths. Personally, I believe that religious education is a subject which can sometimes be treated too seriously or be very stereotypical and dry. For many people religion is an integral part of their lifestyle. It should therefore be treated with great respect, but it should also be made interesting and enjoyable for those studying it by drawing on some of the similarities rather than all the differences. Today, with the decline in the importance placed upon religion in society, some children are unable to connect with many of the religious ideas and therefore more visual and practical inputs are needed, such as visits to places of worship.

Another important factor is cultural inputs. The introduction of cultural exposure will help to attract interest especially for those people of an older age group. Dance, music, drama could all help to create a greater understanding of people of different backgrounds. Certainly in my school I have found that through assemblies that I have taken, dance, music and Indian cookery lessons,

pupils and teachers alike have shown a greater interest in my faith and culture which in turn has enhanced their knowledge further. Investment into multi-cultural resources are vital if we are to create a lasting impression in schools.

Other inter-faith skills are learnt through day to day interaction. For me, in my school, where only around 5% are from ethnic minorities, I had little choice but to learn these skills and utilise them in order to avoid being alienated from others. In some single community schools, however, such as those now opening all around the country, these inter-faith skills would not be learnt naturally. Therefore, I feel it is important for them to make a conscious effort to interact with other schools and communities so that they do not segregate themselves totally. This could be done through a variety of media such as sport, drama and music.

Today, technological advances are making the world a smaller place day by day and there no longer remains one country in the world where there resides a population of only one colour, race and religion. Therefore, it is vital that we all learn how to live and work harmoniously with people of all beliefs. It is only once inter-faith skills have been mastered through greater exposure to a variety of faiths that we can begin to advance as a whole community to resolve conflicts and create universal tolerance.

In questions and discussion the following points were made:

- Home, school and faith community need to work together to provide encouragement and support for young people.
- The Girl Guides Association is an example of an organisation which has worked hard to develop appropriate ways of responding to the needs of young people from diverse religious backgrounds.
- In many ways younger people are more used to mixing in a multi-faith environment than are older people. Educating adults can be more difficult than educating young people!

**RELIGIOUS EDUCATION, VALUES, AND SCHOOL ETHOS:
FOUNDATIONS OF INTER FAITH UNDERSTANDING?**

**Mr David Jackson, RE Adviser of Schools, Bradford and Involved in Inspection Work
for Bradford Local Education Authority And OFSTED**

The 1988 Educational Reform Act requires schools to be concerned with the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils and of society. Making this a reality is challenging. The National Curriculum addresses questions of knowledge, understanding and skills but arguably does not pay sufficient attention to attitudes and to 'being and becoming'. Religious Education (RE) has an important part to play and the RE part of the curriculum is decided locally by Agreed Syllabus Conference and implemented with the assistance of the local Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE). Regrettably, not all schools manage to provide the 5% of curriculum time for RE advocated by the Schools Curriculum and Assessment Authority (SCAA).

Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) inspections are designed to examine not only standards, quality, efficiency and value for money but also the adequacy of the spiritual, moral, cultural and social development of the pupils. They examine whether a school provides its pupils with knowledge and insight into different values and beliefs and enables pupils to reflect on their experiences in a way which develops their spiritual awareness and self-knowledge. This is not just a question of reviewing the provision for religious education. It also involves looking at the impact of the curriculum as a whole, the character and quality of collective worship, and the example set for pupils by adults in the school. Inspections examine whether members of the school show respect and consideration for each other, the quality of behaviour within the school and whether opportunities are provided for pupils to widen their horizons through social and cultural events, including educational visits and visitors to the school such as people of different faiths and cultures and people working within the local community.

Schools are addressing questions of the spiritual, moral, cultural and social development of their pupils and are writing policy documents on their responsibility for this area. These policy documents need to recognise the contribution which can be made, for example, in the teaching of English literature, history and art as well as in religious education and collective worship. However, schools are in a very stressful situation with increased demands being placed upon them by the National Curriculum and with the accompanying growth of measures designed to provide greater accountability and to raise educational standards, often with no corresponding increase in the school budget. This has an impact on their ability to respond to the issues we are discussing today. So, also, does the "league table" culture which poses the risk that teachers will be driven to see pupils simply as exam takers rather than as rounded, whole persons. Raising educational standards in terms of examination results is of course important. But it would be disastrous for schools to concentrate solely on that.

On the whole schools are stronger on supporting the moral and social development of their pupils than their cultural and spiritual development. There is some uncertainty and resistance to the notion of 'spiritual development'. This may be because for every one pupil for whom religion is a living reality there are likely to be nine pupils who do not have a faith commitment or a family background in faith community involvement. Yet schools do need to promote understanding and respect on the part of the pupils for the notion of faith itself as well as respect between pupils of different faiths. The influence of the wider society, of the media and of peer group pressure can be inimical to steady and sustained growth in the development of a sound sense of personal worth, a set of values and a belief in a pupil's own spirit, understood as a power to grow and be creative in ways which link spiritual development with community responsibility. Schools exist within a surrounding society. Often evidence of a lack of values and social responsibility within that society is put down to the failings of parents and of schools. But social and economic factors can militate against the efforts made by both schools and families.

If schools do manage to incorporate a response to the multi-cultural reality of present society, they are likely to find it still harder to tackle the multi-faith dimension. But the factor of religious identity must be an important one in considering the needs of pupils, especially for those for whom religious belonging is the basis of their cultural identity. Sadly, some pupils who are highly committed members of a particular faith group can have a simplistic view of their faith which leads them to denigrate other faiths. There is a need constantly to combat inter-religious intolerance, the erection of barriers and developments which would lead to the breaking down of bridges. The

need for the Inter Faith Network has never been more acute.

Many pupils from a religious background remain ignorant about the meaning and potential of their faith for personal support and growth. There is a need for schools to support pupils in the development of an appreciation of their own religious and cultural heritage. In Bradford there is generous provision of support for RE through the Bradford Interfaith Education Centre, but even so most pupils receive little or no religious education after Key Stage 4 and opportunities for most pupils to engage directly in focused discussion of personal social values are limited. It is good when these issues come up, for example, in the context of English literature or history. But there is a need for some direct provision to explore personal, spiritual and social issues.

The national model syllabuses for religious education promulgated by SCAA can be seen as encouraging compartmentalisation of different religions and hence as leading to examining each religion in isolation rather than looking at thematic issues. The new draft Bradford syllabus for RE stresses the need for the development of dialogue between the different faiths and the study units acknowledge the distinct nature of different faiths but stress what different faiths share and highlight this through thematic study. The curriculum at KS4 explores, for example, questions of truth and meaning, religion and relationships, religion and the environment, religion and human rights, religion and medical ethics and conflict in religion and religions in cooperation. The syllabus represents a conscious effort to produce a syllabus which is appropriate to a multi-faith local community. Regardless of the syllabus being used, it is vitally important that religious education teachers receive adequate in-service training and support of the kind which the Bradford Interfaith Education Centre tries to provide and which we hope other LEAs may consider following.

Collective worship also has relevance to the questions at which we are looking today. The present framework for collective worship is problematic. Schools are very creative in their response to it. But the attempt in national legislation and the Department for Education Circulars to narrow the definition of collective worship has aroused antagonism on the part of head teachers and staff. In Bradford 50 schools have received a determination from the local SACRE which allows them to provide for separate faith worship alongside assemblies for all the pupils in the school. This kind of approach can provide a securer basis for mutual respect and understanding. It is good that there are plans in which the Network are involved for initiating a consultative review of the present requirements for collective worship.

More generally there is a need to find a language in which we can talk about the spiritual in schools which may be quite secular in their outlook. These issues are of concern not only in this country but more widely. The Bradford Interfaith Education Centre has been given a grant from the European Community to help develop inter faith education materials for schools across Europe in collaboration with a number of European cities. This is the agenda for a forthcoming meeting in Bradford. It is good that we are beginning to focus more on this whole range of important issues and I welcome the reflections of participants.

**A MANAGEMENT RESPONSE TO THE CHALLENGE OF CREATING
GOOD INTER FAITH RELATIONS IN SCHOOLS
Mr Mohamed Sabur, Deputy Head, Villiers High School, Southall**

Let me give a little background about myself. I came to Britain in my teens from Uganda and at my school and at my Teacher Training College in Swansea I was the only black student. My teaching experience has been in London where I have taught in Brent as well as in Ealing where I am presently teaching at Villiers High School in Southall.

It is interesting that the 1988 Education Reform Act requires schools to ensure that they promote not only the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of their pupils, but also of society. This underlines the important role which schools play in shaping the character of our society through the attitudes which they encourage in pupils. The wording in the 1988 Act is an adaptation of similar wording in the 1944 Act where 'community' was used rather than 'society'. At the time when the 1988 legislation was being considered, the then Minister of State, Mrs Angela Rumbold, suggested that the use of the word 'society' would encourage the education of children in such a way as to promote the ultimate development of communities within our society. The use of the word 'community' in the 1944 Act implied a homogenous mono-cultural and mono-religious society. The shift from 'community' to 'society' in the 1988 Act is a recognition that Britain is indeed a plural society with a range of different cultural and religious backgrounds among its people.

The implication of this is that pupils in all schools, regardless of whether they are themselves internally diverse, need to be encouraged to develop appropriate attitudes of respect and mutual understanding among those who form the wider society of which they will be a part. A good teacher needs to understand and appreciate the background of the children being taught and be able to relate the education which is offered to the life experience and background of those pupils.

The kind of leadership provided by the head teacher and senior management team in a school is of great importance. An effective school is one where there are shared visions and goals so that staff are able to promote the aspirations of their pupils within consistent policies and practices. A learning environment which encourages self-control among pupils is a pre-requisite for a satisfactory classroom ethos. High expectations and self-esteem among teachers, students and parents need to be encouraged. There is a need for positive reinforcement, clear feedback, and rewards and disciplinary rules rather than simply punishment and criticism.

Students need to feel that they have some kind of say in the way in which their own learning process is managed and operated so that they are able, in a sense, to take charge of their own learning. The partnership between home and school is of vital importance and also with the communities from which the pupils come including faith communities. A school leadership, including governors and senior staff, needs to have a very clear vision of the kind of school they want to create. They will need to be in dialogue with the communities around the school. It is helpful for a school to have a mission statement which can be translated into goals from which targets are set. These targets have to be set and prioritised. A school needs to create an environment where pupils feel that they are secure and where their cultural and religious backgrounds are going to be respected. Aspects of the curriculum and of extra-curricular activities can be developed to underpin this sense of security.

Collective worship in schools provides opportunities for representatives from faith communities to come into the school, particularly at times of particular religious festivals. It is helpful on special occasions to set aside more time during the day to mark a particular festival, for example, with drama or displays and exhibitions. There needs to be an overt signal of the importance which a school attaches to the cultural and religious diversity within it. There needs to be flexibility for pupils to be able to dress in a traditional way within the broad requirements for school uniform.

The kind of behaviour required from pupils needs, at all times, to include showing proper respect for those from different cultural and religious backgrounds. Visits to different places of worship can be an enriching cross-cultural exercise for pupils. This is an area in which SACRE's (Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education) can help schools, for example by developing lists of places of worship which will accept visits from schools and providing a list of speakers from different faith communities who are willing in turn to visit the schools themselves.

In discussion the following points were made:

- There needs to be a balance between ensuring that children have an adequate education in the background of their own faith and ensuring that they also have some knowledge of the faith of others. It is the task of faith communities themselves to instruct children in their own faith tradition. The task of the school is a more broadly educational one. In terms of a pupil's own faith development, the role of the school is, therefore, supplementary and complementary to that of the faith community.
- Schools must take care not to undermine the faith identity of a pupil, but it is appropriate for pupils to be encouraged to learn about other religious traditions as a basis for greater understanding and respect. Pointing to areas of agreement between different religious traditions is not in itself syncretistic.
- A difficulty for schools is that many pupils do not have a secure faith commitment of their own.
- The development of the work of SACRE's has led to increased partnership between schools and faith communities in a constructive and helpful way. Some places of worship have indeed been overwhelmed by requests for visits from schools and have had to limit these. There is a need for adequate briefing for pupils in preparation for a visit and adequate briefing of the place of worship as well.

SESSION II - 'YOUNG ADULTS' INTER-FAITH PROGRAMMES AND INITIATIVES

This session offered the opportunity to hear about two ongoing projects designed to involve young adults in inter faith work, and to learn of some of the challenges facing those seeking to develop better inter faith relations on Britain's university campuses.

**THE COUNCIL OF CHRISTIANS AND JEWS "YOUNG LEADERS"
PROGRAMME**

**Revd Jonathan Gorsky (Education Officer of the CCJ and a member of
the Jewish Community)**

Christian-Jewish relations have particular problems and challenges. The two traditions have been in close relationship and often in conflict. Obstacles to good relationships between people of different faiths can arise from within their own religious structures but we can also draw on the resources of our own faiths to promote a greater understanding of others. It is important to realise that building good inter-faith relations is not simply a question of developing general attitudes of respect but of tackling particular problematic issues.

So far as students of institutions of higher education are concerned, there are likely to be few for whom inter-faith dialogue is high on the agenda. Young committed Christians can have a very exclusive view of their faith. Young Jewish students can be profoundly introspective and more concerned with their own identity than with developing open relations with others. Both groups may possess profound commitments to their own traditions in ways that do not produce an interest in dialogue or with wrestling with coming to terms with 'the other'.

University Chaplains often comment on the fact that students may respond to their new environment by revelling in the freedom which they have gained from past restraints and, in the course of this, move away from their own faith commitment, or may wish to focus on exploring and understanding better their own faith identity. So inter-faith dialogue is not usually the first concern of students.

The founding fathers and mothers of the Council of Christians and Jews established it in an awareness of the threats posed by anti-semitism in the context of the dark days of the Second World War. This was, in the past, the main focus of the work of CCJ and dialogue in theological and spiritual terms could at times seem cautious and hesitant. By contrast young people want to plunge into discussion and debate on all the difficult issues and to confront much more directly theological differences between the two traditions and the political dilemmas in the Middle East. This means that for those who are prepared to engage in inter-faith dialogue at student level, it has a different flavour to that among those from an older generation.

To meet these kind of concerns, the CCJ has arranged visits for young people to Israel where they visit, for example, right-wing Jewish settlements, the PLO and a whole range of different groups across the political and religious spectrum. This is one of the CCJ's initiatives among young people. Every two years some 60 Christian theological students attend a programme at the Leo Baeck College, the training institution for rabbis within the progressive Jewish tradition. They spend time in synagogues and with Jewish families which provides a framework for informal education along side the more formal content of the programme. This helps to introduce them to the reality of another religious tradition to their own.

The CCJ has also developed a young people's group which arranges seminars, meetings and discussions, including weekend conferences. The aim is to help participants understand and

appreciate the world of 'the other'. Sometimes a social issue, such as that of refugees, forms the subject for discussion; sometimes a more specifically theological or spiritual issue. There is an increasing desire on the part of the young people participating in this group to find ways to develop opportunities for joint social action going beyond meeting and discussion.

The education staff of the CCJ are being invited increasingly into schools to address, for example, sixth form groups. The response has been very encouraging indeed. 400 young people took part in a seminar on prejudice at a Northern Ireland school and it was fascinating to see the crosslinks made between sectarian intolerance within the Northern Ireland community and Christian-Jewish relationships. The programme of work of the CCJ with young people underlines the need for those developing inter-faith programmes for young adults to meet the desire of young people for engagement and challenge.

**THE INTERNATIONAL YOUTH INITIATIVE OF THE
WORLD CONFERENCE ON RELIGION AND PEACE**

**Mr Nersey Raston, UK representative on the International Youth Committee on the
World Conference on Religion and Peace.**

Thank you for inviting me to speak. I serve on the International Youth Committee of WCRP. The new youth committee was elected a year ago at the Youth Conference preceding the WCRP World Assembly in Riva del Garda, Italy. It is quite a privilege for me to be here speaking to you now as I am only very new member to the inter faith circle. I first got introduced to WCRP quite by accident: I was in France for my cousin's wedding in 1993 and was told about a youth conference in Cluny. I had assumed that it was a Baha'i youth conference but only found out that it was in fact WCRP when I got there!

One of my recent responsibilities was organising WCRP youth participation at the World Social Summit in Copenhagen in March 1995. We managed to find the means to get 20 of our youth there to attend the numerous youth activities associated with the Summit. We left a definite impression on the minds of the other youth there as we were the only inter faith group represented. The organisers commented on the maturity and knowledge of WCRP members who voiced their opinions in discussions and workshops. We had a gruelling schedule as we raced to attend as many events and activities as we could during our short time there.

At the event, we were also responsible for the inter faith meditation room at the World Leaders Summit itself. We had problems with security fears and the like, not to mention actually getting a room! We did also somehow manage to meet each other as a group to focus on our international work, but we had to do this in our spare hours: in fact one meeting started at 11 pm and finished near 3 am! Considering that we had youth members from as far as part as Japan, Lebanon, Israel, India, Namibia and Croatia you can see why we were so keen to meet. This is how inter faith work is. I am sure all of you have found yourselves in similar situations. Inter faith work is demanding and does require lots of stamina at times if we are to achieve our goals.

The most important action we can take is to provide the means of bringing youth together on projects that get them working together to break down barriers of prejudice. I like doing inter

faith work and I want to work with other youth who similarly make the time to work on peace and justice issues. There is always the need for youth to learn to value more the different cultures. Equally there is a need to engage in cooperative projects to put something more into the community whether that community be local national or global.

In the UK we hope that very soon we can start planning a project to bring university students together from diverse religious backgrounds to work in this way. The idea is to take the university groups to local primary and secondary schools to work with teachers to give lessons or workshops on dealing with prejudice in the school grounds. The subjects tackled would range from bullying through to racism and sexism.

WCRP Youth have an International Newsletter entitled *Bridges*. This is usually produced twice yearly and carries information and reports from the various regions and keeps us all informed about what everyone is doing. The compiling of articles and the chasing of people for reports is quite a major task and consumes vast amounts of energy on the part of the editor and any assistants that are free to help. Fortunately, for *Bridges*, I am not the editor!

The next European WCRP youth conference is being planned by German youth who hope to host it in the Summer of 1997. European gatherings usually attract a number of international participants. I would encourage other young people to attend because hopefully you will find the joy of meeting with other religious youth, speaking a variety of languages, all working to understand each other and providing a model of cooperation for the world around them. It is this sort of event that first got me involved with inter faith work and WCRP.

I have given you an idea of the sort of work youth do get involved with internationally and have provided you with some ways you too can get involved in areas where we want to have an impact. I hope you can share these thoughts with youth that you know and encourage them to work in inter faith area.

WAYS TO WORK TOWARDS BETTER INTER FAITH UNDERSTANDING ON CAMPUS

**Ms Janhavi Ambekar, Student at the London School of Oriental and African Studies
and of National Hindu Students Forum (UK)**

The Forum links Hindu students in some 30 higher educational institutions. It organises social events and discussions and so far has links with the Union of Jewish Students and the British Association of Sikh Students. Discussions have focused on such topics as faith, symbols and marriage. There is at present concern over the activities of Hizb ut Tahrir, a group of militant Muslim students. There has been concern that its activities represent an abuse of the freedom which university campuses provide.

As a British Hindu one should not feel that these two identities are in conflict. There is a need for people to feel that their faith identity is recognised and respected. The campaign over Bhaktivedanta Manor has shown the need to develop more mutual tolerance and understanding within British society.

There need to be better facilities at universities and colleges to meet the needs of students from different faiths. At the moment there are chaplaincies for Christians but very little provision for students of other faiths.

There also need to be social events and other gatherings where students from different faith backgrounds can meet one another in order to build understanding and friendships across the divides between different faith communities.

(Mr Attasham Ali of Young Muslims UK obliged to withdraw through illness)

In discussion the following points were made:

- The actions of Hizb ut Tahrir are causing concern in a number of institutions and in one or two cases they have been banned. But it is important to recognise that it is only one organisation among Muslim students and has only limited participation. The need is not for confrontation but for dialogue. [It was noted that it was unfortunate that because of illness the planned Muslim student speaker could not be present so that he could put the position of Hizb ut Tahrir into a broader context].
- Many young people are struggling to define their own identity, including their religious identity, and in the process a strengthening of their faith commitment can lead to more intolerant attitudes.
- The Network could perhaps help by discussing with representatives from different student organisations ways in which better inter-faith relations can be developed in higher education institutions.
- There is a danger that violent language makes violent action 'thinkable' and 'do-able'; there is a need to work to create an environment within which violence is neither 'thinkable' nor 'do-able'. No faith is without an extremist dimension and all need to work hard to promote greater mutual tolerance and understanding in every area of life.

SESSION III - LOCAL INTER-FAITH YOUTH INITIATIVES

This session focused on local initiatives to bring young people of different faiths together.

THE TYNE AND WEAR RACE EQUALITY COUNCIL

Mr Hari Shukla, for many years the Director of the Tyne and Wear Race Equality Council and the organiser of its Inter Faith Panel, of which he continues to be an active member.

Those involved in inter-faith relations on Tyne and Wear can feel isolated because we are quite a distance from the nearest big towns: 100 miles, for example, from Edinburgh and 100 miles from Leeds. There are some 60,000 people from ethnic minorities on Tyne and Wear where 56 different languages are spoken. It is a cosmopolitan area. Religion is an important aspect of a person's identity and there is a need for better understanding between the different faiths now to be found in Britain.

Bishop Ronald Bowlby helped to launch the inter-faith forum in 1974. The purpose was to work towards developing better relations between the different faith communities and a better understanding of the point of view of others. This has to be based on the development of a sense of mutual trust. At times of crisis people from different faiths now come together, as they did, for example, at the time of the Gulf War, the Ayodyah mosque incident and most recently the assassination of Mr Rabin.

There is a good understanding between different faiths at a leadership level but it is important that a good understanding is also developed among young people. An inter-faith youth forum has been launched and the local inter-faith group has facilitated the establishment of this. While adults are present as facilitators they let the young people speak for themselves. It is instructive to see, for example, Roman Catholic girls and Sikh girls comparing their experiences of feeling isolated in their schools because they are 'different' from their fellow pupils. We have found from the forum that young people want to ask straight questions and to get straight answers. Too often, adults advise young people not to get drawn into discussion about their religion and this discourages them from taking part in inter-faith events. Added to this is the pressure of finding time for such events and discussions in busy lives.

The Tyne and Wear group, in addition to promoting an inter-faith youth forum, has also taken steps, with the support of the local SACRE, to provide help for schools. There is a list of some 30 to 40 volunteers from different faith communities who are willing to go into local schools to talk about their faith and engage in discussion with the pupils. There are also arrangements to help schools set up visits to local places of worship. Resource material on different faiths is being built up at the local teachers centre.

The University of Newcastle has set up a Hindu Studies Group to produce material about Hinduism and a similar project is planned in relation to Islam. The intention is help provide material which will help parents in the passing on of their religious faith to their children. A programme of visits between families of different faiths is also a feature of the local group's activities. All these activities on behalf of the local group are designed to encourage and support the faith identity of young people and to promote better mutual understanding between them.

BIRMINGHAM COUNCIL OF FAITHS
Mrs Ruth Tetlow, former Chair of Birmingham Council of Faiths
and teacher at St Philip's Sixth Form College, Birmingham

The Birmingham Council of Faiths was previously called the Birmingham Inter Faiths Council but has changed its name to reassure people that it is not aiming to blur the boundaries between different faiths, but rather to uphold different religious identities while promoting good relationships between them. In Birmingham there is a strong commitment to involving young people in inter-faith work and a number of school teachers and parents are involved in the Birmingham Council of Faiths who have personal and professional interests which come together in their concern for young people.

A lunchtime inter-faith group has been launched at the sixth form college at which I teach. This provides an opportunity for young people to learn to listen to one another and to share personal experiences of individuals who come from different backgrounds. It is important for young people to be free to speak as individuals and not to be labelled as 'representatives' of a particular faith.

Young people tend to be interested in shared activity: experience is more important for them than discussion. In general young people have an impatience with the levels of hypocrisy among older people. Sometimes some young people are over-committed to an aggressive interpretation of their faith. By contrast, others may be diffident about their own faith commitment. For either of these reasons they may be reluctant to get involved in inter-faith dialogue. There is a need to develop opportunities to engage young people in constructive encounter dialogue with one another.

The Birmingham Council of Faiths has looked for ways to involve young people. Conferences for sixth formers have been arranged by the Council. We have found that it is best for these to be held on Sundays. Participants are drawn from the youth wings of different faith communities and young people are involved in the planning process. The Conferences involve presentations and workshop discussions. Sometimes a panel of 'experts' is available. The young people subject them to a very direct questioning process! We have found that, alongside discussion and worship, there is a need to provide opportunities for drama, music, dance and games so that inter-faith encounter has its lighter side.

In 1992 it was decided to raise funds to send two young people to the International Inter Faith Conference in Bangalore which took place in connection with the 1993 Year of Inter Religious Understanding. In the event £2,000 was raised and four young people were sent. Shaleen Meelu was one of them.

BIRMINGHAM COUNCIL OF FAITHS 1993 YOUTH VISIT TO BANGALORE
Ms Shaleen Meelu

Ms Shaleen Meelu, at present a student at Imperial College in London, was one of the four young people funded by the Birmingham Inter Faiths Council to visit Bangalore. She explained to the meeting that:

I found that the context of inter-faith dialogue in India was very different from what I was used to in Birmingham. In India people may dedicate their whole lives to inter-faith relationships, whereas in Birmingham inter-faith activity is on a much more occasional basis. Those of us who went to Bangalore found we came back wanting to find ways of working constructively to tackle problems within society. The experience made us realise how little we knew about ourselves and our own faith traditions and we realised we needed to learn more about these and gain more self understanding as well as finding out about other's faiths.

Time has gone by since the conference and although the desire for social action is strong it is difficult to implement this because we are all now busy as students. I find that at my college there is a lack of understanding and knowledge among students of other faiths and other cultural backgrounds and there is a need for me to start again with the basics in terms of developing mutual understanding and awareness. Even though you want to move on towards more ambitious kinds of inter faith co-operation with a social dimension, it's important to start where people are.

BRADFORD YOUNG PEOPLE'S FORUM
Mr Mohamed Saliss from Bradford

The Forum began after the recent problems in Bradford. It was set up "by young people and for young people" of any background, race, culture or religion between the ages of 12 and 25 and it has representatives from different areas of Bradford and from different communities and age groups. Among other things, it brings young people from different communities in Bradford together to build trans-cultural links, and to raise awareness about the importance of racial harmony.

The Forum helps young people with particular questions or problems by signposting them to other organisations that can help them. For example, on a religious issue, it might suggest they talk to the Bradford Interfaith Centre. Or for another kind of problem it might direct them to Youth and Community Services or another suitable agency.

The Forum recognises that there is a need to develop better relationships among young people themselves, but it also is there to give a voice to young people within the city. People who are making policy decisions about services and opportunities in Bradford need to be aware of the concerns of young people and pay attention to them. This role of "giving a voice" is very important with the communities too because young people have difficulty communicating with their elders and are feeling at the moment like they are being neglected.

It is not just in Bradford that young people have a need for this kind of forum and hopefully the long term objective would be to set up forums in other parts of the country.

At this point there was an opportunity for brief discussion in small groups before a break for tea.

SESSION IV - SETTING THE AGENDA FOR THE FUTURE

Bishop Roy Williamson invited contributions from speakers and other participants in an open forum to close the meeting. The main points made were:

- The Network might consider arranging for inter faith representatives to be at 'freshers fairs' at universities and colleges. It could also help promote meetings between different student groups. In higher education institutions there is a need to balance freedom of speech with the need to ensure proper respect for different religious and cultural identities.
- Most universities are alive to the issue of equal opportunities. Perhaps equal opportunity policy can be used as the framework within which to press for greater recognition of the needs of students of different faiths. There is a need for higher education institutions to develop structures to enable them to consult students of the different faiths. At present most chaplains are Christian, although there are some Jewish chaplains. Many universities are evolving student charters which can be used to promote a commitment to appropriate attitudes on campus. It is helpful that the Network has circulated its code of conduct on inter-faith relations to higher education institutions. This has helped to put the issue on the agenda of these institutions but there is a need to move forward to incorporate appropriate provisions in the charters and student handbooks of the institution itself.
- Ideally every city and town would have its own inter-faith youth forum. The Network needs to develop material and resources which would promote this development and identify potential sources of funding. There is a need to emphasise the commonalities between different faiths and also to find a way of checking on the accuracy of material on different faiths before this is issued.
- There is an enormous amount of youth work being undertaken. It may not all be labelled 'inter-faith' but yet involve people from different faith communities.
- A quick national review of the position could be undertaken through contacting local Race Equality Councils and Councils of Voluntary Service.
- Young people have a stake in the future and it is particularly important to involve them in inter-faith activity. The Network should sponsor a weekend conference for young people at which young people could be consulted about what needs they have in the inter-faith field. But it might be better to think in terms of regional gatherings for young people rather than a national conference.
- The Network has developed valuable links among those involved in inter-faith work at adult level. Something similar needs to be done with young people. The Network could help by producing a list of those involved in inter-faith activity among young people in different areas. The voluntary sector youth organisations have an important role to play in this process. There is a need to involve local education authorities and youth services in inter-faith work among young people.
- Peer education among young people is vitally important. Young people in those areas

where there is inter-faith activity among them could visit other areas to encourage young people there to become involved.

- Local inter-faith groups should be encouraged to focus directly on inter-faith activity among young people. There is a need for greater opportunities for exchange visits between young people in different faith communities. There are questions of central and local government resourcing of work designed to promote better inter-faith understanding among young people.
- The work being done in schools is of vital importance and there is a need for schools to build good working links with local faith communities. Local faith communities should identify volunteers who are ready to help through visits to schools. A resource like the Bradford Interfaith Education Centre can be of enormous benefit and it would be helpful if other local education authorities would develop similar facilities.

