



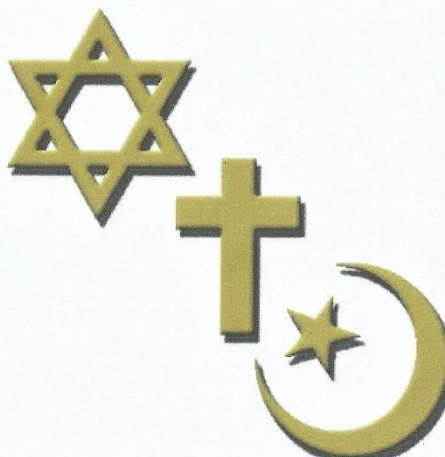
The Oasis at St Anne's

invites you to an important and innovative day

Working Faith

How the Abrahamic faiths today may work and reason in practice.

**Presented by three of the Eton College chaplaincy team
Imam Monawar Hussain, Mark Jones and Jonathan Paull**



**Tuesday October 13th 2015
Jaffar Hall, Eton College
10.00a.m. to 3.00p.m.**

A summary of the day in five parts

- Part 1: A general guide to the day given out to participants beforehand
- Part 2: Introductory presentations by the three speakers, with responses
- Part 3: Scriptural Reasoning session; the chosen texts
- Part 4: Scriptural Reasoning session: individual presentations by the speakers
- Part 5: Group session: the suggested questions and feedback at concluding plenary

Part 1. A general guide to the day given out to participants beforehand

Attached to this you will find the scriptural texts from the different faiths that will be used in the morning, as well as a brief outline of the scriptural reasoning process that will be used today. It has been developed in recent times as a way by which people of different faiths can offer mutual hospitality to others, inviting them to become more at home with their scriptures, opening up what many have found to be new friendships and understandings as well as a desire to become responsible for the common good in a new way.

But first, we ask the three main speakers, one after the other, to relate to us an overview of how their own personal faith and life works out in the current multi-belief society here in the UK. This will give us many insights on what a working faith looks like today.

After a short break, we begin the Scriptural Reasoning session: each of the speakers has chosen a scriptural text which you should see printed below. The session takes a particular form, viz;

1. The text is first read out by the person who has chosen it.
2. That person then gives some background as to how this text fits into the wider context of their scriptures.
3. The other main speakers are then invited to say what strikes them about the text, and a conversation takes place as each person's engagement with the text is discussed. No agreement is necessary but the aim is that each is able to express their insights as to how they see meanings in the particular text working out.
4. This process is repeated for each text; so we have 20 minutes each for each text, with perhaps the first 15 minutes restricted to the three speakers, and then opening it up to the wider group for brief comments, keeping all the time to the text that has been offered to us.

In the afternoon, we are invited to join a small group where the kind of hospitality experienced in the morning is continued. The groups would meet for around 45 minutes and each would appoint someone who would report back on behalf of the group. There will be some simple questions that are intended to help us engage together in a way we have seen in the morning. Each group would then give a short summary of their findings for the plenary session that ends the day.

Please read these texts before the day so that you are familiar with some of the ideas and viewpoints being expressed.

Part 2. Introductory talk on “my life in a today’s multi belief society” by the three speakers, with responses

The Revd. Mark Jones – Christian, housemaster and tutor at Eton College

Mutual hospitality is important for the cohesion at school. Principles they follow during their religious studies sessions to maintain this cohesion:

- Clarity in words to a diverse group. Remember your audience
- Information on the geopolitics of the world and our times. No assumptions about what people think
- Ethics with imagination
- Courage and patience - RS is important in schools.

One understands one's own faith better when it is challenged by other faiths.

Imam Monawar Hussain – Muslim tutor at Eton College, Founder of the Oxford Foundation

Born locally – Kashmiri heritage, Islamic faith both help to make his identity. Tutors at the College try to address the absence of religious vocabulary among Eton boys.

RE in today's world is seen as a lesser priority, with faith often one option among many. Mutual respect is essential for coexistence.

