

Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor at Lyons

Dear friends,

How timely are these gatherings. By God's providence, and the hard work of the Community of Sant'Egidio, each year a response is summoned from hearts of true faith at the very moment when the world is faced with violence in the name of false religion. This year it falls to me to be the one who arrives from a city wounded by terrorism, and to ask: "Who is their god?" A false god, of course, one projected from the darkest recesses of the human heart, one that takes no account of the innocent.

The explosions two months ago in London, which killed 56 commuters and wounded countless others, have led to the same soul-searching as occurred in the wake of other months in the calendar of contemporary infamy: July in London has been added to May in Madrid, and September in New York. Now we, too, have had to face, in a new and direct way, the challenges in our midst of violence in the name of faith. And it therefore falls to us in Britain with a new urgency to forge from within our faith communities, for the good of the whole society, what Sant'Egidio rightly calls a "spiritual humanism of peace". Because it is a task which we should regard as essential to who we are and what we proclaim, it is a great comfort to be among distinguished leaders of all faiths who have gathered here for that same purpose.

In the aftermath of 7 July, the faith leaders in Britain committed themselves to building a spiritual humanism of peace with a new determination and in a very public way. I stood with the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Chief Rabbi, and British Muslim leaders to pledge ourselves to remain true to this goal in word and deed and to work together to make of it an enduring reality. It is a pledge I took, and I take, very seriously. The challenge of religiously-inspired violence has fallen to us, in our time and in our place; and if we cannot meet it then we fail both God and ourselves.

Very close to Westminster Cathedral, where I live, is Victoria Coach Station, one of the main points of entry for people arriving in London in search of a new life. Both of these places, the Cathedral and the Station, are hard to miss. In between them is a place which it would be very easy to miss. It is called The Passage, and it was founded 25 years ago by my predecessor, Cardinal Basil Hume. Those of you who know the projects run by the Community of Sant'Egidio in Rome would recognise it at once. The Passage offers not just a welcome, but a chance for a new life: shelter and beds, yes, but also healing, and training for employment, as well as inspiration to many Christians who recognise in it a glimpse of the Kingdom of God.

Most of those who come to The Passage now are foreign-born.

Britain is currently home to 4.3 million migrants, two million more than 30 years ago. Today, one in four Londoners was born abroad, and in some parts of the capital, the figure is one in two. For some, this is a source of alarm; but few disputes that our economic growth has been made undergirded by immigration, which is compensating, naturally, for the falling birth-rates of our native populations. A new London is emerging, which I see constantly in the diverse, vibrant, growing congregations of the parishes in my diocese. Only yesterday, visiting one of them, I heard the intercessory prayers being given in five languages.

Globalisation is on our doorsteps: a whirlwind of movement of goods and people around the world, the greatest movement of humanity since at least the late nineteenth century. As with any great shift, it brings in its wake new possibilities and an expanded consciousness; but it also brings disorientation, a clinging to old certainties, a need of fixed points. Alongside mobility and diversity, therefore, there have emerged nativism and fundamentalism; alongside integration and cohabitation, new chasms between cultures and religions. Where some find fresh opportunity, others see an enlarged threat.

What we know of the bombers of 7 July is that they were, by most reckonings, assimilated – the sons of successful immigrants, the beneficiaries of education and modernity. Yet they were deeply alienated. They were left hanging between two worlds: the rural Asian culture of their parents, reproduced to some extent in their British mosques; and the consumerist, individualist, fragmented world of modern Britain. Rejecting both, they fell vulnerable to a version of Arabic Islam which sees fit to interpret the Koran in isolation from the interpretative communities and legislative traditions of the faith. This ideology fuelled their fury at injustice and offered them a way of overcoming it, one that they were persuaded to believe could please God by sacrificing themselves and others in the process.