Bishop Roy Williamson thanked all those who had taken part in the open forum and in the day's meeting as a whole and the staff of the Network office for organising the event. Important issues had emerged from the day which would need to be considered by the Network's Executive Committee including ways of sharing good practice and helping to put people working at the same task in touch with one another across the country. But the most important requirement of all was to listen to young people themselves and to hear what they have to say about their needs and concerns.

MEMBER ORGANISATIONS OF THE INTER FAITH NETWORK

Representative Bodies: Afro West Indian United Council of Churches; Arya Pratinidhi Sabha (UK); Baha'i Community of the United Kingdom; Board of Deputies of British Jews; Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland Commission for Inter-Faith Relations; Buddhist Society; Council of African and Afro-Caribbean Churches (UK); Council of Mosques (UK and Eire); Friends of the Western Buddhist Order; Imams and Mosques Council (UK); Islamic Cultural Centre, Regent's Park, London; Jain Samaj Europe; Maha Bodhi Society of Sri Lanka (UK); National Council of Hindu Temples; Roman Catholic Committee for Other Faiths of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales; Sikh Council for Interfaith Relations (UK); Sikh Missionary Society; Swaminayan Hindu Mission; Vishwa Hindu Parishad (UK); World Ahl ul-Bayt (AS) Islamic League; World Islamic Mission (UK); The Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe

Inter Faith Organisations: Council of Christians and Jews; International Association for Religious Freedom (British Members' Group); London Society of Jews and Christians; Standing Conference of Jews, Christians and Muslims in Europe; World Conference on Religion and Peace (UK and Ireland Chapter); World Congress of Faiths

Local Inter Faith Groups: Birmingham Fellowship of Faiths; Birmingham Inter-Faiths Council; Bradford Concord Inter Faith Society; Bristol Interfaith Group; Cambridge Inter-Faith Group; Cardiff Interfaith Association; Coventry Inter Faith Group; Derby Open Centre Multi-Faith Group; Dudley Council of Faiths; Edinburgh Interfaith Association; Glasgow Sharing of Faiths Group; Harrow Inter-Faith Council; Kirkless and Calderdale Inter-Faith Fellowship; Leeds Concord Inter-Faith Fellowship; Leicester Council of Faiths; Manchester Inter Faith Group; Medway Inter-Faith Group; Merseyside Inter Faith Group; Newham Association of Faiths; Nottingham Inter-Faith Group; Oxford Round Table of Religions; Peterborough Inter-Faith Council; Reading Inter-Faith Group; Redbridge Council of Faiths; Richmond Inter-Faith Group; Rochdale Interfaith Action; Tyne and Wear Community Relations Council Inter Faith Panel; Walsall Inter Faith Group; Waltham Forest All Faiths Group; Wellingborough Multi-Faith Group; Wolverhampton Inter-Faith Group

Education and Academic Bodies: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan; Centre for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations, Selly Oak, Birmingham; Centre for the Study of Judaism and Jewish-Christian Relations, Selly Oak, Birmingham; Community Religions Project, University of Leeds; Institute of Jainology; Islamic Foundation, Leicester, Multi Faith Center, Birmingham; Religious Education Council; Shap Working Party on World Religions in Education; Standing Conference on Inter-Faith Dialogue in Education; Study Centre for Christian-Jewish Relations, (Sisters of Zion); University of Derby Religious Resource and Research Centre

NETWORK OFFICERS

Co-chairs:	Rt Rev Roy Williamson (Bishop of Southwark) Mr Indarjit Singh (Chairman, Sikh Council for Inter Faith Relations)
Vice-chairs:	Dr. Mughram Al-Ghamdi (Director General, Islamic Cultural Centre, London) Mrs Ivy Guttridge MBE (Wolverhampton Inter Faith Group) Mrs Rosalind Preston OBE Mr. Om Parkash Sharma (President, National Council of Hindu Temples)
Treasurer:	Mr Ramesh Shah
Director:	Mr Brian Pearce

1996

Britain's Faith Communities: Equal Citizens?

**BRITAIN'S FAITH COMMUNITIES:
EQUAL CITIZENS?**

**Report on the
1996 National Meeting
of
The Inter Faith Network
for the UK**

**BRITAIN'S FAITH COMMUNITIES:
EQUAL CITIZENS?**

**1996 National Meeting
of
The Inter Faith Network for the UK**

**Held on 4 July 1996
At the Central Library, Peterborough**

Inter Faith Network for the UK (Registered Charity No 296773)
5/7 Tavistock Place, London WC1H 9SN, Tel 0171 388 0008
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Britain's Faith Communities: Equal Citizens

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The theme of the meeting

The Network arranged this day conference to look at a number of issues which surround the status of the members of Britain's faith communities.

We are all part of one national society, yet in many ways a genuine equality of opportunity is not yet present. Some of us are better protected against religious discrimination, as Mr Khurshid Drabu's speech explains. Others of us are more thoroughly consulted by policy makers and service providers and therefore have more chance to shape our common life, as Mr Brian Pearce outlines. Yet there are signs of hope in the good practice of cities like Leicester where, as Mr Imtiaz Farookhi shows, the needs of the various faith communities have been taken seriously - as has their ability to make a significant contribution to civic life. Equality is, after all, about being able to give as well as receive.

The transcripts of the meeting afford a glimpse into some of the complexities of multi faith Britain. They show that we are on the road to a more equitable shared life, but that there is still some considerable way to go. The Network, along with its 80 member bodies, is committed to a society where there is mutual understanding and respect between faiths and where there is no unjust discrimination and exclusion. For more information about its work, contact The Inter Faith Network, 5/7 Tavistock Place, London WC1H 9SN, Tel. 0171 388 0008.

BRITAIN'S FAITH COMMUNITIES: EQUAL CITIZENS?

Proceedings of the Day

Mr Om Parkash Sharma, Network Co-Chair, welcomed participants to the meeting and introduced the Rt Worshipful Mayor of the City of Peterborough, Councillor Ayub Choudhary, who took office in May as Peterborough's first Muslim Mayor.

Councillor Choudhary then welcomed the gathering to Peterborough. He referred to the ceremony which had been held at Peterborough Cathedral on his becoming Mayor which had brought together representatives from different faith groups within the city. He emphasised the importance of the religions of the world working together for peace and harmony and to prevent conflict. In this context, he welcomed the work of The Inter Faith Network in promoting understanding among people from different faiths and wished it well on the occasion of this meeting in Peterborough.

Mr Sharma thanked Councillor Choudhary for his words of welcome. He then invited the Director of the Network, **Mr Brian Pearce**, to introduce the theme of the day's meeting and to offer some reflections on the Network's role in tackling the kind of issues on which it would be focusing. After Brian Pearce's speech, Mr Sharma introduced **Mr Imtiaz Farookhi**, the Chief Executive of Leicester City Council since 1991, as well as a board member of the recently formed Environment Agency and a Director of the Leicestershire Training and Enterprise Council. The morning presentations were followed by a comments and questions session. The points made are noted at the end of the transcript of the speaker's initial presentations. **Mr Sharma** drew the discussion to a close and again thanked the two speakers in the morning session.

After a break for lunch, the Network's AGM for 1996 was held, following a rearrangement of the timetable for the day. The meeting then broke into more informal small groups to discuss the meetings' theme and, in particular, to formulate questions to put to Mr Drabu after his presentation later in the afternoon.

Following these small group meetings and tea, **Bishop Roy Williamson**, Network Co-Chair, introduced **Mr Khurshid Drabu**, Head of the Litigation and Complaints Division of the Commission for Racial Equality. He had very kindly come from Birmingham at a few hours' notice to stand in for Mr Sukhdev Sharma, Executive Director of the CRE, who had been taken ill the previous evening. Mr Drabu, who heads the CRE's special project team on religious discrimination issues, based his address on a text prepared for delivery by Mr Sharma.

Bishop Williamson thanked Mr Khurshid Drabu warmly for having come to Peterborough at such short notice and for having dealt so fully with all the questions which had been put to him. He closed the meeting with a period of silence in which he invited those present to remember Mr Hari Joshi, President of the Hindu Council for the UK, who had died recently.

PUBLIC LIFE AND THE PLURALITY OF FAITHS: THE ROLE OF THE INTER FAITH NETWORK

**Mr Brian Pearce
Director
The Inter Faith Network for the UK**

Introduction

The theme of today's Network National Meeting is: "Britain's Faith Communities: Equal Citizens?". I hope it may be helpful in setting the scene for today for me to offer some introductory reflections on the Network's own role in addressing this theme.

The Network's aims

The Network was formed in 1987 with the bringing together of four types of organisations with a particular concern for inter faith relations: representative bodies of the different faith communities; national and local inter faith organisations; and bodies with an educational and academic interest in multi faith issues. The linking of these different kinds of organisation and the wide range of its growing number of member bodies have been important strengths for the Network.

From the outset we have had two broad aims. The first is to increase mutual understanding and respect between our different faith communities and encourage a better public understanding of our different religious traditions. The second is to promote the fuller participation in Britain's public life of our different faith communities. The Network's role in pursuing this second aim has been even more important than we had anticipated when it was first established. The concerns of Britain's different faith communities and the importance of religious identity have become much more prominent items on the public agenda and this is, without doubt, partly as a result of the Network's efforts.

The importance of consensus on public statements

The Network is here to strengthen and to complement the work of its member organisations, not to displace them. This is one reason why, right from the start, we have been hesitant about taking a Network stand, or making Network statements, on a wide range of specific policy issues. Another reason is that, all along, we have, as far as possible, operated through consensus. Very often, there will, understandably, be differences of view between, and sometimes within, our member organisations on particular issues. We attach great importance to respecting the integrity and independence of our member organisations and even when there is a clear majority in favour of a particular position we have to take care not to brush to one side those who take the minority view. This cautious position is, I believe, a strength rather than a weakness of the Network, as it means that our member organisations have not had anxieties about the kind of role which the Network is playing on their behalf.

Naturally there will be times when there is a united view and that can then be voiced. We have, for example, produced a number of general statements setting out agreed approaches to the promotion of good inter faith relations in this country and the kind of society we would like to see, but these have been produced only after very full consultation with our member bodies on the texts of these.

So the primary role of the Network has not been to speak on the public stage "on behalf of" its member bodies, but rather to ensure that particular issues of concern to them are properly explored and that all our different faith communities have an opportunity to contribute their own views to this consultative process.

A trusted source of information, advice and contacts

Over the years that the Network has been in existence the Network office has worked hard to build up a wide range of contacts with Government Departments, other public bodies, voluntary organisations and the media. As a result, the Network is now widely known and has become an acknowledged point of contact used by a large number of organisations and individuals. We have made use of this developing range of links to help make progress towards the kind of society we all want to have: one in which the particular needs of our faith communities receive proper attention and in which we are truly equal citizens.

What does our work involve? First of all, information is important. Our reputation for being able to provide accurate information, as well as helpful advice, means that we have become a valuable resource which organisations and individuals want to use. The publication, with the University of Derby, of *Religions in the UK: A Multi-Faith Directory* has been an important step in making better information on our faith communities more widely available and the second edition will be appearing next year. It has become an essential reference book. We are regularly consulted on drafts of material which others are going to publish dealing with Britain's faith communities and we can recommend a range of consultants in those communities who can help with more substantial exercises.

But the provision of information is a two way process. While we can provide information in response to requests from other organisations and individuals, we can also pass on to our member organisations information which we have received which may be important for them to have. A good example of this is the way in which we were able to alert our member bodies to the important amendments dealing with religious education and collective worship introduced late in the day in the legislation which became the Education Reform Act of 1988.

Meeting the requests which we receive is not simply a question of providing information, but also of offering advice and putting people and organisations in touch with one another. Responding to requests for help often means helping to sustain the commitment of an organisation to building a multi faith dimension into their work when, after initial enthusiasm, it is becoming anxious about its ability to carry the project through. It can be quite daunting, for example, for an organisation trying to find appropriate members of different faith communities to speak at a conference or to join a panel of consultants for some new initiative. We recognise this and have helped many organisations find contacts who can help them. For example, the Cabinet Office Equal Opportunities Division in putting on a presentation on different faiths for Equal Opportunities

Officers from across all Government Departments; in finding people to work with the Prince's Trust on disability issues; in suggesting participants for a conference organised by the Department of Health on the sensitive subject of AIDS. So our reactive response to requests for help is an important part of our work.

Taking the initiative on key issues

But we do not simply wait to be asked for help. We also take the initiative in making approaches ourselves. For example, in 1993, when the Government announced its intention to set up what has now become the Inner Cities Religious Council, I was in touch at once with the Department of the Environment to see if the Network could help. That has led to a continuing relationship with that initiative which has enabled us to bring the Network's influence to bear on the Council's work, while maintaining our independence of Government.

More recently, we have been involved in promoting discussion with what is now the Office of National Statistics on whether or not a question on religious identity should be considered for inclusion in the census to be carried out in 2001. Many of us would not have supposed that a decision was needed as early as this Summer on the questions to be tested for inclusion in a census which is five years away. At the suggestion of one of our member bodies, the Board of Deputies of British Jews, which had been involved in preliminary consultation on the census by the Office of National Statistics, the Network office was able to alert our Executive Committee and other representative faith community bodies to the urgency of this issue.

We worked rapidly with the Office of National Statistics and the Inner Cities Religious Council to facilitate a meeting at which faith community representatives were able to put their various points of view. At present the ONC is considering the points which were made at it and in the light of these is consulting potential users of statistics once more to evaluate the strength of the case for a census question on religious identity. This case illustrates how helpful it is for the attention of the Network office to be drawn by our member organisations to issues which need to be tackled.

Direct action on issues with a particular importance to inter faith relations

Sometimes we take more direct action of our own, where appropriate in cooperation with other interested bodies. At the time of the controversy surrounding *The Satanic Verses* we arranged two joint seminars with the Commission for Racial Equality to ensure that the issue of limits on freedom of expression in a religiously plural society was properly explored from a variety of perspectives. At present, we are promoting a consultative process on collective worship in schools under the joint auspices of the Religious Education Council, the National Association of Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education and the Network. We want to ensure that an issue which is of real concern to all our faith communities is explored in depth in a positive and constructive way, facilitating discussion between our different faith communities and with other interested groups, including educational interests and the teachers' unions.

Offering support to others' projects

We have also been able to exercise influence on the work of other organisations and projects of interest to our different faith communities. A major issue which has been under discussion for some time is whether we need fresh legislation if we are successfully to combat discrimination on the basis of religious identity. This is a question which will come up in our discussions today. Again, it is one on which there have been different views within the Network. But at the time when we knew that the Commission for Racial Equality was considering what role it should play in future on this issue, we were able to put to them strongly the case for a thorough examination of the issues and options involved. We were delighted when the Commission decided to set up a special project team to take this work forward. Unfortunately the illness of the project team leader has inevitably delayed progress on this, but the necessary work is now under way.

Meanwhile, members of the Network Executive Committee who sit on the Inner Cities Religious Council have, together with the Network office, been contributing to work on a document being prepared by the ICRC giving advice to people who believe they have suffered discrimination in various ways because of their religious identity on how they can seek redress. My colleague, Harriet Crabtree, is a member of the Steering Committee of a project by the University of Warwick which is looking at the appropriateness of existing chaplaincy provision in prisons and hospitals in our more religiously diverse society. All of these are examples of how we can contribute to, and help shape, what others are doing in work of concern to us.

Creating a positive climate for inter faith co-operation

I have been detailing some of the ways in which we work to fulfil the Network's aim of tackling public issues of concern to our faith communities and of ensuring that they are brought as fully as possible into the consultative process. I mentioned at the outset that the Network's other main aim is promoting mutual respect and understanding between our different communities and greater public understanding of our religious traditions. These two aims are clearly connected. We shall make more progress in tackling specific issues and in ensuring a practical response to the needs and concerns of our different faith communities if we can create a climate of mutual understanding, tolerance and respect within our society.

The work of the Network office in dealing with media enquiries and the very wide circulation which we have achieved for the Network's short code on "Building Good Relations between People of Different Faiths and Beliefs" have both contributed to this process of "getting the climate right". So too, of course, has the work of national and local inter faith organisations and other Network member bodies and of many committed individuals.

The vital role of local inter faith groups and councils

Before closing, I would like to mention in particular the importance of the work which local inter faith groups and local councils of faiths can do. A theme which we are exploring in this year's regional meetings for the organisers of local inter faith initiatives is the extent to which existing structures for local inter faith co-operation need to be adapted to face the challenge of the coming years. Those who, like me, are involved in a local inter faith initiative will want to reflect on ways in which their local inter faith group or council can develop links and contacts with their local

authority, and other public bodies and voluntary organisations in their area, in order to pursue, at a local level, some of these public issues; and how they can bring pressure for the needs of their different faith communities to be properly met, just as the Network has been doing at a national level. This might, for example, involve checking whether appropriate meals are available in local schools, (for example, halal or vegan to meet the dietary requirements of different religious groups) or whether there is proper provision for prayer by prisoners of different faiths in a nearby prison or by patients at the area's hospital.

I hope that today's discussions may suggest future lines of development not only for local inter faith work but can also help us identify issues at national level which are of concern to the faith communities. This will help us focus the Network's priorities and allow us to explore ways of pursuing these more effectively together.

Setting priorities for the Network's inter faith work

Over the last nine years there has been an increasing awareness and respect for the Network and the role which it plays. Given more resources we could, of course, do more. But we already have a record of activity in which I think we can take justified pride. We have laid sound foundations on which we can build - and here I adapt words from the end of our Network "code" - as we move forward together, listening and responding with openness and respect and working in ways that acknowledge genuine differences, but build on our shared hopes and values, in seeking a society in which members of Britain's different faith communities are indeed equal citizens.

In response to questions about the involvement of young people and of women in inter faith activities. Mr Brian Pearce referred to:

- a. The Network's Autumn National Meeting in 1995 which focused specifically on inter faith work among young people and to the attempts made by different cities under the auspices of the Inner Cities Religious Council to run "youth challenges".
- b. Issues which arise in relation to student life and further and higher education and the difficulties which there have been in inter faith relations on campus. The Network office has been in touch with a range of student bodies about these issues.
- c. Initiatives specifically designed to bring together women from different faith communities, including a conference which the Network held in cooperation with the Women's National Commission.
- d. The general question of how far, in inter faith work, there is a need to have groups that cater for different sectors and how far people should be brought together generally, the answer being that both kinds of meeting are needed.

SERVICE PROVISION AND CIVIC LIFE IN A MULTI-FAITH CITY

**Mr Imtiaz Farookhi
Chief Executive
Leicester City Council**

Introduction

Whilst I am going to be talking about service delivery generally, I am going to be paying particular attention to some new and important areas for local councils such as the environment and economic and urban regeneration. This reflects the changed role of councils from direct service deliverers to enablers.

When I first came to Leicester one of the things that I noticed very quickly was the city's sense of community. The great strength of Leicester is that this sense of community encompasses a remarkable diversity of people and faiths.

Leicester's Diversity

It is important to remember that the diversity we see today is not the outcome of a planned process. It has occurred because of a combination of factors reflecting events across the world. Since the late 1960s Leicester has been transformed from an industrial city into a major cosmopolitan city that is now gaining a reputation for innovation. From 1968 to 1975 the ethnic minority population of Leicester rose from 5% to about 25%. The newcomers to the city came from a variety of historic faiths. It was this rapid change that laid the foundations for today's multi-cultural, inter-cultural and multi-faith Leicester.

It is, of course, important to remember that Leicester was not completely monolithic during the period up to the late 1960s. Although the dominant culture was a Christian one, this contained within it, as it does today, a variety of churches with very different spiritual traditions. Equally, the new historic faith traditions in Leicester are not a series of monolithic faiths. They contain regional, linguistic and doctrinal variations and different patterns of ritual and these are increasingly important as the Council becomes more sophisticated in its awareness and understanding of the faith background of people in Leicester.

The initial role of many of the faith communities new to Leicester was to support and reconsolidate their members. The experience of moving to a new country with different values, traditions and ways of living was naturally highly stressful and the faith communities played a historic role in alleviating this stress and in the process of constructing new local communities.

We should remember, though, that Leicester's change from being a Midlands industrial city to a multi-cultural and inter-cultural city was not an easy transition. I use the term "inter-cultural" to mean a pattern of cultures which are developing in this country in a dynamic way, particularly among young people. "Multi-cultural" connotes a more static situation. During the 1970's newcomers to Leicester had to endure misunderstanding and racist hostility from many quarters. Again, the role played by the faith communities in supporting their members through this difficult period was of immense value.

The Work of Faith Communities, the Educational and Voluntary Sectors

The faith communities also took a leading role in actively opposing racism. Without this work it would not have been possible to achieve the relative harmony enjoyed in Leicester today. Here it is also important to acknowledge the role played by the many members of Christian churches who played a part in anti-racist campaigns. The benefits of the work done by the Council, by faith communities and by other institutions are now there for all to see in today's Leicester. Compared to other cities there is a high degree of understanding between communities, while significant progress has been made towards bringing about a true inter-cultural and multi-faith city.

There are also other trends that are helping Leicester to flourish. One is the renewed interest in inter-cultural life among educationalists and the wider educated public that has taken place during the past few years. The city's universities have become increasingly interested in the faiths that are present around them. It is also reflected in the curriculum being taught to the present generation of children. So the Council is one actor among a range of institutions, including the voluntary sector, the universities and education sector and the Training and Enterprise Council, which increasingly recognise the importance of the faith communities.

Outward expressions of faiths such as Eid, Vaisakhi, Navaratri and Diwali are now becoming a familiar part of Leicester's annual calendar in addition to Christmas. These are all supported by the City Council and other bodies within Leicester. There is an increased awareness throughout the city of the different faiths and of the festivals that are the expressions of these faiths. In addition, these expressions of faith are coming to be seen by their faith communities as celebrations that can reach out to encompass the whole community. As an example, Diwali nowadays is attended by a wide cross-section of the community. In offices there will be a tradition of Diwali lunches, alongside Christmas lunches.

We are also seeing the development by the historic faith communities which are newer to Leicester of means and institutions to explain their faith and develop rapport with the wider society in the city. Our Leisure Services Department, for example, has promoted this work through its Living History Unit. The very existence of this outward-directed work demonstrates that Leicester as a city has gone beyond the stage when it was necessary for faith communities to make the support of their existing members an overriding priority.

As well as bringing the insights of their traditions to the city, the faith communities are also developing resources of benefit to the whole community. The many buildings across the city belonging to faith communities not only make Leicester a more beautiful place but also provide valuable facilities for all city residents. Faith communities are also engaged in a variety of philanthropic activities which extend beyond their own boundaries. Leicester is fortunate to have such a large and varied and active voluntary sector. The City Council has for many years been committed to supporting voluntary organisations. The Council spends a far higher proportion of its budget on service provision through grant aid to voluntary and community groups than any other comparable local authority.

There can be little doubt that the strength of Leicester's voluntary sector owes much to the commitment of faith communities over the years, both in terms of the work of individuals and in

term of organisations. The value of this work is unquestionable. It is also a way of crossing divides. The work being done by many faith groups for the homeless, for instance, knows no religious boundaries.

This tackling of common problems represents another step forward towards a genuinely multicultural and intercultural society where the barriers have come down. The work being done in the "City Challenge" area, to which I will refer later, provides an example of the way forward. Joint projects are taking place that enhance understanding through common action.

The City Council believes that the progress so far made towards being a genuinely multicultural and intercultural and multi-faith city is one of Leicester's greatest achievements. There can be no doubt that the work of the Leicester Council of Faiths has been instrumental in constructing the bridges necessary to achieve this outcome. The multi-faith conference held in 1994 by the Inner Cities Religious Council together with the City Council was another particularly positive way forward. Other work to link different faith communities has also been of immense value. It was good to see "The Times" recording the achievement of Dr Shah and the Jain community in creating a temple which has now become a major tourist attraction.

The Work of the City Council

To turn now to the City Council, we have, I believe, matched our commitment to creating a multicultural and intercultural city with action. We have conducted a number of surveys and have done so for several years. The Council has extensively funded the cultural celebrations stemming from faith communities, such as Navratri, Diwali, Eid and Vaisakhi. We have also worked to make land available for religious premises, and I think we have a good record in granting planning permission for religious buildings. The Council has tried to respect the sensibilities of faith communities in its service provision. For example, the city provides a Muslim section in Saffron Hill Cemetery as well as a Hindu cremation service. Interestingly enough many of the service provision issues related to food now seem to focus on whether the cuisine should be Gujarati or Punjabi rather than simply on whether it is halal or vegetarian.

Some of the service provision areas can be contentious, generating a lot of political discussion and correspondence. It is to the credit of many local politicians that they have persisted in this work. The challenges will be even greater when the new unitary authority takes over social services and education, although I have to say that the County Council's performance in this area is very good.

In looking back over the past twenty-five years, there is much in Leicester of which to be proud. Real progress has been made and the city has become a place that is, in many ways, a model for others in Europe. The foundations have been laid for a secure multi-cultural and inter-cultural and multi-faith future, based on genuine harmony and mutual understanding.

I am sure that you would agree, however, that there is always more work to be done. The success achieved to date will not be sustained unless the commitment that underlies it is also sustained - and sustained in action by the Council and other institutions. It is my hope that all faith communities in Leicester will continue in their efforts to create deeper and stronger bonds across the city. It is important to realise that, increasingly, local authorities have to work by bringing influence to bear on others rather than through the direct delivery of their own services.

The Environment as an Area of Special Concern

I want to turn now to the environment. Leicester is Britain's first "environment city". The central aim of the "Environment City" project is to create a model approach towards the urban context which ensures sustainable development which does not "cheat on our children".

This work is of world importance, and has been recognised by the United Nations which awarded honours to Leicester at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. The need to create sustainability in cities is essential if overall global sustainability is to be achieved. In 1990 42% of the world's population lived in cities. By 2025 the United Nations estimates that 59% will be urban dwellers. Cities are also increasingly unsustainable.

"Environment City" aims not just to increase understanding of the need for sustainability, but also to involve all parts of the local community in developing practical ways forward. At the core of the project is an understanding that sustainability - leaving the Earth as you find it - depends on the active support of individuals. For this reason "Environment City" thinks in terms of sustainable community - a view that encompasses sustainable development and local livability.

"Environment City" realised at a very early stage that forging close links with Leicester's faith community was a priority. This was why the "Faith in Nature" initiative was established. This aims to promote the environment in a spiritual context. It is based on the recognition that, in contrast to the messages of materialism, the scriptures of virtually all faiths have emphasised the importance of looking after the world. The "faith in nature" initiative provides a means to learn from the spiritual traditions and thus to strengthen the ethical basis of environmentalism.

As part of this initiative, a "Faith in Nature" conference was held in 1994 at which nine faith groups issued declarations on their views on the environment. This was followed up by a series of local environment projects. These ranged from churchyard ecological management schemes to low energy lights in the Jain temple, and included, for instance, window boxes at the Guru Tegh Bahadur Gurdwara, laurel trees outside the Synagogue, planting in tubs at the Shree Swaminarayan Mandir, bird boxes at the Brahma Samaj and an environmental audit at the Society of Friends.

In addition to these local projects, "Faith in Nature" is also involved in facilitating three major projects. The most developed of these is the Friends of Vrindavan. This has been established by the Hindu communities to support the World Wide Fund for Nature project in Vrindavan, in India. The Friends not only support the reforestation work at the sacred forests, but also provide a focus for tree-planting initiatives in Leicester. They have also inspired schools in Leicester to make active links with schools in Vrindavan, while Rushey Mead school has created a Vrindavan garden in its new woodland. The Vrindavan project is being followed by a project from the Muslim community. It is hoped that a project from the Christian community will follow in due course.

The role played by the city's faith communities in "Environment City" has so far been a strong one. This has brought Leicester recognition from around the world - the "Faith in Nature" programme is widely admired. The work being undertaken in Leicester on the environment is of truly international significance. Yet if it is to succeed it will require the whole hearted

commitment of all the communities in the city. There can be no doubt that the chances of achieving the goal of urban sustainability in Leicester, or elsewhere, will be greatly enhanced if faith communities continue to give a lead on the environment.

Economy and Regeneration

Finally, I want to mention Leicester's economy and the continuing need for regeneration of the less favoured areas of the city. Leicester looks a prosperous city. Yet there is a lot of hidden hardship. To quote just one example, the unemployment rate within the city boundaries is one and a half times the national average, and more than twice that for the rest of the county. Between 1987 and 1989 almost 12,000 jobs were lost among the city's traditional industries, including over 5,700 in the textile industry. I do not need to remind you how destructive unemployment is. It not only damages the lives of those unable to find work but also damages the lives of their families. Unemployment also corrodes communities and undermines the harmony that has been created through so much hard effort. The role played by faith communities in sustaining those affected by unemployment, including the families of those who become unemployed, has been of immense value, not just to those affected but to the city as a whole.

The long term solution to this problem is to turn the local economy around. The City Council is making considerable efforts to encourage this and is working in partnership with both the County Council and other organisations such as the Training and Enterprise Council. The aim is to capitalise on the city's strengths, such as its industrial diversity and excellent links to transport and communications networks, to try and attract new employment to the area. It is essential to create a more diverse economic base for Leicester and to attract high-technology industries that will make the city a market leader.

Developing the city's economy also helps to bring communities together. We are already witnessing greater integration in the city's economy and it is my hope that this will be reflected in ever-closer community relations.