His watchword is hikmat, defined as service to humanity arising from his mission “to love God, and serve His creation”. Thus, the question is “How can I serve to my community, society and country?” and “How do we create an understanding of cohesion and retain a diverse sense of belonging?”.

“He who does not show mercy, no mercy would be shown to him” (Al-Bukhari).

"We try to be good example with good values, believing in dignity in humanity; build their sense of belonging, so we can raise role models." Imam Monawar.

He formed the Oxford Foundation, which aims to both understand extremism and then to confront it where it is encountered. It is his experience that hatred is growing in the UK, and this expression of the desire for “separateness” has to be undermined by (a) a combination of love, peaceableness, and respect as the shared values of faith communities that will always overcome narratives of hatred and separation, and (b) the developing of programmes that sustain belonging, identity and community.

Jonathan Paull – Jewish tutor at Eton College

There is a need for an individual approach to faiths, as faiths have different strands - we have Orthodox, Reform and Liberal Jews – and even within these, boys will have experienced a wide range of diversity.

Eton gives us the platform to work across the bridges not only within our own faith but also across faiths. Family life is very good for Jews in U.K yet anti-Semitic attacks still happen. Need to know one another across the boundaries eg. Jonathan has been a Jewish governor in C of E school.

Understanding what the society is about is the key for cohesion. We develop our own faith as we study others’.

The Bloxham Project works nationally in support of school chaplains, in association with the School to manage faith within schools.

Is there a difference between anti-Zionism (politics in Israel) and anti-Semitism (Jewishness)? The borders between these two were perhaps clearer in the old days, but now they are more blurred, and many today in the Jewish community cannot feel the difference and treat each one as including the other. For the Orthodox Jew, the tri-partite relationship between the Land/ the People/ the Book is inseparable and society has to understand this. Social media magnify the issues often unhelpfully. He sees that common to our faiths are righteousness/justice, and charity (hesed, and zedek which carries the meaning of social justice in Hebrew). Get to know- seek to listen- aim to understand more.

Responses from both the speakers and the audience to introductions

- We have been made aware of the care that has to be given to the language we are using.
- Sense of belonging/identity and individual responsibility is important
- Coming to live in the UK from an established multi faith culture abroad (ie Jerusalem) can be a difficult experience as one does not know the boundaries.

- Moving from one faith to another may be a problem, though for many it is the discovery that they have a faith tradition in their past that motivates enquiry.

- Blurred boundaries between Zionism and Semitism. Ultra-orthodox groups can easily separate anti-Zionism from anti-Semitism as they don't accept Zionism. But for many Jews, it is impossible to make this distinction. Muslims though will want to remind other communities of their own sense of sacred belonging to Jerusalem, so perhaps, rather than taking sides, we choose to become ambassadors of a new peace - Monawar

- This can and should be practiced locally, viz. working side by side rather than face to face. Working together with the police, local authority etc for better schools, better housing, for instance.

Law of Kings - Maimonides (Rationalist approach to Messianism) "Our ways is not his ways, our laws is not his laws" - Jonathan

– We tend to impose our own framework of interpretation. Beware of cherry-picking and interpreting the verses to suit our purposes. We can though ignore many traditional interpretations and challenge the texts for today - Monawar

From notes offered by Emel Soylu, with other material from Jo Saunders and Malcolm White

Part 3. Scriptural Reasoning session; the chosen texts

The Dignity of Difference, A Jewish Approach to Interfaith

“Fundamentalism, like imperialism, is the attempt to impose a single truth on a plural world. It is the Tower of Babel of our time. The test of faith is whether I can make space for difference. Can I recognise G-d’s image in someone who is not in my image, whose language, faith, ideals are different from mine”

Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, Quote from “The Dignity of Difference” p201

Genesis 1:26

And God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness, and they shall rule over the fish of the sea and over the fowl of the heaven and over the animals and over all the earth and over all the creeping things that creep upon the earth."