Our task is not only to challenge the ideology of the crucifier with the faith in the Crucified, but to address the alienation of our Muslim youth. We need to seek a new framework for social integration built on foundations that are open to authentic religion. In past eras, secular nationalism and its accompanying civic values may have offered such a mantle. Expanding the concept of Britishness can only take us so far; but not far enough. Nor are secular values sufficient, for so much of the restlessness of contemporary society carried with it a refusal to circumscribe humanity to the material, shut off from the spiritual. We have moved from being a 'secular society' to become a 'seeking society'. Where only ten or 15 years ago, people spoke of the victory of secularism, now there is talk of the 'return of religion'. Even here in France, the home of the doctrine of exclusion of all religion from the public sphere known as *laïcité*, is increasingly being recognised as inadequate, as Nicholas Sarkozy's call for a greater role for religion in public life has recognised. Indeed, it is remarkable to me how far contemporary Europe has shifted in its view, from seeing religion as incompatible with democratic pluralism to a realisation that there cannot be democratic pluralism without a recognition of religion in the public square. We have now, as perhaps never before in my lifetime, the chance to build a spiritual humanism of peace in which all our religions can see the best of themselves reflected, yet which is also acceptable to those of no faith who see tolerance and respect for diversity as fundamental.

This new, spiritual humanism is being forged in these yearly gatherings of faith leaders in the spirit of the Assisi meeting of 1986. It starts with what all true religion holds in common: the recognition that divinely-created human beings possess an innate dignity by virtue of that fact. It recognises what is inherent: the right for the innocent to be protected from violence is not a philosophical idea, or a concession of the state, but a foundation stone of culture and society. From it flows also a religious respect for the autonomy of what is properly secular, and a distinction in law between sin and crime. It must mean respect for the individual, yes, but also for family and community; tolerance, yes, but also the right to passionate belief. If our religions can agree on these core tenets, which flow from the best of each of our traditions, and if they are upheld by the state, we will enable newly-assimilated peoples of different faiths to feel they belong.

It especially falls to us, the religious leaders, to build this humanism by the example of our own relationships. And I want to here to stress one element in particular of that example:

the defence of each other's freedom of religion, everywhere and anywhere in the world. This means that British Christians must feel the plight of Bosnian Muslims as keenly as British Muslims feel the plight of Christians under Sharia law in Nigeria.

I spoke last week of my concern at the new Iraqi constitution, which includes an article which appears to open the door to Sharia law. The 800,000 Christians in Iraq, mostly Catholic and Orthodox, are justifiably concerned that their religious rights are not explicitly enshrined in the Constitution. Muslims in Britain should understand this fear, and share it; for an Islamic Iraq in which the religious rights of minorities are disrespected undermines not just Iraq's attempts to create a democratic and plural society but runs against the proper traditions of Islam.

It also means that we Christians must be vigorous in isolating those in our own communities who seek to scapegoat or demonise people of other religions. And it means that Muslims must draw a clear line between those inside the best traditions of Islam and those who seek to pervert it. On the one hand, it will involve a new openness to those of other faiths who uphold the God-given dignity of human beings and who abhor violence in God's name; on the other hand, it will involve a new willingness to isolate those in our communities who do not share those core values.

In acting thus to construct a new spiritual humanism of peace, we faith leaders will be, in a sense, following a path which is already being marked out in the ordinary human response to terrorism. I am thinking here especially of the response of the relatives of the bomb victims whom it was my privilege to accompany in the wake of 7 July. One mother, a Nigerian Catholic married to a Muslim, spoke of her determination to forge, in her son's name, bonds of forgiveness and understanding across the borders of hate and miscomprehension. In so doing, she lit a beacon to guide our response to terrorism. A new spiritual humanism of peace was born, too, in the response of Londoners to the bombings: differences dissolved in those hours and days, as they put their arms around each other, united in their common humanity, just as people around the world of all faiths sent Londoners messages of sympathy and solidarity. Terror struck, hoping to sow alarm and division. But God struck back, gently but firmly. From the twisted carriages of London's underground trains came a new determination for the religions to raise their voices against violence in the name of God. Here in Lyon, we are responding with gratitude and determination to that initiative, conscious of the challenge with which our age has entrusted us.

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