One initiative aimed at regenerating the inner city which is fostering better community relations is the "City Challenge" initiative. This project followed a visit to Leicester by Robin Squire, who was then Minister for the Inner Cities. He also chaired the Inner Cities Religious Council in which the Bishop of Leicester has played a significant part. The initiative rests on a series of partnerships between the City Council, County Council, universities, private sector, voluntary sector and community groups from the "City Challenge" area which is an area of some 15,000 people in the west of the city.

Faith groups have played an important role in supporting the City Challenge initiative through acting as channels to give voice to the views of the local community. The closer working generated by "City Challenge" is helping to bring different faith groups closer together, such as the Church of the Martyrs and the Jalaram Prathna Mandal prayer centre who have met together to learn from each other. This is a most welcome development. The "City Challenge" project is based on an understanding that community involvement is essential for long term success. As part of this, with financial support from British Telecom, capacity building training has been provided for 10-12 community leaders, including, representatives from the Council of Faiths. This exciting and innovative project has been a great success.

The years ahead will, however, will be challenging ones. The city has not been helped by the Government's decisions to reduce the sources of funding designed to help areas like Leicester. The Urban Programme has been abolished and its replacement, the Single Regeneration Budget, is problematic. Section 11 funding has been reduced and the government is now putting in finance on a 50:50 basis with the City Council, rather than providing 75% of the funding as before. It is important that we as a city make the case to Government that the Urban Programme and Section 11 funding have been used to good effect here in Leicester and that it needs to continue.

The City Council believes that the way to meet the challenges that will face our city in the future lies in forging partnerships that cross the boundaries between public, private and voluntary sectors. Yet even this broad-based approach will not reach the whole community. As faith communities you have the ability, in a way which few others have, to reach deep into the community. You can reach untapped skills and potential. You can translate these into actions which benefit your cities. The community leadership that has historically been provided by faith communities is as valuable today as it has ever been, perhaps even more valuable.

In response to questions Mr Imtiaz Farookhi made the following points:-

- a. The private sector is getting to know local community needs and opportunities better as a result of schemes like City Challenge. At the same time, the local community is beginning to understand more the basis on which the private sector needs to operate. As a result, there is a growth in mutual understanding between local authorities, local community groups and private sector developers. "Partnership" requires different leadership skills drawn from a variety of sources. There is a need for more "networking" and facilitating in order to take advantage of the opportunities for funding from a variety of sources. An increasingly important role of local authorities is to act as a catalyst in bringing various interest groups, including the private sector and community groups, together to form partnerships.
- b. It is important for local authorities to ensure that they are sensitive to the needs of different groups within their area. Not every group wants help from their local authority, but many do. It is important not to respond only to those which are the most articulate and vociferous. A number of voluntary organisations within Leicester bring together people from different communities.
- c. The local community is not always organised on faith lines. Unfortunately some manifestations of faith can be used to divide people and it is important to be aware of this.
- d. The County Council has been responsible for running the education service in Leicester and has tried to ensure that pupils are made aware of, and respect, the different faiths in the city. This will no doubt be a priority for the new unitary authority when it takes over responsibility for education. There is a need for greater dissemination of good practice. It is necessary to take account of the concerns of parents, of the neighbourhood community and of the school as a professional institution and to balance the various interests involved.

- e. It is important to find ways of involving young people more in community activity, but it could be inappropriate for the local authority to fund youth organisations within different faith communities. In Leicester particular efforts have been made to draw young people into concern for environmental issues.
- f. Like many other cities, Leicester has put in bids for funding from the Millennium Fund resourced by the national lottery. including a project for a new inter faith centre at Abbey Park.

EQUALLY PROTECTED ? DISCRIMINATION, ABUSE AND RELIGIOUS IDENTITY

**Mr Khurshid Drabu
Head of Litigation and Complaints
Commission for Racial Equality**

Introduction

It pleases me greatly to be here, contributing to your National Meeting. The Commission for Racial Equality has long valued its relationship with the Inter Faith Network and I hope that our relationship will continue to be fruitful.

As the issues facing us collectively as faith communities, or individually as members of faith communities, become more complex, it is crucial that there is a dialogue which guides us through the moral maze. The CRE is often asked to help articulate the hopes and aspirations of those at the sharp end of discrimination, so it is crucial for it to listen to the opinions voiced before it intervenes in the public debate.

The work of the Commission for Racial Equality

Unfortunately, there is a general misconception that the CRE is much more powerful than we really are. What tends to be forgotten is that the CRE was created by statute and given very clearly defined duties. It has operated, and continues to operate, in a none too friendly environment. Its first stated duty is to work towards the elimination of unlawful racial discrimination. Its second duty is to promote equality of opportunity and good relations between persons of different racial groups. You will see immediately that the "big stick" is only available in cases of racial discrimination and that it is largely dependent on other bodies, such as tribunals and courts.

You will also see from our duties that the CRE has no power to act in cases involving direct religious discrimination. It can only act where religious discrimination is caught by the law as "indirect racial discrimination", at least where the exercise of a religion has a particular association with the country of origin. This point was made in the Commission's Second Review of the Race Relations Act on which we were consulting at the time that the controversy occurred over "The Satanic Verses". The question we posed then was: "Are legal adjustments needed to secure good race relations in a multi faith society?" It is in answer to that question that the CRE's work around religious discrimination has taken place. Let me remind you of the debate taking place at that time: it was around the law of blasphemy, incitement to religious hatred, and the lack of protection from direct religious discrimination. All these are quite distinct questions and require different responses. I want to begin by looking at religious discrimination.

Religious discrimination

Direct religious discrimination

What is meant by 'religious discrimination'? Religious discrimination could be, for example, where a person is denied a job simply because he or she is a follower of a certain faith, or where a person receives less favourable treatment in the provision of services or facilities in education, housing and planning simply because the person is a member of a particular faith. That would be discrimination on the grounds of religion and would be direct religious discrimination. It is not covered under the law.

Religious Discrimination which is also "indirect racial discrimination"

Sometimes, but only sometimes, indirect racial discrimination can be involved in religious discrimination and the case can be followed up under existing law. For example:

- * an Asian Muslim girl denied admission to a school whose rules prohibit the wearing of the hijab has suffered indirect racial discrimination;
- * an Arab Muslim denied permission from his employer to attend the mosque during his lunch break on Friday for prayers has suffered indirect racial discrimination;
- * a woman from Pakistan who failed to get a job because she said she could not wear the uniform consisting of a short skirt and sleeveless top has suffered indirect racial discrimination;
- * the job centre told by a firm not to send them 'any Muslims' was suffering from pressure to discriminate because such an instruction would have excluded 95% of the Bangladeshi and Pakistani population in the local area;
- * a factory worker from Bangladesh denied time off for Eid, even though he offered to work overtime the week before instead, suffered indirect racial discrimination;
- * a woman from India working for the Department of Social Security denied two days annual leave for Eid, even though a white colleague was permitted leave for a holiday, suffered indirect racial discrimination.

All these examples are of actual cases in which the CRE has assisted the complainant and achieved a successful outcome, either through a court or tribunal or by negotiation.

Absence of compensation for cases of indirect racial discrimination

It should be made clear that these kinds of unintentional indirect discrimination cases are not eligible for financial compensation. All one gets is a "declaration" from the courts. The Commission strongly feels that this area of law needs to be looked at closely, particularly as law

concerning discrimination on the grounds of gender has moved on because of the effect of European Community law. If you prove that you have been discriminated against on grounds of gender, you will receive compensation as well as a declaration, but not for discrimination on grounds of race, because under European Community law racial discrimination is not prohibited, unlike discrimination on grounds of gender or nationality.

The case of Hussain and Others v Walker and Walker is to be heard in the Court of Appeal in November. This is a case about a group of Muslim employees of a large Yorkshire manufacturing firm who were not given permission to say their Eid prayers and took action under the Race Relations Act. They were successful at the Tribunal which ordered £1,000 compensation per person. The respondents then argued that for unintentional indirect discrimination there should have been no compensation and that the Tribunal erred in law in awarding it. But the Tribunal ruled that if the employer knew that he would be discriminating, albeit indirectly, then the remedy should include compensation. So this Tribunal decision has made a slight dent in the law. But the employers have now taken the matter further to the Court of Appeal which should help to clarify the law.

The Commission's position is that, for the avoidance of doubt and in order to convey an important message both to potential victims and perpetrators of discrimination, Section 1 of the Race Relations Act should be amended by adding a new sub section (3) stating that, for the avoidance of doubt, a requirement or condition relating to religious grounds which meets all the other criteria set out in Section 1 (1) (B) shall be construed as "less favourable treatment" for the purposes of Act. In addition other possible legal options are being considered, including the 'testing' of a suitable case which would help to define a "racial group" more clearly.

The relationship between religious and racial identity

What about religious discrimination in its own right or direct religious discrimination? Two things have confused the issue here and led some people wrongly to assume that religious discrimination in its own right is a race-related issue.

Firstly, in 1983 the House of Lords decided in the case of Mandla v Dowell Lee that Sikhs are not only a religious group but are also an ethnic or a racial group. That meant that a Sikh person could bring an action under the provisions of the Race Relations Act for direct discrimination. At the same time it was recognised that Jews are not only a religious group but also an ethnic or a racial group and are therefore similarly protected. So some faith communities have the full protection of the law as it stands at the moment. However, even for these communities, whenever there is a conflict between the protection afforded by the Race Relations Act and the provisions of some other law, either national law or European Community law, the Race Relations Act does not take precedence. There is a legal requirement, for example, when working on a building site to wear a helmet, but under UK national law Sikhs were exempted from this on religious grounds. European Community law has now said that on grounds of safety it is essential that helmets should be worn. The exemption for Sikhs under national law has now been superseded by European Community law.

The development of the law is a dynamic process and people need to be vigilant about the erosion of rights which have been conceded earlier. I understand that a campaign has been launched to

highlight this problem. In another case the Court of Appeal decided two years ago that Rastafarians are not a racial, but a religious, group. This case has been backed by the Commission for Racial Equality and is a very important case because of the broad principle that the case involves. We wanted a better definition of racial groups and ethnic groups. The matter has been pending before the House of Lords for the last two years but we hope that the action can be continued.

Secondly, there has been what might briefly be labelled post-Rushdie public anti-Muslim prejudice and hysteria. But it would be more accurate to describe this not as religious discrimination but as an incitement to religious hatred and a public order question, where general anti-Muslim activity has been involved. Similar anti-Jewish activity has tended to be described in this way, including for example the desecration of cemeteries.

There are clearly situations in which 'straight' religious discrimination can occur, such as a white Muslim denied employment because he is a Muslim or a Seventh Day Adventist expected to work a Saturday shift. In such cases the need for legal redress may be convincingly argued. But such a law, especially if modelled on the Race Relations Act or Sex Discrimination Act, to include social policy issues as well as employment, would consist more of exemptions than applications. These are difficult questions which merit a lot of thought before answers are formulated. For example, what about Jehovah's Witnesses who refuse to allow their child a life-saving blood transfusion or any other invasive treatment?

In terms of a general law on religious discrimination, the priority for the CRE is its relationship to good race relations. If there were to be a law, it might need to be entirely separate from the Race Relations Act. The CRE could play its part in the 'equality proofing' process at the drafting stage, as it does with much other proposed legislation, and could, alongside others, also play a part in providing appropriate information and assisting in the facilitation of discussion.

Related but separate issues

There are also a number of other issues which are often discussed under the general heading of 'religious discrimination'. On these the Commission has established policy. They are:

a) Blasphemy

It is now generally accepted that the law of blasphemy is unacceptable in principle as it stands. Our position is that it should either be abolished, or extended to protect other religions.

b) Incitement to religious hatred

The arguments in favour of a criminal offence of incitement to religious hatred, as part of the Public Order Act (and analogous to the existing offence of incitement to racial hatred) have already been spelled out and accepted by the Commission. Most recently, we supported the attempt by Lord Lester to secure an amendment to this effect, though this was unsuccessful. We will continue to support the passing of a law on incitement to religious hatred.

c) Public funding for religious schools

Our policy on public funding for religious schools is set out in *Schools of Faith*, published in July 1990, and is: 'In line with the Race Relations Act 1976, so long as existing arrangements for granting voluntary status are in force, no application for a minority faith school should be given less favourable treatment, either by an education authority or by the DES, than any other application. Any decision or recommendation must be made on non-racial grounds'.

d) Daily collective worship in schools

The same booklet states that the requirement of the 1988 Education Act that schools' daily act of collective worship be conducted on broadly Christian lines 'must now be seen as an obstacle to integrated schooling for all religious groups within the state sector ... and the repeal of the religious requirements of the 1988 Act should be seriously addressed'.

e) Religious education

Schools of Faith said that "the role of multi-faith syllabuses for religious education developed by the former Inner London Education Authority, Bradford and other education authorities, with the approval and participation of many different religious bodies, has been impressive". We considered that it was not appropriate for the CRE to make any further comment on the detail of curriculum content, although we did assert that the ability to feel confidence and commitment to one's own faith would not be undermined by knowledge and understanding of the faith and customs of others.

The work of the CRE's religious discrimination policy team

To give effect to the policy positions we have adopted we have also set up a project team which I head. Its terms of reference include exploring available legal options, engaging in a programme of consultation with members of faith communities, providing information and assistance to those lobbying for legislation prohibiting direct religious discrimination and working closely with the Inter Faith Network and the Inner Cities Religious Council.

As part of our work on legal options, we are looking for a test case which will enable us to get a clearer ruling on what constitutes a "racial" group under the Race Relations Act to see how far this might affect cases involving religious identity. If the interpretation of "racial" were to be broadened by the courts to include "religious" groups then the provisions relating to direct discrimination under the Act would apply and make such discrimination unlawful. There can be no certainty that the courts would broaden the interpretation of "racial" in this way and the Commission is also examining alternative legal options and the form which fresh legislation might take.

In terms of providing assistance and information there are currently three pieces of work under way. The first is the preparation of a leaflet explaining what protection exists under the Race Relation Act for those who believe they may have been discriminated against an religious grounds. We intend to finalise and circulate this leaflet as widely as possible. The second is reviewing the situation in countries which have legislation outlawing religious discrimination. What we are

interested in are definitions, and the exceptions that have been included. Countries we are interested in are the USA, Canada and Australia, and nearer home the Netherlands, which has only recently introduced legislation outlawing religious discrimination. We can learn from these other countries, for example how to overcome problems of definition. The third piece of work is to collect available information on cases of alleged religious discrimination although the case for new legislation should not be decided simply on the basis of numbers.

The Commission has already had a number of consultations with faith communities, and more are in the pipeline although this process has been subject to some delay. We have already said we will work closely with the Inter Faith Network and that we greatly value the relationship we have developed so far. As we take forward our work on religious discrimination we would like the Network to help us by

- providing information on cases of racial discrimination that have come to the attention of Network members and which could form the basis for a test case on extending the boundaries of the Race Relations Act 1976 to include religion;
- publicising, through faith groups and local inter faith groups, the remedies available under the Race Relations Act of 1976 to those who believe they have been the victims of religious discrimination;
- identifying "networks" in other countries that members are in contact with and who could assist us with our research into the situation in other countries;
- acting as a sounding board on other work that might develop.

This two way dialogue is essential if we are to succeed. We have to work together if we are to achieve our aim of a society which is just and fair.

In response to questions Mr Khurshid Drabu made the following points:-

- a. It is important for faith communities to act together if they wish to pursue the case for legislation against discrimination on religious grounds. It is the case that the Race Relations Act 1976 does not define "race" and this weakens the argument that it is not possible to legislate against discrimination against religious grounds because of the difficulty of defining religion for that purpose. The House of Lords in the case of Mandla in 1983 was asked to define "race" but was unable to do so.
- b. With new legislation there is always the risk of undesirable side effects. More general legislation affecting issues of social policy might be more open to this risk. But it seems less likely in the case of legislation outlawing discrimination on religious grounds in the area of employment. In the case of any legislation on employment there would need to be exemptions, for example, to permit a Hindu temple to require its employed priest to be a Hindu.

- c. Because in the past the CRE said that it was not in a position to act on complaints about discrimination on religious grounds, complaints of this nature may not have been sent to it. But the Commission does now want to hear about cases of alleged religious discrimination as part of the work which it is currently doing to collect evidence in this field. At the same time, it is not just a question of numbers: a matter of principle is involved.
- d. Everyone has a right to seek assistance from the CRE if they believe they have been discriminated against on grounds of race and wish to take legal proceedings. But the CRE is entitled, after investigation, to decide not to grant assistance with a case. Grants to REC's are now dependent on the number of cases of racial discrimination with which they deal in the course of a year and how many applicants are assisted by them.
- e. Although the cases which Mr Drabu mentioned in his speech relating to indirect discrimination all involved Muslims, the CRE has helped many complainants from the Hindu community as well. However, the cases were settled out of court in ways which limit the freedom of the CRE to disclose the details of the settlements which were reached;
- f. The Race Relations Act outlaws discrimination on grounds of race in the case of individuals, but does not protect racial groups as such. The CRE argues that the legislation should be amended to cover this;
- g. European Community Law does not offer much help in the case of racial discrimination. The UK has the best legislation on racial discrimination anywhere in Europe.
- h. There are provisions in the European Convention on Human Rights dealing with discrimination on religious grounds which would be relevant if the Convention were to be incorporated into UK law, as some have argued that it should be.
- i. Issues of planning permission for places of worship and community centres are important. There have been instances of discrimination in this regard against faith communities and the Hindu community in particular has suffered from this.

MEMBER ORGANISATIONS OF THE INTER FAITH NETWORK FOR THE UK

FAITH COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVE BODIES

Afro West Indian United Council of Churches
Arya Pratinidhi Sabha (UK)
Baha'i Community of the United Kingdom
Board of Deputies of British Jews
Buddhist Society
Council of African and Afro-Caribbean Churches (UK)
Churches' Agency for Interfaith Relations in Scotland
Churches' Commission for Inter-Faith Relations
(Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland)
Friends of the Western Buddhist Order
Hindu Council of the UK
Imams and Mosques Council (UK)
Islamic Cultural Centre, Regent's Park, London
Jain Samaj Europe
Jamiat-ul-Ulama Britain (Association of Muslim Scholars)
National Council of Hindu Temples
Network of Buddhist Organisations (UK)
Network of Sikh Organisations (UK)
Roman Catholic Committee for Other Faiths of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales
Sikh Missionary Society
Sri Lankan Sangha Sabha of G.B.
Swaminaryan Hindu Mission
UK Action Committee on Islamic Affairs
Vishwa Hindu Parishad (UK)
World Ahl ul-Bayt (AS) Islamic League
World Islamic Mission (UK)
Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe

INTER FAITH ORGANISATIONS

Calamus Foundation
Council of Christians and Jews
International Association for Religious Freedom
(British Members' Group)
London Society of Jews and Christians
Maimonides Foundation
Northern Ireland Inter Faith Forum
Westminster Interfaith
World Conference on Religion and Peace
(UK and Ireland Chapter)
World Congress of Faiths

LOCAL INTER FAITH GROUPS

Birmingham Council of Faiths
Birmingham Fellowship of Faiths
Bradford Concord Inter Faith Society
Bristol Interfaith Group
Cambridge Inter-Faith Group
Cardiff Interfaith Association
Cleveland Inter Faith Group
Coventry Inter Faith Group
Derby Open Centre Multi-Faith Group
Dudley Council of Faiths
Edinburgh Interfaith Association
Glasgow Sharing of Faiths Group
Gloucestershire Inter Faith Action
Harrow Inter-Faith Council
Kirklees and Calderdale Inter-Faith Fellowship
Leeds Concord Inter-Faith Fellowship
Leicester Council of Faiths
Manchester Inter Faith Group
Medway and Maidstone Inter-Faith Group
Merseyside Inter Faith Group
Newham Association of Faiths
Nottingham Inter-Faith Council
Oxford Round Table of Religions
Peterborough Inter-Faith Council
Reading Inter-Faith Group
Redbridge Council of Faiths
Richmond Inter-Faith Group
Rochdale Interfaith Action
Sheffield Interfaith
Suffolk Inter-Faith Resource
Tyne and Wear Racial Equality Council Inter Faith Panel
Walsall Inter Faith Group
Waltham Forest All Faiths Group
Wellingborough Multi-Faith Group
Wolverhampton Inter-Faith Group
Wycombe Sharing of Faiths

EDUCATIONAL AND ACADEMIC BODIES

Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan
Centre for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations, Selly Oak, Birmingham
Centre for the Study of Judaism and Jewish-Christian Relations, Selly Oak, Birmingham
Community Religions Project, University of Leeds
Institute of Jainology
Islamic Foundation, Leicester
National Association of SACRE's Religious Education Council
Shap Working Party on World Religions in Education
Study Centre for Christian-Jewish Relations, (Sisters of Sion)
University of Derby Religious Resource and Research Centre

1997

Developing an
Inter Faith Strategy:
A Priority Task for
Britain's Faith
Communities

**DEVELOPING AN
INTER FAITH STRATEGY:
A PRIORITY TASK FOR BRITAIN'S
FAITH COMMUNITIES**

**Report on the
1997 National Meeting
of
The Inter Faith Network
for the UK**

**DEVELOPING AN
INTER FAITH STRATEGY:
A PRIORITY TASK FOR BRITAIN'S
FAITH COMMUNITIES**

**1997 National Meeting
of
The Inter Faith Network for the UK**

**Held on 23 June 1997
in the Birmingham City
Council House**

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DEVELOPING AN INTER FAITH STRATEGY: A PRIORITY TASK FOR BRITAIN'S FAITH COMMUNITIES

The Theme of the Meeting

Each of the faith communities in the UK has a range of tasks: serving the social and spiritual needs of their adherents; training teachers and leaders; finding ways to transmit the teachings of the tradition; carrying out the necessary administration that underpins the practical work; and finding the funds for all this. Along side such pressing concerns, why is developing an inter faith strategy and finding ways to carry it forward really a priority task?

The speakers at this Tenth Anniversary national meeting shared their reasons for believing that the task is indeed a priority one. They offered their reflections on how we can all work within our communities and through inter faith and other organisations to respond coherently and effectively, with integrity, to the challenges posed by living side by side in a religiously plural society.

Proceedings of the day

Mr Om Parkash Sharma, Network Co-Chair, welcomed participants to the meeting, drawing attention to its special significance as 1997 marked the Tenth Anniversary of the founding of The Inter Faith Network for the UK. He invited those present to join in a short period of silence, each praying or meditating in accordance with their own tradition. He asked the meeting in particular to call to mind during the silence the work and life of the late Rabbi Hugo Gryn, one of the Network's founder Co-Chairs, who had died the previous August, a few weeks after the Network's 1996 National Meeting. **The Lord Mayor of Birmingham, Councillor Sybil Spence** then welcomed the gathering to Birmingham, referring to the mix of races, cultures and faiths which make up the city today. She congratulated The Inter Faith Network on its tenth anniversary and said how much she welcomed meetings of this kind, in which people of different faiths come together to discuss living and working together to tackle their common concerns.

Mr Sharma thanked the Lord Mayor for her words of welcome. He then invited **Mr Indarjit Singh**, Director of the Network of Sikh Organisations (UK) and a Vice-Chair of the Network, to provide the meeting with an introductory survey of inter faith relations in Britain and some reflections on the need for faith communities to develop inter faith strategies. A number of comments and questions are recorded at the end of the text of his presentation.

Mr Sharma then introduced **Revd Canon Dr Christopher Lamb**, Secretary to the Churches' Commission on Inter Faith Relations and also responsible for inter faith relations within Church of England and a member of the Network Executive Committee; and **Dr Elizabeth Harris**, the Secretary for Inter Faith Relations of the Methodist Church. Their presentations were again followed by a number of comments and questions, the main points being noted at the end of the text of their presentations. **Mr Sharma** drew the discussion to a close, thanking the three speakers in the morning session.

At this point a presentation was made publication of the second edition of "Religions in the UK: A Multi-Faith Directory", published jointly by the University of Derby and the Network. Dr Paul Weller, the Editor of the Directory, and now Head of Division of Social Science within the University of Derby, and his assistant in the Directory project, Mrs Eileen Fry, were thanked by **Mr Sharma** for their work on the project. **Dr Paul Weller** presented copies of the new directory to the Co-Chairs of the Network and expressed his gratitude for the help and co-operation which the project team had received from many of those associated with the Network and its member organisations.

After a break for lunch, **Bishop Roy Williamson**, Network Co-Chair, introduced **Dr Ataullah Siddiqui** of the Islamic Foundation in Leicester and **Mr Abdul Hamid Qureshi**, Director of the Lancashire Council of Mosques and a member of the Network's Executive Committee, who offered their reflections on the participation of the Muslim community in inter faith activity at both national and local level.

The meeting then broke into small workshop groups to discuss a number of different aspects of the meeting's theme. The meeting concluded with an "Open Forum" session. The key points from the workshop discussions and the "Open Forum" are recorded towards the end of this report.

After some closing reflections from **Bishop Roy Williamson** there was a break for tea before the Network's AGM for 1997 was held.

Inter Faith Relations in Britain: Why every community needs a strategy

Mr Indarjit Singh
Director, Network of Sikh Organisations (UK)
and Vice-Chair, Inter Faith Network.

I would like to offer you a brief survey of the inter faith scene in Britain now. I hope this will prepare the way for us as, in the course of the day, we reflect together on the ways in which we best can tackle the challenges of the years ahead. I have also been asked to address the need for faith communities to develop strategies for making a constructive contribution to the development of positive relations with other faith communities. To shape positive strategies we need to look first at where we are now and then decide where we want to be in another few years' time and develop plans to get there.

The meeting today forms part of our celebration of the Tenth Anniversary of The Inter Faith Network, which came into being in the spring of 1987. So it is an appropriate time to reflect on what has already been achieved as well as on what needs to be done in the future.

As we know, Britain is now the most religiously diverse society in the whole of Western Europe. Over the last thirty years to the Christian and Jewish communities there have been added substantial numbers of Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs and Buddhists and members of the Bahai, Jain and Zoroastrian faiths and many other smaller religious groups. This means that it is of great importance that we find effective ways of building good inter faith relations between our different faith communities. We have to look at the social and cultural implications of living together in a religiously plural society in which we enjoy a common citizenship. These issues are important not only for ourselves but even more so for our children and grandchildren.

As you know, the Network is based on a link between organisations. The different categories of organisation in membership of the Network reflect different aspects of our inter faith work. In a moment I will look at these in turn. But every one of our member bodies is dedicated in its different way to the overall aims of the Network in promoting greater understanding and respect between the country's religious communities and in ensuring that all our faith communities play an appropriate part in public life at both national and local level in this country.

We are all well aware of the positive enrichment to our society which can come from the greater religious diversity which now exists in this country. At the same time we are sadly aware that religious differences have at times in the past and in other societies been a cause of division and conflict. It is important that we all work together to build a society here in Britain in which there is mutual understanding and respect between different faith communities. It may be easy to discuss religious differences in an amicable intellectual way and there may be little cause for conflict over the practices of the different faiths. But recently there have been problems where young people who have grown up with only a nominal commitment to a particular faith then use that religious identity as a basis for forming gangs and engaging in petty conflict with those of another faith. In these situations religious difference is often the excuse for conflict but these activities can have

a very damaging effect on relations within the wider community. We have to work together to tackle these problems to minimise the disruption they can cause.

When the Network was formed there was already a good deal of inter faith activity and a range of inter faith organisations at national and local level. But there was a clear consensus that it would be desirable to have a new national body which could link these existing organisations within a single framework, encourage new initiatives and help to provide a higher profile for inter faith issues more generally. I am sure that you will all agree that the contribution which the Network has made over the last ten years has fully justified the decision to create it.

As you know, the Network's 80 member bodies fall into four categories. These offer a way into understanding some key aspects of the inter faith scene in Britain. I would like to mention first the work of national inter faith organisations, such as the World Congress of Faiths, with which I have long been associated, and the Council of Christians and Jews. The very useful survey of the development of inter faith relations in Britain which you will find included in the new edition of our multi-faith directory "Religions in the UK" makes clear how much is owed to the pioneering work of these and other national inter faith organisations. Happily, there is now much greater recognition on the part of the mainstream of our different faith communities that the task of building good inter faith relations is of major importance, early efforts in this field initially met some distrust and even hostility.

Other national inter faith organisations such as the UK branches of the World Conference on Religion and Peace and the International Association for Religious Freedom, have a strong international dimension to their work and this reminds us of the global significance of inter faith activity. Indeed some of our colleagues are in San Francisco to-day for an international inter faith gathering taking place there.

Alongside the inter faith organisations which operate at a national or international level, the last twenty five years have seen the development of a range of local inter faith initiatives. Wolverhampton Inter Faith Group, with which Ivy Gutridge, one of my fellow Vice-Chairs, has a long standing connection, together with Leeds Concord, were among the early pioneers. I know that those who have been involved in the important task of building good inter faith relations at a local level have found their own lives to be enriched in the process.

Local inter faith bodies are not branches of the Network but exist as independent entities in their own right and do not follow any single organisational model. But in recent years there has been a growing recognition of the need for more formal structures bringing together representatives of the different faith communities in ways which make it easier for them to interact collectively with local civic authorities and other public bodies in their area.

The third category of Network member bodies is that of educational and academic organisations and institutions. When the plans were being made for setting up the Network it became apparent that a considerable contribution to inter faith understanding was being made by these bodies. Very often it was the local RE teacher who made one of the earliest approaches to a newly arrived local faith community to arrange an educational visit for their pupils. The educational and academic organisations in membership of the Network represent a most valuable resource on which we can all draw in working to promote greater understanding of our different religious communities. We

remember in this context, in particular, the enormous contribution to inter faith work of the late Rabbi Hugo Gryn, one of our founding Co-Chairs and someone whom we miss so much. He was a moving spirit in bodies like the Religious Education Council and the Shap Working Party on World Religions, as well as in a variety of national inter faith organisations.