Deuteronomy Chapter 7: 1-6

When the Lord, your God, brings you into the land to which you are coming to possess it, He will cast away many nations from before you: the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivvites, and the Jebusites, seven nations more numerous and powerful than you. And the Lord, your God, will deliver them to you, and you shall smite them. You shall utterly destroy them; neither shall you make a covenant with them, nor be gracious to them. You shall not intermarry with them; you shall not give your daughter to his son, and you shall not take his daughter for your son. For he will turn away your son from following Me, and they will worship the gods of others, and the wrath of the Lord will be kindled against you, and He will quickly destroy you. But so shall you do to them: You shall demolish their altars and smash their monuments, and cut down their asherim trees, and burn their graven images with fire. For you are a holy people to the Lord, your God: the Lord your God has chosen you to be His treasured people, out of all the peoples upon the face of the earth

Islamic text for the day

Covenant, from the Qur'an: The Family of Imran 3:102-104

You who believe, be mindful of God, as is His due, and make sure you devote yourselves to Him, to your dying moment. Hold fast to God's rope all together; do not split into factions. Remember God's favour to you: you were enemies and then He brought your hearts together and you became brothers by His grace; you were about to fall into a pit of Fire and He saved you from it— in this way God makes His revelations clear to you so that you may be rightly guided. Be a community that calls for what is good, urges what is right, and forbids what is wrong: those who do this are the successful ones.

Christian text for the day:

Luke 10:25-37 New International Version (NIV): The Parable of the Good Samaritan

On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?" He answered, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind' and, 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'" "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live." But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?"

In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he travelled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'

"Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

Part 4. Scriptural Reasoning session: individual presentations by the speakers

Jonathan Paull: taking Deut. 7 verses 1 – 6 after Gen. 1 verse 26

There appears to be an assertion in Genesis with which we can give our ready assent that all humanity is to be accorded an equal status before God, against which an interpretation of Deut. 7 appears difficult. Who are the idolaters of today who are to be destroyed? The Jewish Talmudic tradition and later rabbinic interpretation constantly moves us on from the original locus of the scriptural text. Thus, Maimonides, born in Cordoba in 12th century Spain where Islam and Christianity coexisted in considerable harmony suggested that the foreigners of Deuteronomy are pre-Torah peoples whereas Muslims and Christians are "brothers of Moses" and therefore not under the same banner of being unrestrained idolaters as the Gergishites, etc. In this way we see a kind of evolution of ideas that surround the original scripture and attach themselves to it, all equally inspired as the Torah itself,

traditionally considered as that given to Moses on Mt. Sinai. *(Maybe the interpretation of this text could evolve further to describe how some modern movements may be viewed - and whether some may be considered revivals of pre Torah movements that must be destroyed in our current situation).*

Modern (Orthodox?) Jewish thought often emphasises the contrast between what might be thought of as simple faith (just taking the word as it appears) and what might be thought of as reasoned spiritual development which is continuing all the time. In such a way, even ideas as reincarnation could become acceptable. This is an attempt to get away from a reading of the text, whereby we “know” what the text is saying, which is merely imposing our own framework of interpretation onto the text that we hear. This can take considerable courage, because it will ask of us, “Whose framework shall we take?” Reform Judaism tends to strip out the use of the Talmudic way, and keep to the Tanach itself *(even though the Tanach may be a Talmudic construct).*

Iman Monawar Hussain: taking The Family of Imran 3:102 – 104

Translations are always problematic when it comes to using the Qur’an, for the divine inspiration is given in the precise language of what is classical Arabic. The rope here is understood as a symbol for the Qur’an and the sunna, being the written traditions associated with Mohammad and some of his companions. The chapter (or surah) of which this is part is from the Medinan stage of Mohammad’s life, and has at its base a tribal society, very much concerned with unity and behaviour within the tribe. In this precise context, a new regime was required – goods were to be shared, there was to be the healing of bad blood, and a following of the new way of looking after one another that God’s revelations had given. Overall, there was to be a promoting of the good probably at present within our own traditions. The metaphor of “The Rope” was rich in meaning - holding onto, connection between God and your faith - something which can be slippery at times...

