

Interfaith Relations as a Tool for Justice

Extract from the Anglican Peace and Justice Network's "Report of its Deliberations in Jerusalem, September 14-22, 2004. *Pages 26-7*

Having met in Jerusalem, the city of Peace, sacred to the three Abrahamic faiths, APJN was confronted by both the failure and hope of interfaith relations in resolving conflicts. Clearly, at this moment in history, failure is more evident as Christianity, Judaism and Islam are a cause of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict rather than agents of a just peace. But there are voices for reconciliation and justice in all three communities, and that is a sign of hope to build upon.

We were particularly struck by the witness of the Christian community in Israel and Palestine. First, we noted the disturbing decline in the number of Christians, now making up less than 2% of the population after having been 12% before the 1967 war. Israel and its policies have been a source of frustration to Palestinian Christians both in Israel and in the Palestinian areas under Occupation. But we also noted the vigorous witness for justice in the ecumenical community, including our own Anglican diocese, and were heartened by the determination to build a just peace for both Israeli Jews and Palestinians.

Bishop Kumara of Sri Lanka notes the challenge of being a Christian minority in his country: "When considering the means and the effectiveness of our mission, we must consider the multifaith context and the plurality in which we are placed as a minority community. In a country that has been bleeding for almost two decades due to ethnic civil conflict, people do not want another conflict among religious groups."

Worldwide, Christians need to engage in intense interfaith dialogue as a direct means of promoting reconciliation and justice among all people. The family of God includes every human being, and that is a fundamental premise for doing mission. In pursuing interfaith relations, Bishop Kumara reminds Christians, "We believe that people of different faiths are the concern of God's eternal love and should not be treated as targets to be won or 'annihilated' or



Conversations on a street, Hebron

doomed. There is no need to condemn their faiths and practices or destroy their faith objects, as the task of mission is to reveal in word and deed the love of God and to assist people to experience that love. We need to avoid references to doctrines, practices and objects of worship in other religions. Let us not forget that human beings are tools in God's hands. The mission is God's, and God alone will determine the end result of fragile human action. Target numbers, dates and operational plans in respect of converts are unnecessary and counter-productive to God's mission.

Public demonstrations by those who have accepted our faith and other arrogant proclamations can invite criticism and even violence.”

We refer as a reference point to the Lambeth Conference of 1988 on developing a coherent approach to interfaith dialogue:

This conference commends dialogue with people of other faiths as part of Christian discipleship and mission, with the understanding that:

1. dialogue begins when people meet each other
2. dialogue depends upon mutual understanding, mutual respect and mutual trust
3. dialogue makes it possible to share in service to the community
4. dialogue becomes a medium of authentic witness.

Acknowledging that such dialogue, which is not a substitute for evangelism, may be a contribution in helping people of different faiths to make common cause in resolving issues of peacemaking, social justice and religious liberty, we further commend each province to initiate such dialogue in partnership with other Christian Churches where appropriate.

APJN also commends this recommendation, not just because it promotes interfaith understanding, but as a tool for peacemaking.