Perhaps the most significant step when the Network was formed was the bringing together for the very first time of national representative bodies of all the main faith communities in Britain. In today's Network the Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh and Zoroastrian communities are all represented. At an earlier stage in planning the Network it had seemed possible that faith community organisations might simply give their endorsement to its work. But instead there was a clear wish on the part of these organisations to participate directly in the Network's activities. The Network has, I believe, acted as an important catalyst in getting different faith communities to come together to develop inter faith relations. I know how important this has been in the case of the Sikh community.

The Network has been able to provide a vehicle which the faith communities can use co-operatively on issues of common concern. I am thinking, for example, of the contribution which the Network has made in pursuing with the Commission for Racial Equality issues relating to religious discrimination and in ensuring that the possibility of including a question on religious identity in the 2001 census is properly considered. The Network has made it possible for faith communities to co-operate in arguing the significance of religious, as distinct from ethnic, identity and its importance in the allocation of public resources. The Network has also helped with other new initiatives such as the formation of the Inner Cities Religious Council in 1992. More generally, it has worked to make public and voluntary organisations and the media more aware of the concerns of our faith communities and to raise the level of the communities' involvement in public life.

The title for today's meeting is "Developing and implementing an inter faith strategy: a priority task for Britain's faith communities". It would clearly be wrong for us to think that the issues which we need to address are only of concern to those who are involved with representative faith community bodies. The issues are of concern to all the Network's member organisations. There are questions for all of us about how we can make the most effective use of the energies and resources and organisational structures which are brought together within the Network in order to promote our common task of developing good inter faith relations in this country. But clearly to-day's theme does pose a particular challenge to our faith community organisations and I speak as Director of the Network of Sikh Organisations. We need to meet this challenge.

As I see it, faith communities face a two fold task. The first is to work constructively to develop good relations with faith communities other than our own. In a number of cases we shall have to tackle difficult and sensitive issues and to heal the wounds of history as we look to the future and new relationships. There are real wounds and we need to examine them openly and honestly. The second task is a parallel one. It is to find ways of spreading understanding within our own particular faith community of the importance of good inter faith relations. That is a hard but important task. Newly arrived communities are primarily concerned with the practical problems of life. But then there is a need to look outwards and develop working relationships with other communities.

So some of the questions we need to be asking ourselves as faith communities as we consider how to develop our inter faith strategies are:

- Have we developed a sufficiently clear understanding of the basis within our own traditions for inter faith dialogue in theological and social terms?
- Are we ensuring that the religious leadership of our communities are adequately trained in inter faith issues and are ready to face the challenges of life together in a religious plural society?
- How can we make the most effective use of the organisational frameworks which the Network and other inter faith organisations provide at a national and local level? In particular, are we doing enough to ensure that we faith communities give whole hearted support to the work of local councils of faiths?
- As well as being involved in multilateral inter faith initiatives, do we need to establish new frameworks to address particular significant bilateral relationships where a damaging legacy from the past needs to be tackled?
- Do we adequately monitor and challenge material being produced from within our own community which is derogatory of other faiths as well as looking out for material produced by others which denigrates our faith?
- How can we draw in a wider range of people from our community at all levels into inter faith activity?
- What materials do we need to produce to help members of our faith communities reflect on their relationships with those who belong to other religious traditions?
- How best can we share the experience of those in our communities actually engaged in inter faith work?

These are questions we need to tackle over a period of years as we develop appropriate patterns of inter faith activity. It is easier simply to list them in this way than to ensure that we do enough to address them effectively in practice.

We are all well aware that different faith communities are at different points of development in terms of their national structures and the kind of resources available to them. This inevitably has a bearing on the way in which we can each approach these tasks. We may want to take action but are not adequately equipped to do so. In the midst of our wider concern for the development of the life of our faith communities, it would be very easy for us to give inter faith activity a low priority. But, as a Sikh, I believe that it is not an optional but a necessary activity. That is why I think that it is very appropriate to-day to remind ourselves of the importance of this work and of the need for us all to think through carefully how best we can carry it forward.

Our faith communities have a great deal to offer British society. But we can only contribute

effectively to the development of a coherent and stable society if we ourselves are in harmony with one another. When we look back over the last decade and beyond we can see that we have come a long way. Over the past ten years the Network and its member bodies have made a substantial contribution to getting inter faith issues firmly onto the mainstream agenda of our national community. We can celebrate its first decade with genuine satisfaction at what has been accomplished. Here I must pay a tribute to all those who have been closely involved in its work and in particular to our Director, Brian Pearce. But we all know that much remains to be done. I hope today helps us to see more clearly how best to do it.

In the subsequent discussion the following points were made:-

(a) It is valuable if faith communities can cooperate on practical projects, for example running soup kitchens for the homeless. Faith communities could explore the possibility of cooperation in projects of this kind. But if there are to be joint projects there is a need for joint consultation on these at the outset to pool ideas on what is needed and how the project can best be run in order to ensure genuinely "joint" ownership of the project;

(b) There is a need to ensure that the Millennium celebrations and the Millennium exhibition at Greenwich not only recognise the significance of the anniversary in Christian terms but also affirm the common values shared by different faith communities. The Network is already involved in the work of a group which brings together representatives of the Churches, different faith communities and Government Departments in preparing guidelines for the Millennium celebrations.

(c) It would be desirable if a range of faith communities joined in the initiative on Jubilee 2000 being promoted by the World Development Movement which had evidently made some initial contacts with this in mind.

(d) The whole topic of shared values is a very important one. The Network itself is considering how best to build on its seminar on "The Quest for Common Values" held in December 1996 of which the report is now available;

(e) The task of reconciliation in working to heal the wounds of history is of crucial importance in inter faith relations.

(f) There are limits to the additional tasks which can be taken on directly by the Network in view of its limited resources.

The Christian Churches and inter faith relations in Britain: from hesitation to commitment

A Brief History

Revd Canon Dr Christopher Lamb

Secretary to the Churches' Commission for Inter Faith Relations of the Council of Churches
for Britain and Ireland and

Secretary for Inter Faith Relations in the Church of England.

Where we are

Dr Harris and I are the only full-time officers employed by the British Churches to guide them in their inter faith relations. This may surprise you if you are outside their structures, which may look impressive, but are actually fragile, and hugely dependent on the goodwill of volunteers. Most of the energies of the decreasing number of church members are concerned with keeping their church buildings going, developing the thinking of the churches on moral and social issues, educating our young people, disciplining the ones who go off the rails, dealing with the legacy of past disagreements between Churches, and trying to reach out to those who show no interest in spiritual matters. This leaves little energy for what is, for many churchpeople, a minority interest - inter faith relations - although our Church leaders have consistently grasped the significance of religious pluralism.

Where there is little energy there is also little money. Not everyone will realise that the Churches, even the Church of England, are not supported by the Government but from the weekly giving of congregations and the investments of the past. The only clergy who receive their salaries from government sources are the (relatively) small number of full-time hospital, prison and armed service chaplains.

As for strategy, Elizabeth and I are not policy makers, our contribution is as ecclesiastical "civil servants", helping to shape the thinking and response of the Churches which is expressed in day-to-day decisions at every level.

How we got here

Religious pluralism at a significant level in Britain is of course a new phenomenon, barely 50 years old. Even the Jewish community, though here since 1656, has only been numerically significant for 100 years or so. 'Another faith' to many Christians still means another Christian denomination! When post-war migration began it was initially from the Caribbean, and this encouraged a response from the Government and the Churches in terms of community relations and the pursuit of racial justice. Because of past disputes among the Churches over education and other matters, the Government was reluctant to get entangled with religion and preferred to regard it as a private matter for which legislation was inappropriate. It was easier to deal with pluralism in terms of ethnicity rather than religious identity. The Churches to some extent shared that attitude. Hence the 'hesitation' of our title. But those who had lived and worked in Africa or Asia could not ignore the importance of world faiths and the significance of the development here of a

diversity of faith communities. Beginning from the conference of world Protestant Christians held in Edinburgh in 1910 there have been a series of conferences focusing on the theological significance of other faiths for the Christian faith. Alongside this wrestling with the theological issues of religious pluralism there was increasingly a move towards inter faith dialogue. Already the Council of Christians and Jews had been founded in Britain in 1942, and with the post-war development of the World Council of Churches in 1948 dialogue began to include Muslims, Hindus and others.

The promulgation of *Nostra Aetate* at the Vatican Council in 1965 gave a huge boost to Roman Catholic thinking about other faiths. It was, however, only in 1974 that the British Churches (without Roman Catholic participation at that stage) set up an ecumenical advisory group on relations with Muslims in Britain. In 1978 this was transformed into the Committee for Relations with People of Other Faiths of the British Council of Churches; which in turn in 1993, with the move to full Roman Catholic participation in the new Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland, became the Churches' Commission for Inter-Faith Relations. This brings together representatives of different Churches, a number of which, including the Methodist Church, have separate denominational committees to supervise their inter faith work.

The Tasks for the Present and the Future

Dr Elizabeth Harris
Secretary for Inter Faith Relations
in the Methodist Church

Christopher Lamb has commented on the past. My job is to comment on the tasks for the Christian Church in the present and the future. In the mainline Churches, I see commitment to building good relations with other faith communities, although many Christians still stand on the sidelines or do not see it as a priority.

I also see a wish to make reparation for past arrogance, violence and discrimination, even among more conservative Christians who would at the same time remain committed to Christian mission. The Reconciliation Walk, organised by evangelical Christians in France, the USA and Britain, would seem to be one example of this. At this moment, groups of Christians are walking from Istanbul along the route of the Crusades meeting Muslims to apologize for the barbarity of the Crusades. In the words of their brochure: "The aim of the Reconciliation Walk is to mark the 900th anniversary of the Crusades by conveying a person-to-person message of apology from western Christians to Muslims, Jews and Orthodox Christians".

Apology for intolerance towards other faiths in the past is one task for Christians now. But what are the other tasks? What are the tasks which are most important in my work as an officer of the Christian Church, working within a limited budget? Broadly speaking, there is an internal task and an external task for the Churches. Both are equally important.

The internal task relates to education within the Churches. In brief, I believe, it should be to set a continuing agenda so that inter-faith encounter and co-operation are seen not as an optional extra but as a necessity, which can contribute towards social harmony and enrich personal faith. It involves both offering Christians theological or biblical tools which will help them explore the relationship between Christianity and other religious traditions, and encouraging good practice in the relationships themselves.

How? And here I would like to talk about the nuts and bolts of the struggle to do this, in a situation where the importance of developing good inter-faith relations is not fully realized by all Christians.

One important task for people in a national position like myself is to encourage the whole structure of my Church to take the sensitivities of other faith communities into account. This means liaising with those setting an agenda for urban mission, racial justice, youth work, education, evangelism and theological education to make sure that Britain's religious diversity is not forgotten. This can be an uphill task. Those involved in theological education are not always receptive to the message that those training for the ministry should learn about other faiths. Those involved in planting new churches do not always want to hear that the feelings of those who are already rooted in another faith should be taken into account.

Then, each Christian denomination has a governing body. It is the General Synod for the Church of England and the annual Methodist Conference for Methodists. It is important that inter-faith issues should be kept on the agenda of these. The Methodist Conference has already accepted The Inter Faith Network's code on Building Good Relations, which offers guidelines for inter religious encounter, and also some other principles which include:

Meeting with people of other faiths is essential for building relationships of trust through mutual understanding.

Opportunity must be given to Methodists to learn about the beliefs and practices of people of other faiths.

Methodists engaged in working among people of other faiths should be encouraged in their work, and assured of the Methodist Church's warm support for what they do.

I see part of my job as encouraging Methodists to live up to these.

The written word is also an important tool. I do not think any one Christian denomination has a glossy magazine dedicated to inter-faith issues, although there are newsletters for those already involved. But all denominations have their own generalist newspapers or journals. Making sure that they cover inter-faith issues sympathetically is mandatory now. There is also a need for other resources to help people read the scriptures in new ways or to explore what inter-faith encounter involves. Some excellent books are already available for Christians such as Kenneth Cracknell's *Towards a New Relationship* [Epworth 1986]; Wesley Ariarajah's *The Bible and People of Other Faiths* [World Council of Churches 1985] Both challenge narrowly exclusivist readings of the Bible. Then, a study-guide for Christian house groups on living with people of other faiths is soon

to be published by the Open Learning Centre within Methodism. Already, the Centre runs a course on Islam. Another useful resource will be the bibliography on inter-faith relations on which the Theological Issues Group of the Churches' Commission for Inter-Faith Relations is working. These are just a few initiatives out of many but much more needs to be done.

In addition, direct communication with local church leaders is necessary. Several denominations of the Christian Church have sent to their ordained clergy guidelines or points for action for use in their local situation. The Church of England sent out ten points. Methodism changed this to ten questions, which included:-

Do you know which faith communities are represented in your Circuit or District?

Are you aware of the hopes and fears of other faith communities?

Do you know who is already involved in your District or Circuit?

Could you do more to build up direct and positive relationships with other faith communities?

The response I have received is good and I hope it will lead to much better networking at local level and a greater willingness among local Christian clergy to seek advice from those more involved in inter-faith relations than they are.

There is much more I could mention here, not least the training days, seminars and debates on inter-faith relations which are being organized by local churches, theological colleges and Christian organisations. Things are happening but there is scope for much more. Undergirding it all must be the message that building good relationships with other faith communities is not only essential for healthy communities but also enriching for the whole Church.

To pass quickly now to the external task of the Christian Church within inter-faith dialogue. These words of Thomas Merton, a 20th century Christian monastic, have always touched my heart and I believe they say something about our task in inter-faith relations. He is speaking about the Christian life: "This life, this dynamism, is expressed by the power of love and of encounter: Christ lives in us if we love one another. And our love for one another means involvement in one another's history".

"Involvement in one another's history". It is a most evocative phrase. Merton certainly lived it. He was a pioneer of inter-monastic dialogue. He listened, responded and was changed. The challenge for the Christian Church now and in the 21st century is to listen and respond to the concerns of other faith communities in Britain, to become involved in their histories. The concerns may be about specific issues such as education, employment and social services or the wider questions of discrimination or racism. I am not thinking here of the Christian Church as powerful mediator or deliverer of change. The Church has some influence but not as much as is sometimes imagined and within this those committed to building good relationships with other faiths have some influence but not as much as they might like. There is another paradigm: that of friendship-building, joint exploration and joint action. Of course, this is happening at different levels already - here at The Inter Faith Network and in the Inner Cities Religious Council at

national level and in numerous local inter-faith councils and groups. I would like to see this expanding.

The challenge for all communities will be how to create adequate structures at local level through which all voices can truly be heard. Different kinds of groups or councils may emerge to meet different needs. Bilateral dialogue groups - Buddhist/Christian; Sikh/Christian; Jewish/Jain - can be tremendously vibrant as can inter-faith groups where anyone interested can attend. Yet, to prevent domination by any one faith tradition, inter-faith councils with stricter rules concerning representation might also be necessary. My vision is that in all of this the Christian Church will play an active role as one faith alongside others - to explore what needs to be done to create a society in which all religions are able to relate to one another with respect, trust and understanding.

So, in conclusion, the Christian Church has an internal and an external task. Hard work, exploration, struggle - all these terms could be used to describe the way ahead. Yet, as I look forward to the 21st century, I am hopeful.

In the subsequent question and discussion session the following points were made:-

(a) The Churches need to be ready to help other faith communities secure the access which they need, for example in terms of hospital and prison chaplaincy. There has been a disappointing lack of progress in following up the report by the University of Warwick research project team on this topic, which was partly funded by the Church of England. The attitude of different chaplains in helping to make adequate arrangements for access by other faith communities differs markedly from institution to institution. At the same time, although statistics could be misleading as many register as "Church of England" by default, the present prison population includes relatively small numbers of people from faiths outside the Christian Churches and the issues surrounding chaplaincy are complex ones. The Prison Service Chaplaincy has begun to open its training programmes to "Visiting Ministers" of other faiths. Also, questions of religious identity may be less significant than the need to show compassion to patients and prisoners who have no religious commitment but are open to the spiritual dimension of life.

(b) There is a need to ensure that schools encourage constructive approaches to inter faith relations among young people. The National RE Festival in October 1997 provides an opportunity to focus on this issue. The Festival information pack being distributed to schools includes the text of the Network's code on inter faith relations.

(c) The work of promoting good inter faith relations at the "grassroots" is of crucial importance. It is important to recognise that constructive work is being carried out by local inter faith groups. The Leicester Council of Faiths has a wide ranging programme of activities and projects and hopes to have soon a "drop-in" centre, in premises provided by the Methodist Church, providing a facility for those seeking contact with the different faith communities in Leicester.

Muslims and Inter Faith Relations in Britain: Context, Concerns and Expectations

Dr Ataullah Siddiqui
The Islamic Foundation

I believe that dialogue means engaging in the search to understand how others understand themselves. It involves a community's acknowledgement of the self portrayal of others. In other words, dialogue is about recognising "the otherness" of the other. In that spirit, I would like to talk about the participation of Muslims in multi faith dialogue in Britain. I would also like at the outset to make the point that different kinds of people are involved at different levels of dialogue. For example, various faiths are working together towards a multi-faith approach to chaplaincy in hospitals and universities. Others are involved in education, where they are working together to frame educational syllabuses. There are other areas where faith communities wish to move together, namely the media, morals and ethics and some progress has been made. This is a broad picture of our inter faith relationships and our understanding of inter faith dialogue.

Let me now focus briefly on the history of Muslim participation in inter faith dialogue. It began against the background of generally good race and community relations in Britain. Initiatives came from the Churches to involve Muslims in dialogue, especially in inner city areas where the Muslim population is fairly large and local authorities have faced unprecedented challenges of social and cultural adjustment.

Perhaps the first bilateral dialogue between Christian and Muslims took place in 1973 in Peterborough with the theme "Islam in the Parish" and it was followed by two other meetings: one in 1974 with the theme of "The Family" in Islam and Christianity and in 1975 on "Worship and Prayer". Muslim participation in these dialogues was cautious but enthusiastic. Cautious, because of the fear that perhaps the Churches wanted to convert Muslims. Yet there was enthusiasm that at the local level the Churches were ready to help Muslims in securing prayer and educational facilities and even to help them in their day to day interaction. So, at this juncture, Muslims participated in dialogue with hope but with an element of fear.

While these bilateral dialogues were in progress, Muslims, Jews and Christians entered into a trilateral dialogue as early as 1972. The three faiths have a lot in common. They held a very important seminar in 1972 which formed the Standing Conference of Jews, Christians and Muslims in Europe (commonly known as the JCM), still an active body. Perhaps Jews and Muslims felt closer to each other because of the history of their living together in Spain and the co-suffering of their expulsion from Spain in 1492. Maimonides and his contribution to Spanish history has become of considerable significance today. Young Jews and young Muslims meet under the auspices of the Maimonides Foundation in London. This is, I believe, a momentous step forward.

For Muslims the context of inter faith relations took a significantly different form after 1976. The Churches had begun to study the new Muslim presence in Britain and were beginning to define

more clearly their relationship with Muslims. In 1974 the Churches appointed an "Advisory Group on the Presence of Islam in Britain". In 1976 the World Festival of Islam was held in London. It attracted a lot of attention, especially from within the Churches and this was reflected in the work of the "Advisory Group". The Festival also encouraged the desire to learn about this "new religion". I believe that 1976 was a turning point in the history of Christian-Muslim Dialogue. By 1976 also Muslims had realised that they were not going "back home"; that this country is their home; and that they must contribute and participate in the day to day activities of life in British society.

This was also a period when Muslims began to participate in multi-lateral dialogues in organisations like Leeds Concord Inter Faith Fellowship. Here they encountered Hindus, Buddhists and Sikhs. Many Muslims met these faiths at close quarters for the first time, since they had come from areas where Muslims were in the majority where they had little opportunity to encounter others. So far there has been very little progress in dialogue with the Hindu, Buddhist and Sikh communities, generally known as the Indic religions. We meet in multi-lateral dialogues, in local inter faith groups or at national meetings. But I am not aware of any sustained bilateral dialogue in Britain between Muslims and the Hindu, Sikh or Buddhist communities. This is a shortcoming we should remedy.

The formation of The Inter Faith Network in 1987 gave Muslims more formal recognition, at least at the religious level. The hope was that this would help other to recognise how important it is that Muslims should be seen as a faith community and not merely as a racial or an ethnic community.

We are here in Britain with our historical baggage. In India, Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs met at a social level. There was less a dialogue of theology and more of a living and lively encounter. They participated in each other's festivals and weddings and mourned together if a neighbour died. However, our perceptions of each other were based on a mixture of reality and rumour, in which "the other" did not recognise themselves. We have a long way to travel to create the right perceptions of one another. We are perhaps more aware, here in Britain, of the need to search for a new depth of understanding in our relationships. In our dialogue with the Churches in Britain this is perhaps the right time to acknowledge that the relationship between Muslims and Christians is now mature enough for us to establish a permanent body for mutual understanding along similar lines to that which exists between Jews and Christians.

Perhaps our social interaction - the dialogue of life and living - will have an impact on our theological perception of "the other". Success in developing constructive interaction depends on our trust of each other. The growth of trust and acknowledgement of "the otherness of the other" provides space which allows our community to revisit its theological constructions of other communities. Here I would like to emphasise that Muslims in Britain, though informally and on a small scale, have already begun this journey. For the last three years a group of people from different denominations have met on several occasions to discuss the issue of "Islam and Pluralism". The past formulation for an approach to other faiths has been that of the distinction between the "House of Islam" and those who are outside the "House of Islam". But the adequacy of this formulation now has to be reconsidered because we are all citizens together in one society. That gives an important new dimension to our debate which we need to discuss within our community, as well as with the wider society. There are many other issues for us to address. For

example, we have a theologically defined position on the faiths which came before the Prophet Muhammad. But what about the faiths which came afterwards, Sikhism, for example? These are all issues which need to be discussed.

Before I ask Abdul Hamid Qureshi, Director of the Lancashire Council of Mosques, to describe his experience in working with communities in Lancashire, I would like to point out that not all members of our faith support what we do. There are reasons for these reservations and I am sure that in the case of Christians the position is also the same, as Elizabeth Harris mentioned in her remarks. Though we would like them to see things as we see them, at the same time, in their turn, they too want us to think what they think important. The communities of Christians and Muslims and others have to live with these internal differences and points of view. This is one challenge that is not going to go away.

A second challenge, at another level, is how the faith communities are going to relate to the world outside their "circle of faith", so to speak. Our position seems to be a very clear one: there can be no inter faith dialogue unless there is faith. That is the central point for our inter faith encounter. However, we must also face the question: how are we going to relate to those such as humanists who have convictions and moral and ethical values but whose world views are very different to ours? How do we connect with them? That is a question we need to address within our individual communities and among our communities together.

So there are challenges ahead, but we must recognise just how far we have travelled as faith communities and the ground we have covered so far is exciting. Now I will hand over to my colleague Mr. Qureshi.

Mr Abdul Hamid Qureshi
Director of the Lancashire Council of Mosques

I am grateful for this opportunity to share what we are trying to do in Lancashire in this field. My work starts from my personal perceptions, and from a very simple principle. The previous speaker mentioned that we all look to our history. Our ancestors may have done well in many respects, but at the same time they may have made mistakes. Similarly, in the case of other communities. The real issue is what we are going to do now. If we think that the mistakes of previous generations are going to bar us from doing good, and if we think their good deeds are going to travel with us and be sufficient for us and we are all the time looking to history, then we are history ourselves and are not people who will make history. The people who make history have to ask: "What am I going to contribute as a person to this society now and how am I going to shape the future?". That is the fundamental and most important challenge for us to face if there is going to be a future and if we want to share in this society as The Inter Faith Network has inspired all of us to do.

In 1994, I became Director of the Lancashire Council of Mosques which has the same boundaries as the Lancashire County Council and the Anglican Diocese of Blackburn. Before 1994 the Bishop of Blackburn with some of his colleagues and the leadership of the Lancashire Council

of Mosques used to sit together twice a year, once at the Bishop's house and once at the Council of Mosques. But that was the extent of the dialogue. We had good conversation on some issues but that was it. Fortunately at the same time as I arrived as Director of the Council of Mosques, the Revd Colin Albin came to the Blackburn Diocese as the Bishop's Adviser on Inter Faith Relations. We were both concerned to explore what we could do together and we were charged with drawing up a plan.

We decided that as a first step we should arrange for some Muslims to visit the Cathedral and for some Christians to visit the Mosque. Fourteen Muslims came to visit the Cathedral, and about twice that number turned up to visit the Mosque. The Cathedral Provost was a little disappointed that only a few people came, although it was a very cold night. But we thought it was positive that fourteen people came as none had visited the Cathedral before! So then we decided to have a larger programme to which we would invite not only the leadership of the Christian and Muslim communities, but also those people who belong to the secular establishment, the local MP's and local authority leaders so that it would be an event for the community but with a faith orientation.

This first event was on 2 March 1996 and 150 people turned up. It was a great success and everyone started to talk about it in the Council and among the police who started to take some initiatives on the youth front. The evening had a knock on effect. The Bishop had been concerned whether the programme would succeed but after this initial gathering he suggested that there should be one every year. On 13 June this year we held our second event. This time it explored issues in greater depth under the title of "Living with Diversity: Problem or Opportunity?". Two well known speakers, one Muslim and one Christian, took part and this time the event was held in the Cathedral. While we were planning to have the meeting there my colleague was asking: "Will the Muslims turn up at the Cathedral?" I said "We will have to see, but we have to try". That evening 250 were sitting in the Cathedral to everyone's surprise. The event involved and inspired a lot of hope.

We have to move forward in this way if we are to establish a community which is peaceful, tolerant, just and fair. That is a clear requirement. It is not simply wishful thinking but an absolute necessity if we are going to offer something positive to our children and for our future. If we are people of faith we believe that we are accountable to God. I believe that He is going to ask me: "What have you done with your life?" I need to be able to say that I have tried my best and that has to be good enough. That is very important. If we are people of faith, we must believe in accountability for our actions.

We are going to assess our recent meeting shortly. But we are already at work on a youth conference. There does need to be a programme for young people and indeed a number of younger people were present on 13 June who showed considerable maturity in their thinking and perceptions.

So I believe that if we have a shared concern for our society we can break all the barriers between us. I cannot see a single barrier which we cannot overcome. It is the will to do it which is required. The God who has created us will be with us if we are seeking to do it.

The work we have been undertaking in Blackburn has already had a knock on effect. When we had an Inter Faith Network regional link meeting in Blackburn recently, one of the participants

said that he had been trying very hard to develop an inter faith programme in his area. We decided to work together on an event which was held in the Town Hall in Accrington. More than a hundred people participated in it.

We need to have a clear aim in our inter faith activity. Our programmes need to be properly focused on the key issues and properly thought through. Then there is nothing which is unachievable. I pray to God that He may help us to develop together a just and fair society.

WORKSHOP DISCUSSIONS

The following notes record the three key issues raised and conclusions reached in each of the seven workshop discussions.

Focus Group 1, Public life as an arena for the development of inter faith cooperation - possibilities and challenges. Facilitators: Mr Neville Nagler, Chief Executive, Board of Deputies of British Jews and Revd David Randolph-Horn, Secretary, Inner Cities Religious Council.

1. How far are perceptions of other faiths and issues which concern them filtered through the media and subject to ignorance and bias affecting the media?
2. How far do particular faith groups seek power or advantage for their communities, as opposed to genuine inter faith understanding? Unless one community is prepared to support another community on an issue which affects the latter, are not professions of a desire for better relationships just hypocrisy? On the other hand, new opportunities can open up when faith communities approach Government together with an awareness of their common interests.
3. There is a risk that a particular faith or religiously based organisation may become associated with a particular stance on political issues. If other faiths do not share this viewpoint, it could act as a barrier to understanding and cooperation.

Focus Group 2, Educating to end inter-faith prejudice both against one's community and within it. Facilitators: Revd Canon Dr Christopher Lamb, CCIFR and Dr Ataullah Siddiqui, Islamic Foundation.

1. A number of participants said that in their traditions little was done to provide information about other faiths, either in general community education or in the training of leaders and clergy.
2. Regardless of faith tradition, sometimes people can be open and respectful in public dialogue between faiths and more critical and less affirmative about other faiths in discussion within their own community. We betray our own faith when we are guilty of insincerity or when we knowingly "bear false witness" against other traditions.
3. Among students, evangelism by particular faiths is a problem since it can seem to say to other faiths, by implication, "you should not exist".

Focus Group 3, Creating the human and financial resources needed for inter faith work - training the leaders and funding the initiatives. Facilitators: Maulana M. Shahid Raza, Executive Director, Imams and Mosques Council and Mr Om Parkash Sharma, President, Hindu Council of the UK.

1. Specific events and projects can get funding from local councils and other bodies. Trusts and individual donors are equally important. Donors need to be shown what their funding will achieve. Even small donations add up.
2. The importance of inter faith relations needs to be stressed within our own communities. The involvement of highly motivated individuals and also of religious leaders is vital. It

is also important to draw in more young people and to widen the circle generally through such strategies as arranging inter faith entertainment and running social help projects.

3. Individuals with inter faith skills need to play a role in resolving disputes among communities such as those between Muslim and Sikh young people in Slough.

Focus Group 4, Local inter faith councils - a focus for faith community relationship building. Facilitators: Mrs Angela Berryman, Policy Officer (Faiths), Leicester City Council and Mrs Ruth Jacobs, Jewish representative on the Birmingham Council of Faiths.

1. There was strong agreement that inter-faith dialogue is needed to promote peace, understanding and social action in place of local struggle, prejudice and exclusion.
2. There was a clear recognition that local circumstances make a big difference to the nature of local inter-faith dialogue or action groups. This includes local history, personalities, authorities, social mix and faith communities.
3. There was an acknowledgement that open discussion groups and representative action oriented councils are both needed. But these different paths can create tension particularly if both compete for recognition, resources, people and influence.