Mark Jones: taking Luke 10 verses 25 – 37

Important for Christians today to try and see how any text fits into the wider movement of scripture; here biblical criticism has shed enormous light on the whole process of understanding how scripture came to us. In this light, we can understand that St. Luke brings his own interests which can be found both in his Gospel and then again in his narrative of the early Church – the Acts of the Apostles. Here in the story of the Samaritan, we may see therefore his interest in the “other” who does not belong to our group; which of course brings us into the encounter we are having today. The story might suggest that considerable innovation about inclusion in the inheritance of eternal life is possible all the while coupled to a continuity with the fabric of what is already in place.

Notes from Malcolm White with additional reflection in italics

Part 5. Group session: the suggested questions and feedback at concluding plenary

After lunch, the participants were put into four groups to look at the following questions.

1. What was the greatest impression on you of what you have heard and seen today?
2. Going through each of the texts discussed today, try to summarise what new understandings members of the group have found.
3. What theme/s would the group like to see explored at another session of scriptural reasoning?

The following notes arose from either notes taken within the group or offered at the concluding plenary by each of the four groups.

Question 1.

- Respectful engagement over texts, and the facing up to our difficult texts
- Humble approach (courage to talk about) to controversial texts. Interaction between speakers showed us all the value of love and respect. No cherry picking to suit your interpretation. We ignore traditions of interpretation at our peril
- Need to approach individuals at different levels
- Barriers created by different opinions and feelings. Ownership is a problem. Who has the right to own a particular faith, and what is right?
- The journey from Scripture to its interpretation through tradition and reason is a long one. We need to move from Scripture to reason. Sometimes tradition can be an obstacle on the way to reason as it is very strong with its tribal influences. Reason comes late. What can we do to make sure Reason is reached?
- We always talk about love. But there is hatred as well. Fear of the unknown may create hatred. People are in need of certainty. They want definite answers to their questions. There is no place for doubt. It is human nature to be frightened of the unknown, for this reason they want certainty
- There is also an issue of identity. For some people, religious identity is more important than their civil identity. If we live in this country, we need to follow the laws of the land, rather than following the law of religion.
- Citizenship is what gives you the most freedom. I am not British. I am American, but I am more Christian than American. I am more defined by my religious identity.
- The role of the media is very important. The representation of a particular faith can be skewed.
- Is materialism the new idolatry? The ease in which we can make God in our image -ISIS
- Separating religion and politics? (as in N. Ireland)
- This is a beautiful setting for doing this!
- History gives perspective
- We share the paucity of R.E. today
- Good to sense the spirituality of the faiths
- It's about what we do rather than what we say – compassion, love, and social justice. We can see the divine through our interactions. So much common ground
- Voluntarily, we can create common ground
- Good to hear of the openness of young people
- Get our own house in order first?

Question 2

The Deuteronomy reading

- Acceptance of difference, esp. over Israel
- The importance of commentators in Judaism (Talmud)
- But Reform Jews do not value such commentary and wish to keep to the biblical text
- That Christians/Moslems are not regarded as idolators by Maimonides

The Qur'anic reading

- The Rope image and its power

The Christian reading

- The experience of meeting one's own 'Good Samaritan' – a Muslim in Stockholm – and the joy of the victim when saved

The readings in general

- The interpretation, and the talking together is helpful to reconciliation
- Not taking texts at face value
- Need to look at context

Question Three

- Lies: a subject for textual study
- Anything that pushes the boundaries
- Talmud important (but not accessed today)
- Judgement and life after death
- Mindfulness and attention to God
- Our differences!!
- More difficult texts, like the uniqueness of Christ, or the option to use violence (jihad), the question of Israel and the taking over of the Promised Land
- Exilic repercussions
- Much wider choice of participants
- The understanding and roles of women in faith, the creation and environment, poverty
- Nature of God- our relationship with Him; prayer
- Violence/non violence