Focus Group 5, Religious Education and community inter faith strategy: contributing to educational resources. Facilitators: Mrs Alison Seaman, Deputy Director, The National Society's RE Centre and Editor of the Shap Journal and Mr Indarjit Singh, Director of the Network of Sikh Organisations (UK).

1. Work to help eliminate prejudice needs to begin as young as possible and to carry on later in life with adult education.
2. It is important to work with mainstream representatives from the faith communities to ensure both appropriate provision in schools and reliable material about the faiths. Publishers and educationalists should, however, be aware that the formats in which they ask for faith contributions can sometimes be inappropriate or constraining.
3. Some participants expressed concern about the "artefacts" approach to RE, either because they did not like to be asked for artefacts for classroom use as if sacred objects were just objects of curiosity or because, in the case of at least one faith tradition, it is explicitly taught that attention should not be focused on artefacts but rather on the essentials of the faith.

Focus Group 6, Moving on to a deeper dialogue as trust develops. Facilitators: Most Ven Vajiragnana (President, Sri Lankan Sangha Sabha of Great Britain) and Mrs Jane Clements (Council of Christians and Jews)

1. It is important to spend time appreciating the existence of common aims and exploring the purely spiritual aspect of being together. It is a question of maturity of shared interests. Time to get to know each other is valuable, as is being prepared to get on and do things together.
2. Deeper dialogue can take place on an individual level than at a group level. It must involve exploring the spirituality of "the other" within their own tradition. In worship

contexts this can mean not so much "inter faith worship" as experiencing the worship of the other.

3. Two way or bilateral dialogue can be particularly challenging because it is harder to avoid some issues. In any dialogue, there needs to be real exploration of difference conducted with honesty.

Focus Group 7, Setting a British strategy in its wider European and international context.
Facilitators: Mr Jehangir Sarosh, Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe and World Conference on Religion and Peace; and Mrs Celia Storey, World Congress of Faiths and the International Interfaith Centre, Oxford.

1. We need to know what is relevant for us in the wider European scene today: what old fears remain rooted in history and what new fears there are, often with economic roots.
2. It is important to involve other communities in our own experiences: exchange visits are useful for this. The UK has some good inter faith models to offer other countries.
3. Communications are all important in the contemporary world.

OPEN FORUM

Following the small workshop discussions there was an "Open Forum" session. The following is a summary of points made in the course of it:-

- Britain is further advanced in its development of inter faith relations than other European countries and has a lot to offer them. It would be good to establish a European wide inter faith link. On the other hand it is important to maintain the focus of the present Network on developments in this country and some new European wide link could be established alongside it. The possibility of funding from European Union sources for inter faith work should be explored.
- Work in the educational field and with young people is a priority. The Council of Christians and Jews has put particular energy into developing a "young leaders" group and has recently added another member of staff to join its team dealing with educational work. Young people want opportunities for practical co-operation where the benefit of applying their energies is apparent. Youth organisations such as the Guides and Scouts are becoming more multi-faith and multi-cultural in character and provide valuable opportunities for young people to meet and work together.
- The opportunity to join in cooperative projects is useful not only for young people but for older people as well. The trip which a number of Christians and Muslims made from Bradford to Pakistan some years ago has cemented relationships of friendship and trust between those who took part.
- There is a need for those working at a national and at a local level to be in a relationship of "mutual empowerment". It is always difficult to secure adequate communication between different levels of activity. Often those at local level see "power" as residing at the centre, while those at the centre realise that they can achieve little unless national policies and initiatives are implemented at local level. There is a need to make more effective use of the links which The Inter Faith Network and other "networks" provide. It appears that more attention will be given under the new Government to the regional dimension of public policy.
- The whole question of funding inter faith activity in Britain and more widely is of crucial importance. There is a need to ensure that the future plans for the Network and other inter faith organisations are in line with the level of resources which can realistically be anticipated.
- Funding is a major problem for local initiatives. Fundraising can be a constant and often depressing grind and the struggle to secure resources consume energies which should be devoted to the work itself. There might be advantage in the Network preparing a short leaflet with ideas and suggestions on fundraising for local groups.
- It is proving difficult to secure the necessary resources to enable national faith community structures to develop and operate effectively so that they can take advantage of the opportunities for wider participation in public life which are opening up for them, partly

as a result of the activities of the Network. Government Departments, local authorities and other public bodies cannot expect faith communities to be able to offer an adequate response and constructive support for policy development and specific initiatives if those communities do not have the resources to enable them to do so.

- The most important resources needed for inter faith activity are human resources. If people of commitment and vision are involved then they can generate the financial and material resources which are needed. Increasingly, local Councils of Faith and inter faith groups are making a substantial impact in their localities. In many ways the most important work which needs to be done is at the "grassroots" level. If a group can demonstrate that it is engaging in worthwhile activity, then it is more likely to command wider support, including that of the local authority.
- It is difficult for inter faith groups to become truly effective if they do not have the support and involvement of key local figures in the different communities. But in making initial approaches in developing new patterns of local inter faith activity it is important to be sensitive to such matters as different attitudes to gender roles.
- If faith communities are to provide constructive support to one another then they need to be aware of each other's problems. There needs to be a pattern of mutual understanding and support which can be drawn upon, for example, in situations like the difficulties which the Hindu community experienced over Bhaktivedanta Manor.
- It is important not to become too preoccupied with questions of structure and organisation. We need to focus on the task of personal spiritual growth. We cannot bring peace to others if we are not at peace with ourselves.

Closing Reflections from the Chair

Bishop Roy Williamson then offered some closing reflections to draw the National Meeting to a close. He referred to his own experience in the Anglican Diocese of Bradford where he became Bishop in 1984 with hardly any previous experience of a multi-faith situation. He found that ten of the local Anglican clergy had been commissioned by the Diocese as "community chaplains" with the task of dealing with inter faith work. But this meant that churches left it to those ten individuals to do all the inter faith work. This is no doubt a syndrome which other faith communities have experienced. It is important not to give responsibility for involvement in inter faith matters to a few, and partly in consequence marginalise this work.

In Bradford, a new strategy was adopted of looking for ways to enable ordinary church people to relate to their neighbours of other faiths: not to do the job for people, but to enable people to do the job for themselves. The need is for empowerment and enabling in order to instil confidence in people that they can work directly themselves on building inter faith relationships and friendships.

Friendship and trust are a necessary basis for good inter faith dialogue. Friends can not only

encourage one another but can also be honest with one another and remain friends. We need to dig below the surface in our relationships.

The challenge confronting all faith communities today in Britain is the absence of hope and the decline in morality. People of faith have resources to offer which are of vital importance to our nation in terms of hope, stability, standards and values. So inter faith cooperation and inter faith strategies for faith communities are not optional extras but are a necessity, both for the wholeness of our community and of our nation.

There is a need to see young people as an invaluable resource. Young people in the churches are impatient with their elders, who they feel are often fighting battles that no longer need to be fought. Adults, and particularly those in positions of leadership, need to open themselves up to listening to what young people have to say to them. Again, it is a question of empowerment: to liberate the contribution which young people can make both to their faith communities and to the wider society. There is so much to learn from young people if we are prepared to do so, through enabling them to speak to us.

At the end of the day, young and old, to whatever faith we belong, the only future we have is a future together. So we need to be honest with one another, to be friends with one another, and to trust one another, and, when we need to do so, to say hard things too, but within our relationship of friendship.

The Inter Faith Network For The UK

The Network links Britain's faith communities and promotes good relations between them. It works with its member bodies to combat inter religious prejudice and intolerance and to help make Britain a country marked by mutual understanding and respect between religions where all can practise their faith with integrity. It:

- Provides information on faith communities and on inter faith affairs
- Advises the public and private sectors on multi faith projects and inter faith issues
- Publishes books designed to help people working in the religious and inter faith sectors
- Fosters inter faith co-operation on social issues
- Holds regular national meetings of its member bodies where social and religious questions of concern to the different faith communities can be examined together and sets up multi faith working groups, seminars and conferences to pursue these where appropriate
- Links 80 member organisations including representative bodies from the different faith communities; national inter faith organisations; local inter faith groups; academic institutions and bodies concerned with multi faith education.

The Network has also worked with other organisations, such as the Commission for Racial Equality, the Inner Cities Religious Council and the University of York on a number of its projects. Notably, it has worked with the Religious Resource and Research Centre at the University of Derby to produce the landmark publication *Religions in the UK: A Multi Faith Directory*, the second edition of which was published in May 1997.

1997 is the Tenth Anniversary year of the Network. Member bodies and a number of other organisations around the UK are arranging events to mark the occasion and to draw attention to the general importance of working to build good inter faith relations in all contexts.

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MEMBER ORGANISATIONS OF THE INTER FAITH NETWORK FOR THE UK

FAITH COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVE BODIES

Afro West Indian United Council of Churches
Arya Pratinidhi Sabha (UK)
Baha'i Community of the United Kingdom
Board of Deputies of British Jews
Buddhist Society
Council of African and Afro-Caribbean Churches (UK)
Churches' Agency for Interfaith Relations in Scotland
Churches' Commission for Inter-Faith Relations
(Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland)
Friends of the Western Buddhist Order
Hindu Council of the UK
Imams and Mosques Council (UK)
Islamic Cultural Centre, Regent's Park, London
Jain Samaj Europe
Jamiat-ul-Ulama Britain (Association of Muslim Scholars)
National Council of Hindu Temples
Network of Buddhist Organisations (UK)
Network of Sikh Organisations (UK)
Roman Catholic Committee for Other Faiths of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales
Sikh Missionary Society
Sri Lankan Sangha Sabha of G.B.
Swaminaryan Hindu Mission
UK Action Committee on Islamic Affairs
Vishwa Hindu Parishad (UK)
World Ahl ul-Bayt (AS) Islamic League
World Islamic Mission (UK)
Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe

INTER FAITH ORGANISATIONS

Calamus Foundation
Council of Christians and Jews
International Association for Religious Freedom
(British Members' Group)
London Society of Jews and Christians
Maimonides Foundation
Northern Ireland Inter Faith Forum
Westminster Interfaith
World Conference on Religion and Peace
(UK and Ireland Chapter)
World Congress of Faiths

LOCAL INTER FAITH GROUPS

Birmingham Council of Faiths
Birmingham Fellowship of Faiths
Bradford Concord Inter Faith Society
Bristol Interfaith Group
Cambridge Inter-Faith Group
Cardiff Interfaith Association
Cleveland Inter Faith Group
Coventry Inter Faith Group
Derby Open Centre Multi-Faith Group
Dudley Council of Faiths
Edinburgh Interfaith Association
Glasgow Sharing of Faiths Group
Gloucestershire Inter Faith Action
Harrow Inter-Faith Council
Kirklees and Calderdale Inter-Faith Fellowship
Leeds Concord Inter-Faith Fellowship
Leicester Council of Faiths
Manchester Inter Faith Group
Medway and Maidstone Inter-Faith Group
Merseyside Inter Faith Group
Newham Association of Faiths
Nottingham Inter-Faith Council
Oxford Round Table of Religions
Peterborough Inter-Faith Council
Reading Inter-Faith Group
Redbridge Council of Faiths
Richmond Inter-Faith Group
Rochdale Interfaith Action
Sheffield Interfaith
Suffolk Inter-Faith Resource
Tyne and Wear Racial Equality Council Inter Faith Panel
Walsall Inter Faith Group
Waltham Forest All Faiths Group
Wellingborough Multi-Faith Group
Wolverhampton Inter-Faith Group
Wycombe Sharing of Faiths

EDUCATIONAL AND ACADEMIC BODIES

Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan
Centre for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations, Selly Oak, Birmingham
Centre for the Study of Judaism and Jewish-Christian Relations, Selly Oak, Birmingham
Community Religions Project, University of Leeds
Institute of Jainology
Islamic Foundation, Leicester
National Association of SACRE's Religious Education Council
Shap Working Party on World Religions in Education
Study Centre for Christian-Jewish Relations, (Sisters of Sion)
University of Derby Religious Resource and Research Centre

1998



Millennium

MILLENNIUM

1998 National Meeting of The Inter Faith Network for the UK

**Held on 13 July 1998
At the National Council for Voluntary Organisations
Regent's Wharf, All Saints Street, London N1**

**The Inter Faith Network for the UK (Registered Charity No. 1068934,
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MILLENNIUM

The Theme of the Meeting

The Network's 1998 National Meeting provided an opportunity for representatives of its member bodies to find out more about the plans emerging to mark the Millennium across the UK, including the Dome at Greenwich and the work of the "Lambeth Group", which brings together representatives of the Government and of faith communities to consider the religious aspects of the Millennium celebrations. The Group has been exploring how public celebrations of the Millennium can be handled in a way which recognises the important Christian significance of the Millennium and is at the same time sensitive to the aspirations of people of other faiths and beliefs, allowing for a shared participation at what will be a time for reflection and a renewed commitment to creating a more just and humane society.

Proceedings of the Day

Bishop Roy Williamson, Network Co-Chair, welcomed participants to the meeting. The morning session was to have been chaired by his fellow Co-Chair, Mr Om Parkash Sharma, who was unable to be present because of the death in Belfast of his mother two days before the meeting. Bishop Roy Williamson began the meeting by inviting those present to join in a short period of silence, each praying or meditating in accordance with their own tradition, calling to mind the recent bereavement in Mr Sharma's family and also the tragic deaths in Northern Ireland of three young children in an arson attack on their home.

Bishop Roy Williamson then introduced **Ms Shaheen Bekhradnia**, of the Zoroastrian Community, the World Congress of Faiths and the Oxford Round Table of Religions who explored the different calendars used by faith communities and the significance of these calendars, and the festivals marked within them, for our lives. The second speaker was **Revd Donald Elliott**, of the United Reformed Church, Convenor of the Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland's Four Nations Millennium Consultative Group, who described the plans of the British Churches for marking the Millennium. The third speaker in the morning session was **Ms Clare Pillman**, Head of the Millennium Unit in the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, who provided an overview of the main aspects of public programmes and events to mark the Millennium and of the role which different bodies were playing in these. Following a brief period of questions the morning session was then brought to a close.

After a break for lunch, **Bishop Roy Williamson** introduced **Revd Canon Colin Fletcher**, Chaplain to the Archbishop of Canterbury and Co-Chair of the "Lambeth Group", who provided an account of its work in advising the Government and other bodies working on events and projects for the Millennium on their religious aspects. Following a brief period for questions and discussion a series of perspectives on the work of the Lambeth Group were provided by four of its members, **Mr Deepak Naik**, Public Relations Officer of the National Council of Hindu Temples; **Mr Indarjit Singh OBE**, Director of the Network of Sikh

Organisations (UK); **Mr Neville Nagler**, Director General of the Board of Deputies of British Jews; and **Mr Iqbal Sacranie**, Secretary General of the Muslim Council of Britain.

Bishop Roy Williamson then introduced **Miss Jennifer Page CBE**, Chief Executive of the New Millennium Experience Company, which carries responsibility for the Millennium Dome at Greenwich, who gave an overview of the technological and creative challenge of this giant project, explaining the role and shape of the "Spirit Zone" within it.

After a brief period of questions to her, there followed an Open Forum with a panel comprising all the afternoon speakers together with **Mr Warwick Hawkins** of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and **Dr Harriet Crabtree**, Deputy Director of The Inter Faith Network, who has represented the Network office on the Lambeth Group.

After some closing reflections from **Bishop Roy Williamson** there was a break for tea before the Network's AGM for 1998 was held.

Calendars and Festivals – their Importance in our Lives

Ms Shahin Bekhradnia
of the Zoroastrian Community, the World Congress of Faiths and
Oxford Round Table of Religions

Time affects us on so many levels that we are probably not aware of all the different ways in which we are affected by it unless we really stop to think. Let us consider time at the most basic level, and keep well away from thinking in terms of hours and minutes and missing an appointment, using a watch and the like. I'm talking here about the personal level of time: we are all aware of births and deaths because they touch us and our loved ones. In different cultures we commemorate them as birthdays, wedding anniversaries, death memorials and other key stages or rites of passage which are celebrated repetitively through our lives indicating the significance we attach to personal history. These personal histories bind families together giving them a sense of common ties and often common interests. They also all concern events that make us think about the meaning of LIFE - who we are, where we came from and where we are going to- in other words the passing of our biological presence on earth and our ability to procreate through which we defy time and enjoy a drop of immortality through our offspring.

On a larger scale, as societies or communities, we carry a collective history of experiences which, when great significance is attached to them, we tend to commemorate regularly. These may be nationally commemorated occasions such as Remembrance Day, days of independence, Bastille Day on 14 July in France and other revolution days. These are secular commemoration days which generally mark historical events. Additionally we also have seasonal associations with some of these occasions which may be celebrated only at a local level such as 1 May in Oxford as an ancient Spring Festival Day with maypole dancing and Morris Men, Well Dressing Day in a Yorkshire village, or Midsummer's Day at Stonehenge.

Within the nine major world religions events too are commemorated which have been attributed significance within a religious tradition or community. These may remember the birth or death of a figure of importance within the tradition, a historical event, or a natural phenomenon such as the full moon or the shortest day, a harvest festival or the first day of spring. We want to be able to remember when they occur so that the event may be properly commemorated.

The common thread between them is that they all rely on ways of reckoning the passing of time in a way which is familiar to, and recognised by, those within the community practising this tradition. These are occasions which bring people together in an atmosphere of shared experience and brotherhood. On the other hand the way of reckoning the passing of time may not be familiar to those outside the society which participates in the commemoration. It goes without saying that whether the occasion is a festive one or not determines whether we might call it a celebration, but whatever the mood of the event, it often occasions commensality or sharing of food - a very basic symbol of communality. On the whole most

religious occasions seem to give rise to dancing, singing, occasionally drinking and generally the celebration of the good things in life and these events are eagerly awaited and give meaning, form and security to people's lives, helping to shape their identity.

At some point in the distant past humans developed the ability to count, remember and record, and religious tradition has given birth to some of the oldest records of this ability. The wonderful cliché about how innovative and individual the human mind is, applies here to the remarkable range of different time reckoning systems that have evolved and become associated with religions.

Alongside the personal milestones such as births and deaths, the celestial bodies (notably the sun and moon, but also the constellations which have been observed in their movements) provide further points of reference. The sun's movements have been correlated with certain important seasonal/agricultural cycles and have been noted as occurring with unfailing regularity. The difficulty within many religious traditions has been how to fit in the monthly moon returns of 29.5 rotations of the earth on its own axis producing night and day (which we call days) within the annual 365.2422 days it takes for the sun to return to the same position when it has been observed that the same climatic/seasonal conditions re-occur. Fitting in moon within sun movements makes for difficult mathematical jugglings which have confounded many calendar calculations over the centuries and produced all sorts of arrangements for fitting in the extra or intercalary days necessitated by these considerations. In our western or Gregorian system we call these years with extra days "leap years".

The complications and importance attached to measuring time correctly according to the tenets laid down by one group of adherents and challenged by another group of adherents has even produced situations where such considerations alongside others reflect differences both *intra* as well as *inter* groups. Take for example the Catholic and Protestant Churches compared to some of the Orthodox Christian Churches. The former follow the Gregorian calendar and the latter the Julian which is 13 days behind the current Gregorian use in this century. One of the results of this difference is seen in the two traditions' dating of key events such as Christmas or Easter. This goes back to Julius Caesar who adopted a solar calendar based on a year being 365.25 days long with an additional intercalated day once every four years to keep the solar year in step with the seasons. This Julian calendar was taken over for Christian usage from the sixth century but dating back from the time of Christ, calling the years Anno Domini, 'year of our Lord'.

Unfortunately the Julian year turned out to be 11 minutes too long in relation to the solar cycle and by the 16th century this meant that the Julian year was over a week out of step with the actual solar cycle. So in 1582 Pope Gregory XIII reformed the old Julian calendar by wiping out the 10 extra days that had crept in and changing the rules for how often leap years occurred so as to ensure that in future the calendar kept in step with the solar cycle. In fact Protestant England did not adopt the Gregorian calendar until 1752 because of the revised calendar's Roman Catholic origins - a good indicator of just how political calendar issues can be. But the Gregorian calendar is now widely used across the world, although in most cases alongside other existing calendars. In China for example three systems are in use: lunar, Chinese solar and Gregorian solar. Other religious traditions have festivals computed according to two or more calendars used together. For example, in India two lunar calendar systems are used, the *purimanta* system (used mainly in the north) and the *amanta* (used in

the south) as well as a solar calendar. Where the system of computing festivals relies on very complex calendar calculations there can, not surprisingly, be some variations from area to area in the date when it is held.

The dominance of the moon in all calendar calculations is reflected in the very word calendar at whose root is the Latin word Kalends means announcing or calling the arrival of the new moon and therefore a new month. A similar practice of recognising a new month by announcing the arrival of the new moon exists within Islam.

Staying with Islam, if you want to know why the Muslim festival of Ramadan moves slowly through the seasonal year and falls at present in winter in the North, this is because the Islamic calendar is strictly lunar and not tied to the solar linked season. The form of the lunar calendar as one without intercalation (adding of extra days to keep a calendar in tune with the solar cycle) was given by the Prophet in the Qur'an (Sura 9, verses 36-37).

The Jewish calendar has also followed a lunar system which has not tried to exactly box in the months into the solar year but instead has institutionalised the 11 extra days from each year to be saved up and inserted as an extra month of 30 days in 7 specific years out of a cycle of 19 years, viz. 3rd, 6th, 11th, 14th, 17th, and 19th. As this is a system administered by acknowledged authorities and rigorously applied, as a system it seems to have been working satisfactorily, fulfilling the needs of the community to maintain festivals at a time of year appropriate to them.

The Zoroastrian tradition from which I originate has come up with a rather different method for intercalating, dating from the early centuries of the Common Era (a term I discuss later). From a very early period of our religious history, the solar year (reflecting the primal importance of the seasons' influence on agriculture) was adopted. In this system the solar year was organised as 12 regular months of 30 days. Each of these days, instead of having a number, bore (and of course still bears) a name reflecting one of the natural manifestations of the creator like water, wind, star, sky, earth and so on with a yazata or guardian spirit watching over it to which the daily prayer is dedicated. It did not have a weekly cycle of 7 days like that which came into Christianity from Judaism.

In this early system of 12 x 30 days the shortfall of 5.25 days was dealt with by adding an extra month periodically. Later this system was reformed and the solar year was finished off with a 5 or 6 day intercalary period at the end of the 360 days and the changeover to the new system of annual intercalary days as opposed to an extra month every 120 years caused some confusion: Did the year end at the end of the 360th day or the day before the festival of Nowruz on the 5/6th intercalary day? The issue was important as All Souls' Day and remembrance of the departed was a duty at the end of the year. As long as there was a central authority with power the system worked, but once the adherents became dispersed and any sort of centralising or official authority was lost, and particularly when some of our co-religionists went off to India, becoming known there as Parsees, the complications of change resulted in one system of calculation in India (Shenshai a corruption of Shahanshahi - royal), while the Iranian community maintained another which the Parsees called Qadimi (or old). This discrepancy resulted in the two getting out of step by about one month and the whole monthly calendar gradually slipping behind the seasons.

For example, our most important Zoroastrian festival is the New Year, Nowruz, which means in Persian, new day. It is strictly associated with the spring solstice after which spring is really in the air and new life in nature begins afresh after a dormant winter. It is on the first day, Ormezd, (meaning the day of the Wise Lord and associated with the sun) of the first month of the year, called Farvardin. Because of the muddle over the exact calculations for the intercalary days, although still maintaining strictly the 30 named days of the month and the names of the months, it happened that Nowruz slipped back into the end of summer. A further reform of the calendar to bring it back firmly in line with the solar cycle was adopted by all but the most orthodox of Zoroastrians and became known as a Fasli (seasonal) calendar. This means that some Zoroastrians, almost exclusively Parsees as opposed to Iranian, still observe the Qadimi or old calendar festivals, sometimes alongside the Fasli ones just to be on the safe side, resulting in a Iranian style Nowruz at spring solstice (known by Parsees as Jamshidi Nowruz) and a late summer New Year in terms of the first day of the first month. Naturally all other festivals follow whatever system is adopted, resulting in significant variation between when Iranian Zoroastrians and Parsees celebrate festivals.

In Judaism many important festivals carry deeply historical associations such as Pesah, Sukkot, or Purim, and refresh the memories of community members about the traditions. In Shia Islam too, for example, Muharram and particularly Ashura is all about the historical martyrdom of Hosseyn grandson of the Prophet. In contrast the main Zoroastrian festivals tend exclusively to be associated with the elements and the seasons. Apart from the first day of spring festival of Nowruz, we have a fun water festival Tirgan in the summer when the day of Tir and the month of Tir coincide. Similarly when the day of Mehr (Mithra is associated with the sun as is day of Ormezd the first day of spring) and the month of Mehr coincide in the autumn at about the time of the solstice we have the Mehrgan festival which is like a harvest feast. We have a fire festival in the mid-winter 100 days before Nowruz (hence its name - Sadeh = 100) when our legends have it fire was discovered. And then we have the commemoration feasts in honour of the dead *gahambar* occurring 6 times yearly for 5 days when fruits of the land are blessed and distributed to the whole community from endowments. These are all reckoned by keeping up with daily prayers which refer to the appropriate name of the 30 different days attributed to nature within the month.. There are a number of others of course I will have to omit because of limited time.

So much for the moon and the sun. But chronology is actually what concerns us with the millennium and this is another branch of time reckoning. Different dating systems where the years are numbered beginning from a specific point of significance have existed for a long time. One of the earliest known is the regnal system which goes for example like this 'In the 4th year of the reign of Caesar Augustus', or as in the case of Ancient Athens, the years were recorded by the name of the eponymous archon who changed every year - sensibly a written record was publicly maintained of the archon for each year. That is how AD was adopted as it means in the Year of Our Lord.

Sikh dating starts with the date of the birth of Guru Nanak, so 2000 will be 531 Nanak Shahi Sammat. A highly significant date is coming up for Sikhs next year with the 300th anniversary of the founding of the Khalsa or Sikh community in 1699 (Gregorian equivalent) by the 10th Guru, Gobind Singh. It has apparently very recently been decided to standardise the dates for the celebrations of all Sikh festivals so that they are commemorated on the same day each year. Jains have a tradition whose chronology also has a founder link because for the marking of all significant events in their religious history they date time from the year

following the death of the last Tirthankara, Mahavira in the equivalent to 528 BC Gregorian equivalent. On this dating they are on the brink of celebrating the 2600th birth celebration of Mahavira in 2000/2001 Gregorian time since according to tradition he was born in 599 BC.

Not all traditions, of course, link their chronology to births and deaths. The Jewish calendar, for example begins in the year when creation is traditionally said to have occurred and in the Gregorian year 2000, the Jewish year will have reached 5760. Hindu chronology is rooted in a view of time cycles or ages, each of which has numerous subdivisions. For Hindus using the Vikrami Samvat calendar it will be 2056 in the year called 2000 in the Gregorian calendar, although the calendrical system is much older than this date which probably reflects a reform. It should be said that Jains use the same Vikrami-Samvat system for most purposes. The Shaka era was adopted for the solar Indian National Calendar in 1957-8 which began in 78 CE so in the Gregorian year 2000 it will be 1922 Shaka era.

Within Islam an interesting situation exists where Sunnis observe a year based on the migration of the prophet from Mecca to Medina calculated in lunar months *Qamari* whereas Shia adherents of Islam calculate their year from the same event but the calculation is based on the solar year *Shamsi*. The choice of Shias to revert to a solar year may reflect the older Iranian tradition. The difference in length of a lunar year which consists of 12 months of 29.5 days and is 11 days short of a solar year means that there are two alternative ways to date the Hejira or migration from Mecca to Medina, depending on the tradition to which you adhere.

A glance at a Zoroastrian diary offers a number of choices in chronology: we have the traditional regnal one beginning with the year equivalent to 631 Gregorian which marks the beginning of the reign of the last Zoroastrian king of Iran, Yazdegird III which, in the Gregorian year 2000 puts us in 1379/80 Yazdegirdi or Shahenshahi. This name can no longer be printed for political reasons in the Iranian Zoroastrian diaries but is still used in Parsee publications. We also find the year 2000 Gregorian will be equivalent to 3737 Zoroastrian era based on a speculative date for Zoroaster's birth which is in itself an extremely contentious issue. The reality is, as in other traditions, that the Gregorian date also appears, as does the national Iranian Hejri Shamsi (solar) calendar and these are almost exclusively used. The two chronologies with Zoroastrian associations merely serve a symbolic function.

The Baha'i era begins with the year of the declaration of the Bab in the equivalent Gregorian year of 1844 so in the Gregorian year 2000 it will be 157 Baha'i era. Buddhists vary in practice from country to country, on the whole not seeing the dating system as very significant, although Theravadins use a calendar dating from what they believe to be the year of the Buddha's death in 544 BCE and in the Gregorian year 2000 for them the date will be 2543.

Clearly the different chronologies and calendars are of significance to the followers of the different faiths and it has been argued that it is inappropriate for everyone to be obliged to use the Gregorian dating with its Christian origin and its accompanying initials standing for Before Christ and Anno Domini. There has been a move of late in some countries such as the USA to use the initials CE and BCE referring to Common Era and Before Common Era, which I used a few minutes ago, meaning that from 1AD, the world entered an era common to Jews and Christians. But that does not really help other faiths and if one were to take all

faiths into account, the Common Era would have to be dated from the arrival of the most recent of them.

A universal calendar?

There have been a number of attempts over the centuries to encourage the adoption of a universal global calendar. Indeed this idea is a key one in Baha'i tradition. It is also one which has been actively promoted by people working in industries like finance and computing who find the existence of the more than 40 calendars used in the world a practical inconvenience. It is perhaps unlikely that these rationalising initiatives will ever completely succeed, however, because of the depth of religious and cultural feeling attached to the various calendars by those who follow them.

Increasing awareness of the faiths' festivals

In multi-faith countries there is increasing pressure to be able to give the dates of the festivals a long time in advance so that, for example, people setting school exams or scheduling events to which they hope people of all faiths will be able to come will know what days to try and avoid. It can be surprisingly complex, however, to draw up a calendar for all faiths' festivals far in advance. Some traditions, such as Judaism, can give dates as far in advance as they could be needed. With other traditions, the matter can be more complex.

The Shap Working Party on World Religions has for many years produced a calendar of religious festivals but explains that it cannot be produced until about six months before the start of the year in question. A glance at calendar sites on the internet shows very patchy information available for the year 1999 and almost none for 2000. This has proven a little frustrating in the context of planning for the year 2000, Gregorian/Christian calendar, in the UK for organisations like the New Millennium Experience Company, who have been trying to schedule events taking account of the key dates of the major traditions in Britain.

It would be helpful if we could find ways to encourage organisations in their desire to be aware at least of the major festivals of the different faiths because the rhythm of the religious year is very significant for people who belong to a tradition. At a simple level it is the shape of our life: like a mould into which our spirit was poured when we were children and the shape of which has left its impress. Even those whose connection with their tradition is weak are held by the bonds of communal celebration or sorrow and for those whose link is strong, participation in festivals has great meaning. For these reasons, it is particularly important that employers and schools and others should recognise why, for example, a Jain might want to take time off for Mahavira-jayanti or the end of Paryushana-parva or a Sikh at Baisakhi.

In countries like Britain the national calendar has developed in the context of the dominance of one particular tradition, in this case Christianity. This means that certain bank holidays are linked particularly to Church year festivals: Christmas, Pentecost (Whitsun), Good Friday and Easter. This enables Christians to participate in most of their major festivals without booking special leave. For people of other faiths it can sometimes be problematic to get time off - particularly if the festival extends for longer than a day. The Commission for Racial Equality has noted a number of cases over the years where Muslim employees have felt pressured into working during Eid. Members of smaller traditions such as Buddhism, Jainism

and Zoroastrianism face the additional challenge that many employers are not at all familiar with their festivals and are uncertain if leave time should be given. The Inter Faith Network has discussed with the TUC the desirability of developing guidance for employers on festivals as part of good equal opportunities policy and hopes to pursue this idea.

This immediately brings to mind a personal experience: a mere two weeks ago while attending our water festival celebration at our temple, as a congregation we were asked to indicate our feelings about changing the date of celebrations of festivals to take into account the fact that few people living here can comfortably get away from professional and family obligations during the working week. The alternative to the observance of the correct days would be to celebrate the festivals over the weekend nearest to the correct date, thus allowing more of the community to participate. This discussion demonstrates clearly the sort of erosion of traditions that a community undergoes in diaspora unless accommodated and understood better.

It should also be said that our duties to departed souls requires much more attention than is the norm in this country as we observe the day of the month on which the death occurred every month for the first year and thereafter for 30 years annually on the day and the month anniversary. These are matters of deep psychological importance and it is to be hoped that they will be sympathetically understood by employers, teachers and others.

2000 as a possible opportunity for highlighting a festival from each faith community

The Government has been trying to ensure that Millennium celebrations are inclusive, that alongside the marking of the Christian significance of 2000, there are opportunities for people of all faiths to mark the date in the national calendar and to highlight aspects of their faith tradition in ways which bring about greater mutual understanding and ability to work together in the coming years.

Among the ideas that have been suggested is each faith community highlighting one festival event in its own calendar and inviting guests from other faiths, politicians and others. For some faiths, the new year festival might be the most significant, for others a different festival would seem appropriate. Perhaps later today there may be a chance for the panel and audience to discuss this idea.

Editor's note: The speaker referred to the Shap Calendar of Festivals and the Shap book *Festivals in World Religions* (RMEP, 1988). Information about these is available from the Shap Working Party, c/o The National Society's RE Centre, 36 Causton Street, London SW1P 4AU. Tel: 0171-932-1194.

2000: a Date with Special Significance for Christians

Revd Donald Elliott
of the United Reformed Church, Convenor of the Council of Churches for
Britain and Ireland's Four Nations Millennium Consultative Group

It is good to be here today in such wonderful company. The previous speaker's reference to the devising of calendars takes me back to my days with the Leicester Council for Community Relations when we used to try to produce on one poster all the relevant dates for the year. We never quite managed to do it by 1 January in any given year as it was difficult to put it together.

Much of what I was going to say at the outset about the complications about the dating of the Millennium has already been covered. Clearly when we are talking about a historic date which is significant for Christians - 2000 years since the birth of Jesus Christ - one of the questions which is raised immediately is about the accuracy of that date. Probably many people realise that actually to date precisely the birth of Jesus of Nazareth is virtually impossible, for two good reasons. The first is that the birth of Jesus Christ was not a huge public event! He came from peasant stock in an obscure part of the Roman Empire. The traditions are that his mother was on the move during the census at the time of his birth. So precise dating is quite difficult. The second reason is that Christians during the first days of Christianity were more concerned with the future than with the past. They were not particularly interested in the dating of particular past events. That came later and where the date of Christ's birth is concerned scholars are unsure as to how accurate the traditional date is. There are those who think Jesus' birth happened as early as 11 Before the Common Era and some as late as 6 in the Common Era. Nobody really knows. However, we are going to celebrate according to what has become the traditional date. So Christians in a couple of years' time will be celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ 2000 years ago.

Here in these islands we Christians seem to be making quite a lot of celebrating this event. Christians in other parts of the world will no doubt be celebrating too as well but there has been a particular concentration on this here. I am not quite sure why this is the case. But I believe that there will be as much activity here as anywhere else in the world.

A few years ago, Pope John Paul II published an encyclical "Towards the Third Millennium" which set the tone for this event and was received very appreciatively by Christians well beyond the Roman Catholic Church as providing a framework for preparations by Christians for that time. In his scheme the Pope suggested that 1997 might be seen as a Year of Faith, a time for concentration on what Christians believe; that the current year, 1998, might be thought of as a Year of Hope when we look forward, while recognising where we have to admit faults; 1999 as being the Year of Charity, the Year of Love; and, finally, the year 2000 itself the Year of Jubilee.

Those themes have been picked up around these islands in different ways by the ecumenical or inter church bodies in England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland. There will be different programmes although they do have a "family" resemblance. Part of that family resemblance

comes from an agreement that that kind of pattern is acceptable and helpful for Christian people. Within England, where there has been perhaps as much concentration as anywhere else, the theme has been developed of what has been called a "new start". The whole idea of a time of refreshment and renewal is one that appeals to Christian people. So this theme is being developed in different dimensions, based on a document produced a couple of years ago "A Chance to Start Again" which got wide circulation and wide discussion within the Christian family.

The theme of the "new start" forms part of a "resolution" that has been circulated and thought about amongst Christians in the UK. There is a hope that this Millennium resolution might find wide ownership, not simply amongst Christians, but amongst all people of goodwill, so that perhaps at midnight on 31 December 1999 there might be a national pause and this resolution be said either privately or communally. I will read it to you. "Let there be respect for the earth, peace for its people; love in my life, delight in the good; forgiveness for past wrongs; and from now on a new start". You see there a focus on that theme of a new start, both a looking forward and also an asking for forgiveness, recognising that forgiveness is needed, which is part of the dynamics of the Millennium theme that Christians are thinking about. This theme is not far away, as you will be hearing I am sure, from the Government's theme for 2000 of "Time to Make a Difference". Both encompass the idea that we are in a changing situation both in our personal lives and our national lives and that 2000 provides an opportunity for reflection and renewal.

The "new start" theme is being developed at the moment in England with three dimensions. One is "a new start with God": a sense of the renewal of personal and corporate faith. Work is being done now to think what that might mean. The second theme is "new start at home" which is looking at how, in our family lives, in our social lives within this country, there may be scope for renewal and a new look at some of the things that we do. There are materials being developed on that theme as well. The third dimension is a new start for the world's poor. Here I expect you are familiar with the Jubilee 2000 campaign which is one of the means by which Christians and others are seeking to bring to public attention public the issue of the unrepayable debts of the poorest countries in the world. You may recall the programme to lobby the G8 Governments that took place on a large scale in Birmingham in May and that campaigning programme will continue.

I do not have the time to give details of each and every possible way in which in the four nations of these islands are developing the "new start" themes, but I will give just a couple of examples. During 1999 there will be a concerted effort for the Churches in Scotland to study the themes within that Millennium resolution of respect for the earth, peace, love in our personal lives, delight in the good, forgiveness for past wrongs and a new start. Local churches in Scotland, particularly during the Lenten period before Easter, but at other times as well, will be encouraged to study that theme under the title "Catching the Dream". I suspect that the material produced in Scotland, which I am told is very good, will be used more widely by Christians in other parts of these islands. So that is one initiative that has come from our friends in Scotland.

In Wales there is a concentration on the theme of Jubilee 2000, both in terms of the actual campaign of behalf of those who have to try to repay this unrepayable debt and the need for Christians, among others, to express repentance over the past misdeeds by which the accumulation of this debt has occurred on the back, for example, of things like the slave

trade and unequal treaties and so on. There is some heart searching about this, with the Churches in Wales leading the way with a desire for Christians to recognise their complicity in the ways in which inequalities have grown up in monstrous forms across the world today. So that is also a theme that is being developed. How do you say sorry without it coming over as some sort of tokenism? How can you actually express that in a way that means something, not simply for yourself, but for those to whom you wish to say sorry? That is also a theme that we are exploring. But I must say that it is a difficult one and not easy to come to terms with.

Now you may wonder how all this activity is being funded. I think sometimes there is an impression that the Churches have some kind of secret access to all kinds of private funds. Quite a lot of money is going to be spent. There is a considerable Millennium Office which is developing to serve the Churches in England and various denominations have seconded people to it or have provided funding for it. But all that funding is coming from the Churches and from Church members. The degree to which the Churches have somehow been getting their act together over this Millennium celebration and its different aspects is quite exciting. For example, both the Salvation Army and the Roman Catholic Church have seconded people to work in the Churches' Millennium Office. It is an interesting exercise whereby Christians of various persuasions are coming together to help one another in the celebration of the Millennium and in the reflection that needs to go on about it.

The Millennium moment is the event that has been suggested in connection with the Millennium resolution that I mentioned earlier, the proposal that on New Year's Eve at the end 1999 and the beginning of the year 2000 there should be, if possible, in amongst all the partying that will no doubt go on, a moment of silence, a moment of quietness and a moment of reflection. The resolution is being promoted as a way in which very many people, whether Christian or not, can make some gesture of intention at that moment about the future - to God, if they believe in God, to one another, and to themselves.

Associated with the resolution is a plan, particularly being developed in England, but also being taken up in Wales and in Scotland for candles to be provided. The idea is that local churches may wish to purchase large number of these specially crafted candles and give them out around the neighbourhood for use by families and community groups who may wish to come together or indeed just as a family, to mark that moment. A lot of work has to be done in order to see that a time of quietness of this kind can be observed. We can imagine all kinds of difficulties about it. But the idea is that there should be a national moment of reflection, and, if you will, of resolution and intention and, for those who are religious believers, a moment of prayer, when we reflect on the past and we look forward to the future with God, using the words of the resolution that have been adopted. Then the partying will no doubt to get under way in a big way although some of us will no doubt go to bed!

Then on New Year's Day 2000, which is Saturday, local churches are being asked to be open for worship. There will be a lot of bells rung and so if you don't like church bells, then get yourself some ear plugs! But quite an effort is being put into this and some funding has come from the Lottery fund for the restoration of church bells that are perhaps out of tune or have not been used for some time. So there will be a lot of bell ringing around the churches on 1 January 2000.

In that same weekend there are expected to be national or official Millennium services on the afternoon of Sunday 2 January in various locations in the UK. They will be Christian services but persons of other faith will be invited as honoured guests and no doubt members of the Royal Family will be present. It is not intended that the services should be carbon copies of each other. There will be variations according to the culture of the places where services are being held. There will also be some common elements even though we are not quite sure yet what those will be. The four services will almost certainly be broadcast live. The services are also to be multi-cultural in character: we want them to reflect as far as possible the reality of the Christian communities in this country, and others also living here. So we want the services to be ones that people can feel, although they are Christian in character, belong as far as possible to everybody.

I do not intend to say much about the Millennium Festival and the exhibition at Greenwich as others will be talking about this later. But, as you know, all faith communities are being encouraged to participate in these. I also leave to one side the question of lottery funding, which is clearly a hot potato. We know there are difficulties about that for some, including many Christian groups.

Another time of the year when there will be a major coming together of Christian people will be 11 June, Whitsunday in the Western Christian calendar. It is expected there will be large gatherings of Christians in various centres. I know, for example, that the Churches in Wales are developing plans for that. It so happens that in 2001 the Gregorian and Julian calendars for the first time in many years have Easter on exactly the same day. It is possible that on this occasion there may be an opportunity for all Christians to be able to worship altogether on Easter Day.

History books tell us that at the end of the first Millennium there was a lot of excitement. Many Christians thought that at the end of 1000 time itself might end. Christians believe that Jesus Christ will come again and there was quite a lot of expectation that that would happen in the year 1000. There were a lot of strange groups going about, predicting that in different ways. I do not sense the same sorts of expectation this time. If anything, the frenetic activity seems mainly geared to celebrating the date. I think that is to be welcomed. You will find that a lot of resources are being developed: books of prayers, new hymns and so on.

I want to say a word about the global context. The Jubilee 2000 campaign, although it originated in this country, has now become international. There is now an Afrika 2000 campaign which was launched in Accra during April. So the countries directly affected by debt issues are also now beginning to engage in the campaigning.

On another note, it is the case that there will be a quite a lot of Christian evangelistic endeavour surrounding this Millennium. I need to say that. I am aware of quite a lot of initiatives that I hear and read about bubbling up amongst Churches. A lot of Christian groups are wanting to make use of the Millennium to promote and to propagate the Christian faith. That is right and proper. But at the same time you will be anxious, as I am, that the tone, the nature and the way in which that is going to be done are appropriate. The various Church groups around this country with which I work do keep those initiatives under review and try to ensure that they observe good and fair practice and do not undercut good relations with people of other faiths. I do believe that this is an aspect which our Council will be watching very carefully and endeavouring to ensure so far as it can in a free society.

As part of the Lambeth group, about which Colin Fletcher will speak later, the Christian representatives have tried to respect, to learn from and to listen to and to work with people of all faiths as we approach the Millennium. You will be the best judges of that. Various documents have been produced jointly dealing with the values we want to be reflected in the Greenwich exhibition and also in marking the Millennium in a multi-faith context. A document of that name was produced and published by the Department of Culture and Media and Sport in conjunction with the Network and has gone out on behalf of the Lambeth Group, in the name of the Churches and other faith communities as well as the Department. I think that is a very important and significant step.

2000: a Date in the National Calendar

Ms Clare Pillman
Head of the Millennium Unit
of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport

Thank you, Bishop Roy, for that kind introduction and thank you to the Inter Faith Network for inviting me here today. It is a great privilege to address such a distinguished audience and to follow on from two such interesting speakers.

I must begin with an apology - for not being David Chesterton. We seem to be somewhat careless with our Lambeth Group Chairmen - losing Hayden Phillips to the Lord Chancellor and now David Chesterton to the UK Sports Council. For that reason - and more generally, I am delighted that our other Chairman, Colin Fletcher, is here today and looking fit and well.

As Head of the Millennium Unit at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, I am responsible for coordinating the Government's interests in the Millennium (that is, everything apart from the Millennium Bug). I have therefore been asked to give you today an overview of the many different ways in which the people of this country will be celebrating the Millennium and to explain how the Government sees its role in respect of these celebrations.

Since 1993 the Government has recognised the year 2000 as an important moment for the people of this country and has seen its role as two-fold: to provide leadership, and to create a framework for people to mark the end of the second Millennium and the beginning of the third in their own way. Neither this Government nor the previous one saw it as their business to tell people how to mark this moment in time, but they felt it important to respond to the growing interest in the year 2000.

As the previous speakers this morning have demonstrated, the importance of the year 2000 lies in it being a Christian anniversary, which like major anniversaries in other faiths, will be a cause for both reflection and celebration. The year is also important calendrically, and I think that everyone who uses the Gregorian calendar will experience a sense of history in the making when we move from 1999 to 2000.

The Government, in responding to this growing interest in the Millennium, defined its objectives as being:

- to enable as many people as possible throughout the UK to **participate** in, benefit from and enjoy the Millennium celebrations;
- to ensure that the celebrations leave a tangible **legacy** for the people of the UK; and
- to ensure **awareness** and appreciation of the value of the UK's Millennium programme both at home and abroad.

Taking each of these objectives - participation, legacy and awareness - in turn, I propose to say a little about each.

In terms of participation, the most important step was the decision to allocate one-fifth of the proceeds from the National Lottery going to good causes to projects specifically to mark the end of the second Millennium and the beginning of the third. Thus was the Millennium Commission established. Since it started making grants in 1996, the Commission has allocated £1.260 billion to 186 capital projects at over 3000 sites throughout the UK. These schemes alone have engaged literally thousands of people in thinking about and planning for their futures.

Many of the major projects funded by the Commission will be familiar to you: the new national sports stadia in Wales and Scotland; the new Tate Gallery of Modern Art at Bankside in London; the Sustrans national cycle network. Others will be less familiar: a new University for the Highlands and Islands of Scotland will, for example, bring higher educational facilities to people who have previously had to leave their communities to pursue their studies; the Shri Venkataswara Temple and Community Centre will provide valuable new facilities for worship, education, culture and sports in Tividale.

The Commission has sought to achieve a good geographic and demographic mix within the straight-jacket of the application-driven process. Competition for funds has, however, been fierce and only 1 out of 10 applications returned has received funding. The final awards to capital projects will be made over the coming weeks and months - and a couple of significant religiously-led projects are awaiting decision.

As well as funding capital projects, the Commission has an awards scheme for individuals - enabling 40,000 people to do something to benefit themselves and their community by the end of 2000. An example of one of the Awards schemes currently running is the Birmingham Partnership for Change, which will make grants of up to £3,000 to 500 young Afro-Caribbeans in Birmingham over a three year period. The awards will support initiatives to develop and promote the family environment, and provide opportunities for young people to broaden their horizons through activities such as mentoring, work shadowing and training courses. The Millennium Commission is particularly keen that the Awards scheme for individuals should achieve a good spread of projects from ethnic minorities, and we can provide details of the scheme if anyone is interested.

The third strand of the Commission's activity is the Millennium Festival, with the Millennium Experience at Greenwich as its centrepiece. Jennie Page, the Chief Executive of the New Millennium Experience Company, which is charged with the delivery of both the Festival and the Experience, will tell you more about them later today.

But participation is not just about providing people with grants - many thousands of events will be organised without money from the Millennium Commission. It is also about encouraging people to think about how they celebrate. The Government has always recognised the importance of the year 2000 as a Christian anniversary, but it has also been keen to ensure that the celebrations involve and engage as many people as possible, including those of other faiths.

This was why in 1996 my Department set up the Lambeth Group, to promote dialogue about the Millennium between the Christian Churches, other faith communities, the Government, the Millennium Commission and the New Millennium Experience Company. The Group

involves the Churches and the faith communities in the Millennium co-ordination process, in order to ensure that the spiritual significance of the year 2000 is properly reflected. Colin Fletcher and other members of this Group will be able to tell you more about its work later this afternoon.

The Lambeth Group is not the only such group set up by my Department. We also have groups advising on such issues as local community involvement in the celebrations; international issues; media relations; London; and the First Weekend. It is to these groups that we owe such ideas as the recently announced Millennium Bank Holiday on 31 December 1999.

One of the things I have found most interesting in learning about other countries' plans for celebrating the Millennium is the recurrence of the word "legacy" - people (not just governments) want this moment in time to have a lasting impact on society at every level - internationally (through campaigns such as Jubilee 2000); nationally through projects such as Children's Promise (which Jennie Page will tell you more about later today); and at a local and community level (through the creation of a Millennium Wood, as in the "The Archers", or the revitalisation of Bellevalle Community Centre in Liverpool).

Many people also see the new Millennium as a time to make personal resolutions - a time when they can perhaps look at their lives and decide what they want to carry with them into a new millennium, and what they would like to be able to leave behind. Quite literally, a time to make a difference.

The Millennium legacy will take many forms and, frustratingly for some, much of it will take some time to be recognised and some of the most valuable legacies may be the most intangible. The regeneration value of such Millennium Commission projects as the Lowry Centre in Salford or the Earth Centre in Doncaster is easily measurable; as will be the economic impact of the Millennium Experience at Greenwich. Less tangible will be the benefits arising from communities working together to create Millennium projects.

I was both touched and surprised by the final words of the Churches Together in England submission to the Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee, which described the work of the Lambeth Group as "an unprecedented initiative and it is a tribute to the thoughtful work done by civil servants, NMEC and Millennium Commission staff, and other members of the Group that, what could be a very difficult and sensitive part of the Millennium is being thought through carefully, and with remarkable unanimity."

We have, I think, broken new ground in working together in this way, and I for one, find it heartening to know that, at the dawn of a new Millennium it is possible for a group as diverse as the Lambeth Group to produce documents like *Values at Greenwich* and *Marking the Millennium in a Multi-faith Context*. These documents have at their core an acceptance of and respect for different religious traditions, and a sense that diversity is something to be celebrated rather than feared. The input of the Inter Faith Network, and its Deputy Director Harriet Crabtree in particular, has been critical to the success of these documents. This sense of partnership is what the present Prime Minister meant when he said that the Millennium

"will bring the nation together in common purpose. It will unite the nation. It will be a meeting point of people from all backgrounds. It will be an event to lift our horizons. It will be a catalyst to imagine our futures."

In many ways I think that the UK is the most millennially aware country in the world - the press have seen to that. Whilst there have been times that I have begun to doubt that old adage about there being no such thing as bad publicity, I think that this awareness has been valuable. We are having the debates about inclusivity and meaning now, with 18 months to go, not after 2000 in a spirit of recrimination at an opportunity missed.

People are being encouraged to talk about their hopes (and fears) for the future through projects such as Schoolnet 2000, and to become involved in shaping the way their communities see themselves through projects such as Our Town's Story. Jennie Page will be able to tell you more about these schemes later today. That is not to say that we do not have a long way to go to create the level of public awareness of the opportunities afforded by the Millennium necessary to achieve that real sense of a shared experience. But it is events such as today's, and the regional conferences earlier this year (which I know a number of you attended), which build up a sense of anticipation and a willingness to participate.

I would like to end with a quotation (one much used by both Chris Smith and Peter Mandelson) from an article written a couple of years ago by the novelist Ben Okri. Writing about the Millennium he said:

"The Millennium is an illusion; but it is a useful and powerful illusion by which we can become more real. It is not a moment marked out in time by the universe, by nature, by the seasons, or by the stars. It is a moment we have marked out in timelessness. It is therefore a human moment; it is us making a ritual, a drama, a tear on eternity; we are domesticating the infinite. Therefore it is a moment in which the mind of a large section of humanity contemplates and is faced with the larger questions of time, death, new beginnings, regeneration, cycles, the unknown."

In this passage Okri was capturing the sense that we are trying for a moment to seize hold of the flux of time, and in doing so, seeking to improve ourselves and our society. For the Government and others to try to respond to and reflect these profound concepts is ambitious, but we would be failing in our duty if we did not try to do so.

In the subsequent question and discussion session the following points were made:-

(a) The international Sikh community has recently decided that Sikh festivals should all be celebrated in future on the same day each year. Details of these dates are available from the Sikh Missionary Society.

(b) The health and safety aspects of the planned widespread use of candles on New Year's Eve 1999 are being examined.

(c) There are important international dimensions to the Millennium. For example, the United Religions Initiative at its recent meeting in San Francisco called for a global cease fire in conflicts around the world for one day at the start of the new Millennium. The Millennium provides an opportunity to reinforce the developing new relationships between different religious groups.

(d) It was recognised that technically the new Millennium begins on New Year's Day 2001 rather than New Year's Day 2000! But it became clear at an early stage that people will want to celebrate when the figure 2000 appears in our calendars. This is one reason why the celebrations will last for the whole year!

(e) There are considerable uncertainties surrounding the precise date of the birth of Jesus including the day, as well as the year, but again, the Churches have recognised the powerful symbolism of the traditional dating of his birth.

(f) There are many plans for involving young people in Millennium activities. For example, the National Youth Games promoted by the Sports Council will involve 500,000 young people across the country. The NMEC, Marks and Spencer and five major children's charities are co-operating in promoting the Children's Promise to raise funds for work among young people by participants in the scheme donating their pay for the last hour of their work at the end of 1999.

(g) The Millennium Commission has yet to reach final decisions on a number of projects which have been submitted to them but will be doing so soon.

Marking 2000 in our Religiously Diverse Society

Revd Canon Colin Fletcher

Chaplain to the Archbishop of Canterbury and Co-Chair of the Churches and Other Faiths Subgroup of the Millennium Coordinating Group of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport

Introduction

May I begin by thanking Brian Pearce and Harriet Crabtree for their invitation to address this meeting. This also gives me the chance to underline my personal thanks to them for their wider work, together with that of their colleagues. I confess that when I came from Margate where I was a vicar five years ago, to work on the Archbishop's staff at Lambeth Palace, I had not heard of the Inter Faith Network. But over the last five years, I have to come value enormously its work, both for the help of its staff to me personally and for the outstanding contribution which the Network is, I believe, making in our society today. From what I gather there are many many countries in the world which could do with the equivalent of the Inter Faith Network. Sometimes we forget just how good it is to be in this country and to be able to have this kind of gathering, when we are meeting not merely as delegates but as friends who have grown to know and trust one another over the years.

I have been asked to speak on the subject "Marking 2000 in our religiously diverse society". I do so with some hesitation. I certainly cannot provide you with a full overview of the way in which all the different faith communities will be celebrating 2000 and I am very grateful therefore that others will be speaking after me and will be able to correct me if I get things wrong and to add their comments where my own knowledge is thin or non-existent. But the particular focus of my contribution is what is called the "Lambeth Group", or to give its full title, "The Churches and Other Faiths Sub-Group of the Millennium Coordinating Group of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport". But I shall call it the "Lambeth Group" because that is much easier and it is also the way it has been referred to in Parliament, the press and elsewhere.

What I want to do is simply to ask five questions and to attempt an answer to each of them. First of all, what is the Lambeth Group? Second, how did it come into being? Third, who is on it? Fourth, why does it work? (And I will explain that question when we get to it.) Finally, what has it achieved to date?

What is the Lambeth Group?

It is as, I said, a sub-group of the main Coordinating Group set up by the Government in 1996 and staffed by members of the Millennium Unit at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. That Group's remit is to coordinate the Government's response to the Millennium. As Clare Pillman explained, the Lambeth Group is not the only sub-group working to that

coordinating group. There are several others. But it is the one that involves the most people, that has met the most regularly, and has achieved (unintentionally, as far as the group is concerned) the highest profile. Why, by the way, is it called the Lambeth Group? Simply because it meets at Lambeth Palace! There is nothing mysterious about it. It's just that it meets there and hence it is called the Lambeth Group.

How did it come into being?

When the Central Coordinating Group was being set up, the then Government invited the Archbishop of Canterbury to be a member himself or, as the head of the established Church in England, to send a representative to that group. After some thought, the Archbishop of Canterbury asked me to go along to represent him at the first meeting of the group. Following that meeting, I talked with Hayden Phillips, now Sir Hayden Phillips, who was then the Permanent Secretary at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and was also chairing that Coordinating Committee. We agreed that we would need a much larger consultative group if there were to be any way in which the interests of the different Christian communities and the concerns of other faith communities across the four nations were to be represented. It was nonsense, in other words, for the Chaplain of the Archbishop of Canterbury to turn up at the central Coordinating Group and to claim to speak for everyone if he was not actively consulting with a far wider group and, indeed, if their opinions were not being heard by the Government itself.

So the Lambeth Group came into being as a result of that decision. It has two Co-Chairs, myself and a senior civil servant from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, and a unique Church/Government mix in its composition.

Who is on it?

Given the Group's purpose, it was clear to me that it should bring together those who needed to consult with those with had views and guidance to offer. That was fairly obvious. But things are never quite that simple, particularly with regard to anything to do with the year 2000. The Churches - and I think this goes for many of the other faith communities as well - take a long time about their consultation procedures. Mainly we are made up of volunteers who are doing other jobs and trying to fix meetings takes time. We all know how it works. You fix a meeting and then wait for the minutes to come out and then you fix another meeting, and before you know it 6 or 9 months or almost a year has gone past and the process travels gently along. It does get there but it gets there slowly.

With the year 2000 we do not have that kind of timescale. If my colleague Rev Stephen Lynas was here, he would be able to tell you precisely how many days there are now until December 31 1999. I don't know how many it is but it is not that many, that I do know! So we have had to work at such a pace that we could not afford to follow the usual processes of lengthy consultation procedures that might have been ideal for achieving exactly the right balances and carrying out our aims. So a certain amount of guess work had to go on.

So what was the pattern of participation chosen for the Lambeth Group? To split the Group into two: there were first of all those who needed to consult, those who needed to be there as listeners and to have a place to test their ideas. There were five such bodies and groups:

- The Department of Culture, Media and Sport itself
- The New Millennium Experience Company, as it has now become, which is responsible for the Dome and for the Millennium Festival
- The Millennium Commission, with its capital projects, its award schemes and so on
- The Royal Household (because with many of these discussions about big national events, it is important that The Queen and other members of the Royal Family are kept abreast of developments and are feeding in their own ideas)
- The Prince of Wales's Household (as we know, the Prince of Wales has a particular interest in inter faith matters within this country so it is very important that his Household should be there)

That in a sense was the easy bit. More complex was, what about the Churches and other faith communities?

On the Church front, clearly there had to be representatives of individual churches, the Church of England, the Roman Catholic Church, many of the Free Churches and perhaps representatives of the inter-church, ecumenical bodies not only of the United Kingdom but also of the four nations of England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. No Welshman or Scotsman will let you forget that the year 2000 is also a particularly significant year for those two nations and any celebrations marking the Millennium would also have political overtones with the foundation of the Welsh Assembly and the Scottish Parliament. So all those organisations had to be represented. There are also churches with particular interests, for instance those down at Greenwich where the Dome is, so that was another grouping that needed to be brought on board.

On the "other faiths" front what I did - and here I come absolutely clean - is that I followed the Inner Cities Religious Council pattern and invited members of the Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and Sikh communities to provide representatives. All of those are on the Lambeth Group. The Group also includes a number of "inter faith" specialists, and I hope Harriet Crabtree doesn't mind being included in that grouping together with Christopher Lamb who is also here, and also David Randolph-Horn from the Inner Cities Religious Council.

The result is a direct participation of about 40 people in the Lambeth group with a regular attendance of about 30 at any given meeting. If that sounds quite impressive, I am well aware of a number of gaps within it and I have hinted at one already. First of all, it doesn't represent the interests of anything like all the Christians in this country. Secondly, it doesn't represent the interests of all the faith communities in this country. Thirdly, it doesn't represent the interests of all those with an interest in "spiritual matters".

But I think of the problem as being like that of preparing the guest list for a wedding. Whoever the person is whose name is just under the line above which people get an invitation, you can never quite explain adequately why that person hasn't got the invitation.

But the line had to be drawn somewhere and that is certainly true for the Lambeth Group. We only have so much space and I assure you that keeping a group of 30 people together in a Committee meeting once every quarter for about two hours takes some doing. To have 50 or 60 would have guaranteed complete chaos! Others and I have done a little with the limited time at our disposal to try and plug a few of the gaps, which I have outlined. On the Christian side, for instance, I have met with representatives of the British Evangelical Council who are not represented on any of the other bodies, which I have mentioned.

On the broader issue of consultation with other faith communities, I have been immensely grateful for the way in which the Inter Faith Network has circulated minutes and notes to try to keep people informed, particularly in the four other communities represented in the Network but not directly represented on the Lambeth Group. I was grateful for the meeting Harriet Crabtree organised at the Network's offices to which members of those communities were invited and to whom I was then able to come and listen. That was enormously valuable.

On the wider "spiritual matters" front, I have also been in correspondence with a number of bodies which have contacted me expressing an interest in the work of the Lambeth Group and plans for 2000. These have included, amongst others, the Pagan Federation and the British Humanist Association.

Why does it work?

I was tempted to phrase this question: Why hasn't it failed? Because in many ways attempting to bring this spread of people together should be a recipe for disaster. We meet about once a quarter. We have a two hour preparatory pre-meeting of the Church and other faith representatives and then we have a two hour meeting with all members present, after a swift cup of tea! I have certainly had it reported to me by the civil servants that they do find the Lambeth Group one of the more interesting Committees to which they belong as one in which you suddenly get a great debate about theology going on in the midst of an ordinary business agenda. This is not all that familiar to some Government departments.

In many ways I think the Lambeth Group should not have worked given that it is a consultative group bringing together people of very disparate interests involving a lot of people. Yet it has worked so far and is continuing to work through a combination of hard work, of goodwill, of prayer and of much else besides. This may be because in addition to the problems which it faces there are number of factors working in its favour. Firstly, it's clearly a consultative body. This group is not making decisions about the Churches' response to the Millennium or how other faith communities should be responding to the Year 2000. It is not there to do that. It is there to be consulted by the Government, the NMEC, the Millennium Commission and so on. Nor are we deciding matters for the Government. We are not telling the Government what it should be doing. We offer advice and some of that advice is pretty strong. But it is then up to the Government or the New Millennium Experience Company or whoever to decide how to respond to that advice. As I see it, if we have offered advice and that advice is accepted and is acted upon, then it is our role to stand by that advice and to offer our support at that stage. If we offer advice and it is not acted upon or is seen to be too

complex, or there are other factors which we have not understood, then we retain our independence and we can say what we think about that advice not being accepted. That is clearly understood. That is the consultative nature of the body which helps a great deal. Also, the group has been helped by having a very clear focus. It focuses on the year 2000 and in two and half years time (if not a bit before) it will have been disbanded. There is no intention to keep this group going for a long time.

Within that focus on the Millennium we are united in seeing the year 2000 as a year of particular significance for Christians worldwide and a year of particular significance for this country in view of its Christian heritage, but also as a year of national celebration for everybody. Members of the group also feel that the faith communities, individually, and together, have something very special to contribute to these celebrations.

Another factor that has helped is that the Group has brought together people who have many values and ideals in common and share a conviction of the importance of faith to our lives. About this time last year we were rushing to complete a statement of some of the values we wanted to see represented at the Greenwich Dome. Indarjit Singh did quite a lot of work on the drafting of that document, and it did go through to those organising the Dome and it has proved to be of considerable use.

On the negative side we also recognise the problems we face together in conversing with large sections of our society. There are a lot of people out there who cannot understand the significance of faith. It is not that they are aggressively "anti-faith" but just that faith has nothing to do with their experience of life. It is a curious fact and hard to grasp but it's true. So we enter into dialogue at times with those who want to treat the faith communities as a group, like members of a golf club, a kind of special interest group, who can go off and do their particular thing without really affecting the country as a whole. We want to resist this view. We want to express together just how important faith is to us.

Last Thursday I was at a very moving ceremony, which some of you may have seen on television, when the statues of ten twentieth century martyrs of the Christian faith were unveiled on the west front of Westminster Abbey: a reminder that they are representatives of probably hundreds of thousands of Christian martyrs in this century which has been the century in which more Christians have been martyred than any previous one. Yet to our society it seems very strange that people should care enough about their faith to die for it. That, I know, could be repeated in many of the stories of the other communities represented here. But that is a very strange thing to so many people out there who simply don't understand the passion with which people hold to their faith.

I think the Group has also been wanting to challenge those who would just want to put all faiths into a big box and pretend that we are all much the same really. Yes, we do have much in common, but we also have things over which we differ. That's part of who we are; part of our identity. Again, a lot of people find that very difficult to grasp. Actually the year 2000 brings this into a very sharp focus indeed. Because for Christians the year 2000 does, of course, focus on the birth of a particular baby, who within the Christian faith is seen to be the incarnate Son of God. It is very particular. It is very precise and it is also a point of division.

It would divide many of us here and we could have a fascinating afternoon just debating on that one issue. But it is a point of division as well as something we hold very dear.

But while noting and respecting differences, the aspect of common values and ideals is uppermost in our present work. In particular, we want to say that, come the 21st century, faith is not dying out as some argue. It does not belong to the previous Millennium and not to the next. Faith is far from dying out, as we know. Faith and the faith communities world wide are on the increase at the present time in many traditions and we want to say something together about the importance of faith.

There is another factor that has helped the group to work successfully. It brings together people who are willing to trust each other. That trust in my experience is extended not just to the trust between members of the different faith communities but to others as well, to the civil servants and others with whom we are involved. It is trusting exercise. That is the only way it can work. If we didn't broadly trust each other we would still be debating how to celebrate the Millennium in 2005 which would be a little late! I am very conscious that the only reason it works as well as it does in the Lambeth Group is the fact that those levels of trust have been built up over a number of years. The Lambeth Group wouldn't, for example, be working if it wasn't for the prior work of ecumenical bodies, the Inter Faith Network, the Inner Cities Religious Council, and other inter faith bodies that have been working for a very long time too. It's that kind of trust that has been built up that is of enormous importance.

What has it managed to achieve?

In one sense this is for others to say - both in Government and in our communities. Probably in 18 months time, maybe in 10 years time, we will be able to know a bit more accurately what we have achieved. We will, of course, never be able to answer the question: what would not have happened had this group not existed? But perhaps there are some areas where we can say already that the Group has made a significant contribution. Firstly, I think we have established the spiritual significance of the Year 2000 both for the Christians, and more widely for members of the different faith communities of this country. Certainly if you read your Hansard you will see that gets repeated time and time again in debates in Parliament. Of course, it is still true that many have not fully absorbed the significance of 2000 and even within the Christian Churches a lot of people will probably only wake up to the importance of the Millennium sometime late this autumn or in the early Spring, when there is only one more Christmas or Easter to go. They will suddenly think "we had better start planning". It has been our job to try and get them to the point where they have actually got something to plan about rather than missing the boat.

The spiritual significance of 2000 for society is acknowledged in the publication "Marking the Millennium in a Multi Faith Context". This contains guidelines produced by the Lambeth Group, drawing heavily on work that has been done in the past by the Inter Faith Network, about how those organising civic events that year can avoid some of the bigger pot holes which it is all too easy to fall into, and can make the Millennium a good event in our different local communities, many of which are multi-faith communities.

We have achieved real consultation about the first weekend of the Year 2000 and our recommendations are being acted upon. Likewise, real consultation is going on with the New Millennium Experience about the famous "Spirit Zone" in the Dome but I will leave Jennie Page to talk more about that. Again, we decided it was impossible for the Lambeth Group to be consulted effectively in detail about what should go into that. So we have established that one member operates on behalf of the group: Revd Stephen Lynas, the Archbishop's Millennium Adviser and Churches Together in England's Millennium Adviser, and now also the Lambeth Group's representative with the new Millennium Experience Company. He is in weekly, some times daily contact with NMEC talking about what is going into the "Spirit Zone". I am broadly optimistic: most of what you have read in the papers to date is sheer rubbish whether you have liked it or haven't liked it! So watch this space about what will eventually appear in the "Spirit Zone". Certainly the sort of briefs to the designers which are now going out are a vast improvement on what was around earlier on.

It is good too that the Millennium Festival organisers have recognised the importance of religion. The "Time to Make a Difference" pamphlet about applying for lottery money includes religious faith as one of the categories they are prepared to put money into. There is still a problem. It is as frustrating, I think it is fair to say, for the Millennium Unit at the DCMS as it is to the Lambeth Group, that although we have sought ways of finding non-lottery funding for those who cannot, in conscience, take lottery funding, we have as yet drawn a blank on this. It has been good too to begin discussions about an event early in the Year 2000 that could bring the different faith communities together. We heard earlier about Christian services at which members of other faith communities would be honoured guests. There has also been a suggestion that at different times in the Year 2000, each faith community might hold one special celebration linked to a key festival in their calendar to which other faith leaders and public figures might be invited. That would be consistent with other patterns we have established but I hope that somehow we can also ensure that there is an event that will bring us all together. The Lambeth Group is exploring a "shared faith communities' celebration" with a high national profile early in 2000.

Those are the kind of things we have been discussing in the Lambeth Group. Some very quick points in conclusion. This country remains in the lead world-wide on Millennium celebrations. There is no country in the world that is as well developed in its planning as this one is. That feels pretty scary at times when you know how much ground there is still to cover here! Decisions have had to be made at what has at times felt to be a frightening pace. I am sure that the Lambeth Group will have given the wrong advice at times, that is just part of being human. But I am very thankful that not everything depends on the Lambeth Group. What will matter in the Year 2000 are local initiatives, people in local areas and communities, in many of the communities you represent, in individual towns, villages, regions, counties, saying "let's do something together to celebrate the Millennium". It is not for the Lambeth Group or the Government to tell you what to do, although I hope that through our work we will provide a better environment in which your ideas can grow. The real difference will be made, though, because at the local level communities decide to take the initiative and seize the opportunity. The question of whether it all works or not is one we will have to leave the historians of the 21st century to decide.

In the subsequent question and discussion session the following points were made:-

(a) It appears that the emphasis in Millennium events in most other countries around the world will be on celebrations rather than on long term social programmes, although in the United States six key social problems have been identified to be tackled in the coming Millennium. Details are available from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport on plans being made around the world, which have been discussed at a recent international conference in Rome.

(b) No doubt there will be various kinds of inter faith celebrations of the Millennium. There are differences in how far people are willing to join in worship and prayer, as distinct from other kinds of celebration. Various inter faith organisations such as the World Congress of Faiths and World Conference on Religion and Peace are developing plans of their own. The Network is hoping to promote a series of exhibitions across Britain on the contribution of the faith communities to the life of their local city or town. There is also a possibility that co-ordinated plans will be made for multi faith pilgrimages around places of worship in different localities.

(c) The Lambeth Group has prepared guidance on Millennium events which it hopes will be found useful by those organising them, but certainly has no wish to prescribe the pattern of local initiatives. Many local plans are already being made, for example, in Leicester. The Lambeth Group has no funding of its own which it can make available. There have been lengthy discussions about the difficulties arising from the key role of lottery funding in financing Millennium events. It is hoped that at least some funding will be available from other sources, including business sponsors and local authorities.

Perspectives on the Work of the Lambeth Group

Mr Deepak Naik,
Public Relations Officer of the National Council of Hindu Temples

When I was invited to become a member of the Lambeth Group I asked myself a number of questions. The very first one which occurred to me was: What am I going to do and say on behalf of the Hindu community? What reason is there for the Hindu community to be represented on the Group if, as everyone keeps on telling us, the Millennium is a Christian event? So I had to think about why I should be there and why I should make a contribution to it. I sincerely hope that my Hindu brothers and sisters who are here today will agree with my reasoning.

An important reason for me to be there on the Lambeth Group is because of the way that I, as Hindu, respect all other religions. It is also because of my son and the kind of world in which he will grow up. In the year 2000 we will all be carried with the flow, with the enthusiasm, generated by the celebrations which will be organised in the course of it. I will be carried along with this and so will my son. Our community will be carried along with it. It is bound to have an impact on us. So I have a duty to make sure that this impact is a comfortable one, and that what happens is inclusive and creates long term benefit for all of us, something that we can all be proud of. That is the reason why I contribute as much as I can to what is happening at the Lambeth Group, even though as Hindus we have our own calendar and significant dates within it.

When we were invited to the Group, as I am sure my colleagues from other faith communities will agree, we pointed out that as minority faith representatives we do not have the resources and the infrastructure actually to be able to engage with the whole of our faith communities, to report to them regularly and to ask for their response as a community on what we have been asked to consult about. So those who are consulting us have to learn to live with that. The Department of Culture, Media and Sport, Jennie Page and everyone else have got to realise that this is so. I have an accountability to my community which I must try to do my best to discharge. But my community also needs to understand that the resources and infrastructure do not exist to provide an effective two way channel to the extent that we and others might like. But bearing this difficulty in mind, and accepting it as a challenge, we all have to work and contribute sincerely to ensure that the Millennium is a time when everyone can feel that they are genuinely involved in it.

I have been asked to speak about how the Hindu community is handling issues relating to the year 2000. We had the very first meeting of our own only after the Lambeth Group had been at work for 18 months. We tried to get various Hindu community organisations and to warn them that a big Millennium wave is approaching! Minority faith communities can usually

only react to things which happen to them. But in the case of the year 2000 we have 18 months to prepare for it. We have to use this time effectively to plan, co-ordinate and organise ourselves to ensure that we play a role in it in our own unique and significant way and contribute towards the special atmosphere of the Millennium and the new beginning it represents.

At the national meeting of our community a number of ideas came forward. We have stressed that each minority faith community does have its own calendar and that these calendars should be respected as much as any other calendar. We want our calendar to be acknowledged in the year 2000. For the Hindu community, a key festival is Diwali, our New Year, and in the year 2000 we would hope to mount a major event at that time to which you will all be invited.

Plans are already being made by local authorities. But you and I will never get to know about these until they are ready to tell us, which is when they have got everything sewn up! They will work away on their plans and then when they are ready they will ask us to be involved. I guarantee you this is so; this is the way I have experienced it year in and year out! But this time we must get control of the situation and say to local authorities that this is what we want to do and this is the way we are going to do it as faith communities. So local Hindu temples and other faith community places of worship and community centres, - gurdwaras, synagogues and mosques - need to get involved at a local level and at a regional level. Unless we are involved we shall not be able to have any impact on the plans which are made in our area.

Lastly, I have a challenge for you. I was asked to make a presentation at one of the regional conferences attended by delegates from Government Departments, local authorities and others arranged to inform people about the Millennium Festival. Local authorities focus on events: what are we going to do on a certain day at a certain time? I do not blame them for this. But you and I have a different agenda which is: How do you make that event more worthwhile and of long term benefit so that it makes the community think? What do we want them to think about? At the conference I challenged the participants to close their eyes and think about an event that they are organising. I challenged them to think what the one value is which they personally cherish - love, hope, forgiveness, peace - and to think how they can ensure that the value is central to the event they organise and is explored, developed and strengthened through it. Then the event, which might otherwise have only a temporary impact, can instead have a long term effect through the value which it expresses. I make the same challenge to you now. Make the value which is important for you alive in the event which you will be organising. We want to make sure that every event is rooted in values - love, hope, forgiveness, peace - all those values you and I cherish.

Mr Indarjit Singh OBE,
Director of the Network of Sikh Organisations (UK) and Vice-Chair, Inter Faith
Network

I would like to put the Millennium into a Sikh perspective. For me, as a Sikh, the Year 2000 has two important significances. One, of course, is that it is the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ and I know that all Sikhs will join me as we rejoice and celebrate this event. The second significance is that it marks the turn of the century, of the Millennium. We know that at the end of every year we look back on what has gone before and we look hopefully forward into the future. Of course, we should be doing that with great discernment at the end of a Millennium. We need to decide what to take forward and what to leave behind. There are things of which we can, as a community, as a world community, be tremendously proud, such as our scientific achievements. But there are things of which we should be deeply ashamed. This century alone has seen more killings of humans by humans than the rest of history put together. So there is a lot to reflect on and when Donald Elliot mentioned this morning plans for a moment of reflection, I would have been much happier if it had been at least a year of reflection so that we could look to the future and look to see how and where we should change direction for the benefit of our children and those as yet unborn.

When we are talking about the work of the Lambeth Group and about the Millennium celebrations in general we need a measure of success. Success will be if those in years to come say that in the year 2000 we did make a significant change in direction away from the materialistic trends that could jeopardise life in the future. It is to that end that the Lambeth Group has been striving and that has been my reason for being involved in it. There has been considerable progress. It is progress in itself that the group exists at all, with members of the other faith communities. It is the first time in this country that people from different communities have been working together at that level to common ends. The roles of Dr George Carey, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and of Canon Colin Fletcher who has chaired the group, have helped significantly and have been tremendously important. It has given opportunities for Sikhs to emphasise the importance of the values of Christianity which are common to many of our faiths. That is something in which we rejoice and the recognition of it has in itself been a worthwhile experience.

But we are working to promote religion, and spirituality against a very strong materialist tide in this country. As Colin Fletcher has said, many people, whatever their nominal religious background may be, just do not understand what we are talking about, and why we bother with such things when in the year 2000 we can have a jolly nice time, and not worry about the future. We have been working together on this and that is an important benefit. It is only a little while ago that a Government Minister is reputed to have said when it was suggested that there should be a strong religious element in the Millennium celebration: "What a novel idea!" That is a measure of the progress we have made.

To finish on a positive note, we talked about honoured guests being invited to Christian celebrations. We are grateful for that and, as was mentioned this morning, Sikhs have a major celebration next year and you will certainly all be invited to that. But we are not very good at planning. So we are not quite sure where, how and when! But we will get there.

Mr Neville Nagler,
Director General of the Board of Deputies of British Jews

I am often asked what the Millennium means for Jewish people. I find it one of life's ironies that we have seen a Jewish Minister being one of the strongest proponents of the idea of having a largely Christian content in the Millennium Dome. This in a sense reflects the sort of society that we are inhabiting today. From a purely Jewish perspective we will have celebrated our second Millennium some 3,760 years ago! So perhaps there is little new under the sun, although I do not think ours was quite so well written up as this forthcoming Millennium will be.

It is clearly a Christian celebration, and it is very right that the Christian community and Churches throughout the world should celebrate a milestone of this kind. As members of another faith we are happy to be invited to observe celebrations of this kind. But the issue goes wider, as we have heard this afternoon. There has been a strong Government and public involvement in the Millennium. A lot of public money is involved, for example Lottery money channelled through the Millennium Commission and the Millennium Experience Company, and therefore it is vital that all citizens should feel entitled to participate in whatever is being provided without fear of being marginalised or sidelined in any way.

Britain, as we have heard so often, is a multi-faith society with many non-Christian traditions. Should other faiths ignore the Millennium, as some would wish? I received a report, only a little while ago, saying that a group of Rabbis in Israel have come out saying "Nobody should celebrate the Millennium". Or should we rather use it as an opportunity to celebrate both faith and the diversity of faith communities? As citizens should we not all have the option to participate, without feeling ignored or alienated?

As far as the Jewish community was concerned, the invitation to participate in the Lambeth Group afforded an opportunity I could not easily refuse and that was not just because of Colin Fletcher's persuasive personal approach! The Lambeth Group itself has recognised this by creating, as we have heard, a framework where all faith communities, together with the variety of Christian Churches, can come together and seek to develop common ground. There is a recognition that we all of us have a contribution to make to the renewal of faith and spiritual values in modern day Britain. We also have a contribution to make to the evolution of the "Spirit Zone" in the Greenwich Dome and we will hear more about that later.

We have valued the various documents that have been produced in the Lambeth Group, particularly *Marking the Millennium in a Multi-Faith Society* which should provide valuable advice to local authorities and other organisations, planning events and projects centred around Millennium. It is most important, for example, that local authorities and such organisations should recognise the importance of making events as inclusive as possible, with multi-faith participation. In the case of the Jewish community, for example, local authorities need to be aware of the special sensitivity about events involving acts of worship or food. These are aspects of the way in which it is important for local authorities and other bodies to understand the sensitivities of individual faith communities.

We would also like to think that the Group's guidelines on values for the Greenwich exhibition, which Indarjit was too modest to say that he largely co-authored, have proved helpful to NMEC in taking forward its planning of the contents of the Dome and the Millennium Festival. Many Jewish people have also participated in the Jubilee 2000 movement. Interestingly, this has taken from the Torah the concept of Jubilee, which occurred every 50 years when slaves in Biblical times were to be released, debts cancelled and victims of other kinds of oppression freed. Now the concept has been given a topical significance by a campaign to cancel the backlog of international debt affecting the poorest countries in the world. We also welcome the efforts by the Churches and other faiths to apologise or atone for wrongs committed in the past which have particularly damaged other religious communities. We can all think of examples of the kinds of things on which we need to turn our backs.

Altogether the year 2000 offers the possibility of becoming a religious and spiritual milestone, as well as a national celebration. Maybe in fifty or a hundred years time our children and grandchildren will envy us the opportunity of having been there and having seen and celebrated what is to be on offer. After all, there will not be another such opportunity for a further 1000 years.

Mr Iqbal Sacranie,
Secretary General of the Muslim Council of Britain

My task has been made easier by my colleagues who in their earlier contributions have covered much of the work of the Lambeth Group. At present there is considerable debate within the Muslim community about the approach it should take to participation in the Millennium celebrations. Clearly the Millennium is a major event and it is going to happen whether we like it not! But it must have a lasting purpose and not simply involve the expenditure of the large sums of money which it is going to consume. What will the consequences of the Millennium be for our future together? Do we want to work together to change for the better the society in which we live? History shows that many atrocities have been carried out in the name of religion and even today as we speak, ethnic cleansing is taking place in Kosovo. Now we are seeking new ways of working together to the practical benefit of society as a whole. Will the involvement in the Millennium of faith communities other than the Christian Churches simply be a token representation or will it be real and genuine?

The need for the Muslim community to reflect on how best it can contribute to the Millennium was the reason for my accepting the invitation to join the Lambeth Group in its work. An encouraging feature of it has been the emergence of consensus on key issues. There is a general recognition that there has to be a place in the Millennium celebrations for our faith communities, which have too often been marginalised in our society in recent years. We can see that when the contribution which faith communities can make to a society is ignored, that society is morally poorer as a result. The Millennium provides an opportunity to affirm that our faith communities have a valued and central role to play in our society. The Millennium is primarily a Christian celebration. Naturally this is fully accepted by Muslims and Muslims themselves honour Jesus as a prophet of Islam. It is important for the Millennium not to be simply an occasion for general celebration, but also for reflection on, and honouring of, the teaching of Jesus. Muslims want to join in the search for better mutual understanding. Too often, Islam itself has been misrepresented. The exhibition in the Dome at Greenwich will I hope provide an opportunity to help people to understand better our different faiths. To achieve this it will be important for our different faith traditions to have more than token inclusion in it.

The dependence of Millennium events on Lottery funding causes problems for the Muslim community as it cannot accept funding from this source. I am glad that at least a small amount of money may be made available from non-lottery sources through sponsorship. But this itself is not without its difficulties, depending on the identity of the sponsors and how they approach this. Not only Muslims but also a number of Christian Churches have difficulty over accepting lottery funding and this makes it difficult for them to participate fully in the various events and celebrations. There is general agreement on the Lambeth Group that it is important that these difficulties should not have a discriminatory and excluding effect. Rather, the approach to the Millennium needs to be an inclusive one. I personally hope that the events during 2000 make the Muslim community feel it can play a full role in the betterment of our modern British society.

The Millennium Dome at Greenwich

**Miss Jennifer Page CBE
Chief Executive of the New Millennium Experience Company**

You have told me that I have half an hour for my presentation. Actually, my life at present is measured by a slightly different clock which tells me I have got 12,873 hours, 2 minutes and 13 seconds to go before we open the Dome. That is a pretty frightening prospect, I can tell you - particularly if you bear in mind that when the sadist who gave me the watch did so, I had over 28,000 hours and now I only have a little over 12,000 hours. In other words it is time past and time future which is very much on my mind. What did I do with all those hours and what am I going to do with those that are left!

I want quickly to put the Dome into a context. When the Millennium Commission, a peculiar body set up by an Act of Parliament in order to distribute 20% of the "good causes" money from the National Lottery, started to think about the Millennium celebrations, they were not thinking about a Dome at all. Nor were they thinking primarily about the religious implications of the Millennium. They were thinking in much more secular terms about the way in which this particular nation has had a very successful habit of having very major events at different times which in one way or another bring the country together. I think they were motivated much more by recollection of the 1851 Great Exhibition and the 1951 Festival of Britain than by thinking about the deeper religious meanings of the year 2000. They were motivated by a desire to bring people together, starting potentially from a humanist or secular point of view. They wanted whatever was done to be inclusive, to be embracing and actually to advance the cause of making people think more positively and more seriously and together about our common life.

The early phase of developing the idea of a Millennium exhibition, as it is was called in the early planning days, was within a framework under which all the Millennium Commission could do was to give grants. So there had to be a private sector body that could organise an exhibition and be responsible for it and which would make it happen. The Millennium Commission would give them a grant and that would be that. But of course that is not the way that you organise a great national event: you also need to have to have national ownership in one way or another. Also, if you are going to organise something which is going to last for a whole year and is going to have at least twelve million visitors and is going to have at least 50% of them arriving by public transport, the Government has to be behind it in a whole range of different ways. You need more than private capital bearing the risk. It was coming to the end of that logical thought process which led to the situation in January 1997 when it was agreed that the company to organise the exhibition should be a Government owned one. It was also agreed that I should stop being the Chief Executive of the Millennium Commission and be made responsible as Chief Executive of the NMEC for making this amazing event happen.

One of the first conclusions we reached was that if it was to be a truly national event, and if it was to make the most of the opportunity it presented, then we had to find a theme which was capable of touching all aspects of human life. We did a lot of detailed research with people. We found that, notwithstanding that the Millennium was thought to be unpopular at the time, there was in fact a strong yearning on the part of a lot of people for the world to be a better place and to recognise the Millennium as a moment when you could make resolutions to make the world better place.

In our market research we showed lots of people photographs to find out what the Millennium meant to them; this is a standard technique in the market research business. We showed hundreds of photographs to groups which ranged from football players in Scotland to people working in factories in Swansea, from churchwardens in Manchester to single parent families in the Midlands, to people all over the country. Everybody said much the same thing about the three key photographs. One was a photograph of Monet's bridge at Giverny which people saw as the moment of time: the moment in time to pause and to reflect. Another was a photograph of an installation in California where the artist Christo had hung a great big curtain across a valley so that you had a sense of theatre. It wasn't a brick wall that you were afraid of running into it but instead there was a sense of anticipation of the future. The third was the Blake engraving of Dante and Virgil moving forward hand in hand through a gateway. It was this sense of community, of purpose and of the various themes which have been talked about already this afternoon, coming out of a very much broader base of possibility as people responded to these questions about the Millennium, which convinced us that we should have the theme we have in fact chosen of "Time to Make a Difference".

We had to decide how that theme was to be portrayed within the Dome, reflecting many aspects of it. I have to claim responsibility for arguing from right back in February 1997 that if we were to divide the exhibition into different zones of activities then it was absolutely essential that we have one about the Spirit. This was not a particularly popular position for me to take at the time because the immediate response from everybody was that this would very difficult to handle, that it would be impossible to get agreement on it, and that we should never be able to make it work in conjunction with everything else that had to be done. In particular, some people thought that it would not fit in with the desires of people to have a wonderful day out with their families which they would remember for the rest of their lives. The Dome needed to be something which people were going to choose to do in preference to all the other things that people do with their families at weekends. It needed to be able to compete with attractions like Alton Towers, Thorpe Park and other theme parks and visitor attractions. So the idea of putting into our exhibition something as serious as a section devoted to the Spirit was quite a hard battle to win. But I am very glad that we tackled it when we did. I am quite clear that had we not taken it on right at the beginning by now we would be scrabbling to find ways of dealing with it. I am very grateful to the Lambeth Group which has worked us from the early days in order to enable us to find ways through very complicated issues and to find means of moving forward with designers and with "expert witnesses" and with politicians in ways which respect and reflect the diversity of faith in this country.

Where does the "Spirit Zone" sit inside the Dome? The Dome is an absolutely remarkable structure in its own right. It has awe inspiring and beautiful qualities which I think will make people want to go there in addition to everything that happens inside it. It is as significant in its own way, if not more so, as the Eiffel Tower, which after all was put up initially for one year but is now the means by which Paris defines itself. I think if we get the Dome right, and it has potentially a long life, then it will be a significant feature of London for quite a large part of the next century, if not the next Millennium!

The Dome is best thought of physically by starting in the middle. In the middle we have a great open space which is open to the height of the Dome and which is a great piazza. It is about as big as Trafalgar Square. If Nelson's Column were to be placed at the centre of the Dome then the whole of it would be inside the Dome and the nearest member of the audience would be standing on the steps of the National Gallery. That will give you some feel of the scale of this great central space. It is a big public space in which people will move around in the same way they move around Covent Garden or the Piazza Navona in Rome and in which different smaller scale things will be going on in the course of the day. But one of the major purposes of the piazza is to provide the setting for the central show which will happen between three and five times a day. In order to see this show, people will either stand or will sit on tiers of seats, which rise up to a great promenade which will encircle the whole of the central space at about ten metres up in the air, with wonderful views across it.

The central show will in a sense be the heart of the Dome, appealing to the emotions more directly than the "fact giving" sections of the Dome. The show will use a cast of young people, trained particularly in this country, using the full height of the space, using the dramatic techniques of carnival, of festival, of rock concerts, to tell a story which has a message. That message will be much the same as "Time to Make a Difference." It will reflect on our past and look to our future and we hope will leave everybody, by a combination of dance, movement, acrobatics and music, feeling "Wow" at the end of it. It will have themes which are easy to remember so that it will be a key part of their visit experience.

Around the central space there are two rings of exhibitions or "zones" as we have called them. There are fourteen of these within the rings which will allow us to explore different aspects of human life and to think about ways in which those aspects can change in the future. The ring that is the closest to the centre is like a series of thin curled sausages. Those on the outer ring have splendidly great floor plans and there are ten of them around the outside, interspersed with six major buildings where people will find most of the restaurants and other facilities of that kind, with adequate access both from the centre of Dome and by many other different routes. A great benefit of the Dome is that you can get in and out very quickly. It can have its main streets in terms of radial routes. It will have a great sense of place and be almost like a town under canvas.

The "Spirit Zone" is one of the zones in the outer ring, which are bigger in terms of floor plan than those in the inner rings. What we are aiming to do in the "Spirit Zone" is to recognise the importance of Christianity as it has brought this country to where it is today, while at the same time being inclusive of those other faiths which are currently part of our

lives and indeed over many years in the past have contributed to forming what our life is today. We expect to do this by dividing the zone into different spaces and allowing people to move through and between these spaces and to hear different stories. We start with the concept of "beginnings". We start quite clearly on one side with the story of Christianity until we reach this country and we have a story which continues through the history in this country which is about the world of Christianity and where it fits. That is a linear and historic story which needs to be told because it is part of the life of this country. But side by side with this, interleaved with it, almost like a plait, touching it at very many different points, is a different story. This is the story of the rhythm of human life and the way in which all faiths and all beliefs at different moments in human life have to witness to the intersection of the spiritual and the physical. The way in which rights of passage are recognised differently by different faiths but with significant moments in people's lives always being recognised by the faiths. This we hope will enable people to understand how different faiths have some important things in common but that their differences are crucial also. As part of the development of this theme of the way that people's lives are different and their faiths differently reflect on them, we will deal with calendars. The calendar theme is one that has been with us right from the beginning of our conversations with Lambeth Group. We have fully absorbed the idea of displaying within the zone the ways in which different calendars work, both within the year and across the years.

Also in this zone we plan to provide space which will offer an opportunity for very large numbers of people to be quiet, to pause, to reflect, to listen to what there is beyond the immediate and in their own way to find a moment of spirituality. We hope that people will find a way, within this space, which is a very beautiful structure designed by Eva Jiricna the architect, to leave their own mark, a chance, in a sense, to make an affirmation, to make a prayer, to leave a finger print, a footprint, an eye print even. I am very attracted by the new technology which allows you to photograph the iris of everybody's eyes. The iris is more individual, more distinct than your finger print or your thumb print. It would be absolutely wonderful to end up with 12 million irises forming a work of art inside this particular space at the end of the day. The eye is the window of the soul, as we remind ourselves regularly. We very much hope that when people come out of that part of the Dome they will have something to take away with them over and above an immense amount of new information and an immense amount of entertainment, which are what the remainder of the Dome will provide.

The "Spirit Zone" will be in place which is surrounded on one side by what we have called the "Mind Zone", focusing on creativity, innovation and art, about the left brain and the right brain, about how human beings have been tremendously creative. On another side there will be a zone to do with the way in which we fit ourselves inside the whole world, the "Global Zone": where we sit relative to the rest of the physical universe, and I do mean the universe because it needs to cover space as well. It will have on the inner ring opposite it a zone which is to do with inter personal communications, how we relate to each other as human beings. So you will see that the whole geography of the Dome is designed to ensure that the "Spirit Zone" is an integral part of a great quadrant which is about some of the big imponderable issues of human existence. The design of this is coming along nicely, although it is quite difficult to assure people of this without offering them photographs. One

of the things which we are doing at the moment is working very carefully with the architect to ensure that the space is the right size and that the distribution of the space is right, so that we can move on to the more detailed content of the zone and talk further with "expert witnesses" and also to start talking about funding this zone.

This zone, like all zones inside the Dome, needs to find sponsorship or patronage because the Millennium Commission's money, while it sounds enormous sum, is in large part consumed by providing the infrastructure of the Dome and the structures themselves and some part of the national Millennium programme. I have every faith that we shall find people who will put money into this zone. Clearly it is not like the other zones that have already received sponsorship. We will not be planning to "sell it" in the same way that we have sold other zones inside the Dome, but we believe that there are individuals and organisations, and some companies, that have a real interest in ensuring that the "Spirit Zone" is included in the Dome in a fashion which would meet the approval of the Lambeth Group and, I would hope, of everybody in this room.

Let me now move out of the "Spirit Zone" and talk about one or two other matters. The first is that we have agreed that we will, if we possibly can, provide a worship space inside the Dome which meets people's expectations. This will, I hope, be substantially more attractive and meaningful than the sort of space which one tends to find at World Expo's where it is always tucked around the back somewhere and doesn't have very much more than six leaflets and a potted plant! I don't think that any of us would really want that. What we want is a space that is probably big enough for about 50 people which could be used for religious services. We have already had conversations about finding space outside the Dome for those whose objections to Lottery money are so significant that they would not want to be within the Dome. Again I think this is a problem that can be solved and I am grateful to Iqbal Sacranie for his help in this.

I also want to talk about the National Programme. We need to distinguish the National Programme from the Millennium Festival. The Festival is a company working with the Lottery distributors in a fashion which has had a lot of publicity in recent months. The National Programme consists of those elements of sponsorship which are tied to events around the country which also tie in with the theme of Dome. Perhaps it is easier to explain how it will work by describing one or two examples. For example, Tesco is a £12 million sponsor of the Dome and is sponsoring our educational and learning zone. In addition, it is putting money into something called "School Net 2000" which is designed to ensure that all the children in the United Kingdom get access to computers so as to allow them to create a sort of "Internet Domesday Book" as a snap shot of people's hopes and aspirations and their history at the moment of the Millennium. Marks and Spencer, which is putting money into the National Identity zone of the Dome, is also putting substantial sums of money into a programme called "Children's Promise" which we have developed in association with the five major children's charities. This is designed to encourage every adult in the year 2000 to donate their last hour's earnings of this Millennium towards a fund which is designed to help the children of the next Millennium. That fund, if the right heart strings are touched and if the right administration is put in place, could raise between £50 million and £100 million which would otherwise not be raised, to go into children's charities. That theme of "Children of

Tomorrow" and our national identity are quite closely tied together, just as Tesco's work with computers in schools ties in with the idea of education inside the Dome. So the National Programme activities link back into the Dome in a very specific fashion and we would certainly expect to see them reflected there.

One of the other ideas on which we are working, although we don't have a sponsor for it yet, is "Our Town Story". This is designed to ensure that 366 different communities, which are most of the major urban communities in this country, do have the opportunity of working through their local educational authorities to put on a performance in the Dome which allows the children to tell the story of their locality and the diverse forces which have shaped it. So there will be special performances on a daily basis which come from everywhere, from Sterling, which won the right to be the first one in the Dome on 1 January 2000, right the way through to Zennor, which is number 366. But Bradford and Birmingham and all the other places will certainly be there at some point in the course of the year 2000.

That is where we are at the moment. What I am committed to doing, as are all my staff, is continuing to build on the good relations which we have with the Lambeth Group to ensure that the Spirit Zone continues to develop in a fashion which will provide something which is attractive, moving and meaningful inside a setting which of necessity is going to be one where people are looking for a lot of other things which are more at the entertainment end of the spectrum. We are also committed to ensuring that the whole Dome reflects and respects the sensitivities and concerns of all aspects of society. It needs to be inclusive, it needs to take care of ethnic and religious sensitivities and we are doing this by encouraging the Lambeth Group to be a channel for advising us on the people to whom we should be talking, not only about the "Spirit Zone", but about everything from the Body to financial transactions to global environment to the local environment. There will be an opportunity for people who are faith practitioners or notable members of faith communities, but who are also experts in different areas, to have their voices heard in those areas.

Finally, we will work as best we can with the different faith communities to reflect the celebrations of the different faith communities within the site at Greenwich. What we cannot do is to close it down in order to allow something else to happen during those 366 days. We have to stay open. That is what it is there for. It is to be there during that year to allow people to come to it, for up to 12 million people to enjoy a day out. But if there are ways in which we can add experiences which are particular to different religious festivals then we will certainly be keen to do so.

In the subsequent question and discussion session the following points were made:-

(a) Some 6.5 million people attended the Great Exhibition of 1851. Some 8.5 million attended the Festival of Britain in 1951. Perhaps the best modern parallels for the Greenwich Dome are the World Expo's like that held recently in Seville, where the visitor numbers were on a comparable scale to the 12 million anticipated at the Dome. The price of entry to the Greenwich Dome has yet to be fixed but it will certainly be competitive with, for

example, the price of admission to a first class football match and there will be specially priced tickets for families. The NMEC is charged with breaking even in its expenditure and revenue on the Dome.

(b) Many overseas countries are making plans for the Millennium. For example, 40 million pilgrims are likely to travel to Rome and there will be festivals in Bethlehem around the New Year. But most plans are predominantly secular in character and quite short in duration. The rest of the world seems to have ceded the Millennium lead to Britain. This is partly because of the availability of substantial funding from the National Lottery to resource a wide ranging programme and partly because of the significance of Greenwich as the "Home of Time" on 0° longitude.

OPEN FORUM

There followed a period of questions and discussion with a panel comprising all the afternoon's speakers, together with Mr Warwick Hawkins of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and Dr Harriet Crabtree, Deputy Director of the Inter Faith Network. The following points were made in this session:-

(a) So far, the main focus of the day has been on the positive side of the Millennium and the events planned for it, but there are theologies and ideologies, particularly prevalent in the United States, which link the Millennium to Doomsday and Armageddon scenarios. By contrast, other theologies seek to hold together the role of God as Creator, Sustainer, and Destroyer, destroying not for the sake of destruction but as part of the process of recreation.

(b) There is a positive dimension to fears of Doomsday. They help to underline the need for people to recognise the fragility of our planet and its environment. There is a prospect, however, of bizarre and unhealthy religious manifestations being triggered by the Millennium. There needs to be a joint determination on the part of the mainstream of different faith communities to ensure that the central messages of the Millennium are put across sufficiently strongly to marginalise these potentially dangerous fringe groups.

(c) Sources of finance are being pursued for the "Spirit Zone" and it is hoped that they will be secured. There is no provision in the budget for the Dome to fund any zone which does not secure sufficient financial sponsorship.

(d) The decision, which is a brave one, to include a "Spirit Zone" in the Greenwich Dome recognises the significance of spirituality and provides an opportunity to recognise both the commonalities and diversity of Britain's faith communities. These are moving into new kinds of relationships and there is a need to think collectively about how they can continue to be developed after the Millennium celebrations are over.

(e) There is a natural concern on the part of the smaller minority faith communities that their contribution should not be overlooked or marginalised in the Millennium context. Although representation on the Lambeth group has been limited to Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and Sikh participation, the Inter Faith Network has been helping to ensure that the Baha'i, Buddhist, Jain and Zoroastrian communities are kept in touch and have the opportunity to feed their views into the planning process. It is intended that the Greenwich exhibition will reflect the nine world religious traditions whose communities in the UK are linked by the Network. But there are difficult questions of balance here, particularly given the existence of other faith groups which are not represented within the Network.

(f) Some would like to see more of a Millennium focus on tackling social deprivation in this country, rather than simply the funding of the celebrations. There is an obvious need, for example, for practical schemes to tackle drug addiction among young people. But these issues are more the concern of Government Departments and the public services with particular responsibility for them. The Millennium Commission itself has been responsible for deciding how it can most appropriately distribute the money available to it.

g) The Millennium theme of "Time to Make a Difference" itself recognises the desirability of focusing minds on the need for change. This is the theme for the Jubilee 2000 campaign, already mentioned, to tackle the unpayable burden of debt being carried by third world countries. More generally, there is a need for profound change in the direction of our society away from the selfish pursuit of material wealth to a more compassionate and caring society.

(h) Many people are unhappy with the reliance on lottery funding for the Millennium celebrations and for other purposes as well. The National Lottery constitutes, in effect, a regressive tax since lottery tickets are bought disproportionately by poorer people while producing very large sums of money for the winners and for those who run the Lottery. The Lottery has been damaging to the funding of voluntary organisations. Some would argue that there should be a general boycott of projects funded with lottery money. On the other hand, the Lottery is now an established fact and while the Churches and other faith communities were strongly opposed it at the outset, others would consider it unrealistic to suppose that the policy decision to establish it could now be overturned, certainly in the shorter term. Nonetheless, those who are opposed on grounds of conscience to accepting lottery funding hope that some money at least will be available from non-lottery sources.

(i) Local programmes are already being developed in some cities and towns involving exhibitions and inter faith exchange and multi-faith pilgrimages. While a range of programmes and projects are being planned for it, the Millennium as a whole is a phenomenon which no one can control. It is a unique opportunity. What people bring to it will help determine the meaning of the event for our society in the longer term.

(j) There is an important place for seeking reconciliation between those who have been involved in conflict in the past and for resolving to tackle our common problems together in the next Millennium. It is essential for us to look at past mistakes and learn from them in order to ensure a better future for us all. The challenge is to each one of us: will I strive to "make a difference"?

Closing Reflections from the Chair

Bishop Roy Williamson, in closing the afternoon session, thanked all the speakers for their contributions and said:

I have been very encouraged by all that I have heard during the day. I have heard all the problems and anxieties surrounding the Millennium but I am very excited by the picture given to us of what is being planned for it. Different faiths in Britain are co-operating over it and, together, they are co-operating with the Government in connection with it. Faith is firmly on the agenda for this important moment in the life of our society. It has been accepted that the faith communities have a part to play in the Millennium celebrations.

At the end of the day we cannot expect the Millennium Dome to do for us what we cannot or are not prepared to do for ourselves. We are all people of faith who say that our faith "makes a difference" and we are being given a major platform to proclaim that faith, to share the values we have in common and to promote what is unique to our particular faith. I am excited and encouraged and grateful for the vision which has been shared with us.

The Millennium is going to happen whether we like it or not! It presents us with a great opportunity. We must make sure that the contribution we do make is one of integrity and honesty. We as faith communities have as powerful a vision as the one we have heard today from those representing public bodies with responsibilities for the Millennium. Let us be thankful for the vision we have been given and let us with confidence add our vision to it. Our religious values, as we have been reminded, do of course, include the notion of judgement, but they also include hope and these two need to be held side by side.

MARKING THE MILLENNIUM IN A MULTI-FAITH CONTEXT

Guidelines for Events Organisers

Prepared for the Department for Culture, Media and Sport
by the Churches and Other Faiths sub-group of the
Government's Millennium Co-ordinating Group
in association with the Inter Faith Network



MARKING THE MILLENNIUM IN A MULTI-FAITH CONTEXT

Introduction by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport

I am pleased to commend *Marking the Millennium in a Multi-Faith Context* to organisers of Millennium events, and I would strongly urge them to take account of its sensible and helpful recommendations. The Government fully recognises the Millennial year as a Christian anniversary, as well as being a significant moment in the lives of everyone who measures time by the Gregorian calendar. We are determined that public celebrations should be accessible and relevant to all sections of the community, both Christians and those of other beliefs, in every part of the United Kingdom. The Millennium will, after all, be a special moment in time, allowing us all – whatever our faiths or beliefs – to reflect on the past and look to the future. I welcome the work that has been done by the Lambeth Consultation Group, not least in producing this document, and I have been impressed by the number of different religious traditions which are represented within the Group, and by the degree of consensus which has been achieved. The Government wholeheartedly endorses its views as reflected in these guidelines.

Rt Hon Chris Smith MP



A significant dimension of life in Britain at the end of the twentieth century is the presence of communities of the world's major religious traditions: Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh and Zoroastrian, as well as a number of smaller religious groups.

The Millennium marks a key event in Christian history: 2,000 years, according to traditional dating, since the birth of Jesus. Christian Churches around the world will be marking this with many different forms of worship and commemoration. In countries such as the UK, where the Christian tradition has been rooted for many centuries and has had such a formative influence, many national and civic celebrations will have a specifically Christian framework.

At the same time, in our multi-faith society, there will also be shared celebrations and the year 2000 will be an opportunity for people of *all* faiths to draw on the spiritual heritages of their own traditions to think together about the values that underpin our society and to reflect on the future of our society and our environment for ourselves, our children and generations to come. It can be a time, as well, to think about the importance of building good relationships between the faith communities and pledging to avoid repetition of past conflicts.

Local authorities and other organisations planning events, projects, and civic opportunities for shared celebration, thanksgiving, reflection or worship will need to bear in mind the importance of making these as inclusive as possible in terms of multi-faith and multi-cultural participation. The following guidelines are designed to assist in planning Millennium related events and projects in multi-faith contexts. They are not exhaustive, and users may wish to contact the range of organisations listed below for further advice or assistance.

Planning with sensitivity and awareness

In planning events or projects linked to the Millennium, the following guidelines may help organisers to avoid causing accidental offence, given the unusual and complex blend of national, civic and religious issues:

- If arranging civic or local events, it is advisable to consult with all the faith communities about their possible role in these. Some local authorities already have consultative structures and links with churches, gurdwaras, mandirs, mosques, synagogues, temples and viharas and with relevant faith community organisations, women's and youth networks. Where these links are not already in existence it

may be helpful to create a “faith map” of the area and initiate contact early in the planning stages.

It will also be important to give careful thought to who is to host the event and who is to be invited.

- Establishing patterns of consultation always takes time and also resources. Many faith community link people work on a voluntary basis and there may be a need to schedule some of the meetings in the evening to facilitate attendance, as well as to reimburse any expenses incurred.
- It is helpful to be clear about whether an explicitly religious aspect is intended for a Millennium event or project under consideration. Although the largest faith community in Britain is Christian, it is not appropriate automatically to assume that a specific Christian understanding of the Millennium will be shared by everyone. If the intended audience is mixed in faith tradition or includes people of no formal religious belief, this will be a sensitive issue. Careful planning is needed to ensure an experience of inclusion and full participation.
- Any act of worship involving more than one faith is particularly complex and sensitive and can cause discomfort and even offence. It is important to consult widely before planning. There are a range of options for bringing people together to mark major events in ways which do not unwittingly compromise the integrity of belief of any participants. Many will not be comfortable participating in what is experienced as “worship” of another tradition. However, it may not cause comparable problems if a commemorative event has sequential readings from scripture or holy books of different traditions and where there is shared silent meditation. In such contexts it is important to emphasize the fact that each tradition is offering its own contribution and no one is being asked to assent to beliefs they do not hold.
- In a small number of cases, event planners may encounter religious groups which do not wish to participate in any multi-faith or multi-cultural events or which actively oppose them. Sensitivities should be taken into account as far as possible, though experience shows that it may not always be possible to meet such fundamental objections.
- In planning multi-faith, multi-cultural events, it will also be important to bear in mind that a number of people in the UK are explicitly agnostic or atheist or have no formal religious faith or belief. This does not necessarily mean, however, that they will not want to participate in these events. Advance consultation with any who do wish to participate about how their input fits into the event is important. It will also be important to discuss this with faith community participants if the event is explicitly religious.
- There may be civic occasions where an essentially Christian form of commemoration will be the most appropriate, but in such contexts it is important to take care that other faiths are in no way denigrated.
- Respect for religious identity and integrity is always important, and this is very much the case in planning any event to mark the Millennium. Any trivialisation or ridiculing of the religious aspect can cause hurt and offence: in the context of the Millennium, for example, Christians could be offended if there is disrespectful treatment of the figure of Jesus Christ who is central to their faith and belief.
- Explicitly religious events are not the only way to bring about multi-faith cooperation and understanding at the time of the Millennium. Shared social action is another very important avenue. Each faith has strong traditions of service and concern for social justice; and joint projects, such as working together to improve the neighbourhood or environment, can be a positive way to draw on the values and commitments of the various communities. Some Millennium social projects may well be rooted in wider faith community international initiatives related to such issues as third world debt, worldwide poverty or environmental problems.
- Multi-cultural, multi-faith events involving banquets or shared refreshments can be enjoyable and popular. If arranging one, however, it is important to be aware of the dietary requirements and needs of participants through consultation during planning and use of guidelines such as those provided in *Religions in the UK: A Multi Faith Directory*.
- When planning any event, it is advisable to check that it does not clash with a key festival of one of the faith communities. The *Shap Calendar of Religious Festivals* is a good resource, but checking should also be carried out with local religious organisations. Care should also be taken to avoid arranging multi-faith events at the same time as special events planned by the individual faith communities in the area.

Resources for planning with sensitivity and awareness

Organisations

Some key points of contact are:

The Millennium Unit, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2–4 Cockspur Street, London SW1Y 5DH (Tel 0171 211 6182). The DCMS is co-ordinating the Government's interests in the Millennium celebrations.

The Millennium Commission, Portland House, Stag Place, London SW1E 5EZ (Tel 0171 880 2001)

New Millennium Experience Co Ltd,
110 Buckingham Palace Road, London SW1W 9SB
(Tel 0171 808 8350 – Support Manager)

The Christian Churches: information on how to contact the relevant church bodies for England, N. Ireland, Scotland, and Wales can be obtained from the Churches Together in England Millennium Officer, Board of Mission, Church House, London, SW1P 3NZ (Tel 0171 340 0250)

Other faith communities can be contacted via the addresses to be found in the *Millennium Guide* (see below under publications) or through

The Inter Faith Network, 5–7 Tavistock Place, London WC1H 9SN (Tel 0171 388 0008).

The Network can also respond to questions about inter faith issues.

The Inner Cities Religious Council at the Department of the Environment, Floor 4/K10, Eland House, Bressenden Place, London SW1E 5DU (Tel 0171 890 3704) offers advice regarding faith communities and urban regeneration.

Information Focus Network on Religious Movements (INFORM), Houghton Street, London WC2A 2AE (Tel 0171 955 7654) may be able to give advice on unfamiliar new forms of religious expression encountered in Millennium planning contexts.

Publications

Some helpful resources are:

A Millennium Guide

An outline of contact points and responsibilities prepared on behalf of the Lambeth Consultation Group on the Millennium for the Churches and other faith communities. This may be obtained from the CTE Millennium Officer, (see under organisations) – please send a stamped A4 self-addressed envelope.

Religions in the UK: A Multi Faith Directory, ed Paul Weller, published University of Derby/Inter Faith Network, May 1997, lists 5,000+ faith community organisations and places of worship, inter faith organisations, and resources, as well as giving information about the history and practice of the country's main religious traditions. See particularly the chapter, "Making Contact" which gives guidance on setting up multi-faith events and consultations. (Tel 01332 622222, University of Derby).

"Building Good Relations with People of Different Faiths and Beliefs".

Short guidelines for inter faith encounter. The Inter Faith Network.

Shap Calendar of Religious Festivals.

Published by the Shap Working Party on World Religions,
c/o The National Society's RE Centre,
36 Causton St, London SW1P 4AU
(Tel 0171 932 1194).

These guidelines have been prepared for the Department for Culture, Media and Sport by the Lambeth Consultation Group on the Millennium in association with The Inter Faith Network for the UK. DCMSJO263NJ. 3M.

The Inter Faith Network For The UK

The Network links Britain's faith communities and promotes good relations between them. Since 1987 it has worked with its member bodies to combat inter religious prejudice and intolerance and to help make Britain a country marked by mutual understanding and respect between religions where all can practise their faith with integrity. It:

- Provides information on faith communities and on inter faith affairs
- Advises the public and private sectors on multi faith projects and inter faith issues
- Publishes books designed to help people working in the religious and inter faith sectors
- Fosters inter faith co-operation on social issues
- Holds regular national meetings of its member bodies where social and religious questions of concern to the different faith communities can be examined together and sets up multi faith working groups, seminars and conferences to pursue these where appropriate
- Links 80 member organisations including representative bodies from the different faith communities; national inter faith organisations; local inter faith groups; academic institutions and bodies concerned with multi faith education.

The Network has also worked with other organisations, such as the Commission for Racial Equality, the Inner Cities Religious Council and the Universities of Exeter and York, on a number of its projects. Notably, it has worked with the Religious Resource and Research Centre at the University of Derby to produce the landmark publication *Religions in the UK: A Multi Faith Directory*, the second edition of which was published in May 1997

The Inter Faith Network for the UK
5/7 Tavistock Place, London WC1H 9SN
Tel 0171 388 0008/Fax 0171 387 7968
E-mail ifnet.uk@btinternet.com

MEMBER ORGANISATIONS OF THE INTER FAITH NETWORK FOR THE UK

FAITH COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVE BODIES

Afro West Indian United Council of Churches
Arya Pratinidhi Sabha (UK)
Baha'i Community of the United Kingdom
Board of Deputies of British Jews
Buddhist Society
Churches' Agency for Interfaith Relations in Scotland
Churches' Commission for Inter-Faith Relations
(Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland)
Council of African and Afro-Caribbean Churches (UK)
Friends of the Western Buddhist Order
Hindu Council of the UK
Imams and Mosques Council (UK)
Islamic Cultural Centre, Regent's Park, London
Jain Samaj Europe
Jamiat-ul-Ulama Britain (Association of Muslim Scholars)
National Council of Hindu Temples
Network of Buddhist Organisations (UK)
Network of Sikh Organisations (UK)
Roman Catholic Committee for Other Faiths of the
Bishops' Conference of England and Wales
Sikh Missionary Society
Sri Lankan Sangha Sabha of G.B.
Swaminaryan Hindu Mission
UK Action Committee on Islamic Affairs
Vishwa Hindu Parishad (UK)
World Ahl ul-Bayt (AS) Islamic League
World Islamic Mission (UK)
Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe

NATIONAL INTER FAITH ORGANISATIONS

Calamus Foundation
Christians Aware Interfaith Programme.
Council of Christians and Jews
International Association for Religious Freedom
(British Chapter)
London Society of Jews and Christians
Maimonides Foundation
Northern Ireland Inter Faith Forum
Westminster Interfaith
World Conference on Religion and Peace
(UK and Ireland Chapter)
World Congress of Faiths

LOCAL INTER FAITH GROUPS

Birmingham Council of Faiths
Bradford Concord Inter Faith Society
Bristol Interfaith Group
Cambridge Inter-Faith Group
Cardiff Interfaith Association
Cleveland Inter Faith Group
Coventry Inter Faith Group
Derby Open Centre Multi-Faith Group
Dudley Council of Faiths
Edinburgh Interfaith Association
Glasgow Sharing of Faiths Group
Gloucestershire Inter Faith Action
Harrow Inter-Faith Council
Kirklees and Calderdale Inter-Faith Fellowship
Leeds Concord Inter-Faith Fellowship
Leicester Council of Faiths
Loughborough Council of Faiths
Manchester Inter Faith Group
Medway and Maidstone Inter-Faith Group
Merseyside Inter Faith Group
Newham Association of Faiths
Nottingham Inter-Faith Council
Oxford Round Table of Religions
Peterborough Inter-Faith Council
Reading Inter-Faith Group
Redbridge Council of Faiths
Richmond Interfaith Group
Rochdale Interfaith Action
Sheffield Interfaith
Suffolk Inter-Faith Resource
Tyne and Wear Racial Equality Council Inter Faith Panel
Walsall Interfaith Group
Wellingborough Multi-Faith Group
Wolverhampton Inter-Faith Group
Wycombe Sharing of Faiths

EDUCATIONAL AND ACADEMIC BODIES

Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan
Centre for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim
Relations
Community Religions Project, University of Leeds
Institute of Jainology
Islamic Foundation
National Association of SACRE's
Religious Education Council for England and Wales
Scottish Joint Committee on Religious and Moral
Education
Shap Working Party on World Religions in Education
Study Centre for Christian-Jewish Relations,
(Sisters of Sion)
University of Derby Religious Resource and Research
Centre



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