

Blackburn Cathedral: Monday 18th November 2013

Music & More online Supplement No. 28

JESUS & MUHAMMAD- is their message still relevant?

It was an amazing sight! The cathedral's North Transept was full to overflowing with adults and schoolchildren who had come to hear keynote speakers who would explain their Christian and Muslim faiths so that we could more readily understand one another.

The cathedral's Dialogue Officer, **Anjum Anwar MBE**, chaired the day, and kept us all in order, not least in insisting that all speakers used the microphones effectively – for our cathedral is notorious for its unhelpful acoustics – for speech.



Extra chairs had to be found as more school children kept arriving during the first hour of that memorable day.

The advertised keynote speakers were **Canon Chris Chivers**, our former Canon Chancellor whose dynamic ministry worked wonders for multicultural relations in Blackburn and beyond, and **Dr Musharraf Hussain OBE**, who is a scientist, educator and religious scholar in Nottinghamshire, who was awarded the OBE for his services to community relations.

But unfortunately Canon Chivers was delayed in South Africa and so could not be with us.



Julian Bond, the Director of the Christian Muslim Forum who deputized at short notice for Canon Chris, provided a challenging interactive session and interesting information about the work of the Christian Muslim Forum, and a testimony about how his Christian faith which has been nurtured and developed in his inter-faith work.

But if Canon Chris had been with us he could also have explained the Christian faith to those who did not know it, and he could have strengthened the faith of Christians who may not be too sure of their own faith.



Jesus was more than a prophet. He was, and is, the culmination of the prophecies in the Old Testament. (Muslims believe in the Torah as revealed to Moses and the Psalms as revealed to David.) Jesus was, and is, God – who came to earth to demonstrate God's love for us by dying a painful death, and thus redeeming us from the penalty of sin – and rising to life again on the first Easter Day, so that all who follow Him may likewise rise to new life. And after He had ascended to Heaven, He sent the Holy Spirit to enable Christians to live that life more fully for which we were created.

Jesus' teachings – about loving God and loving our neighbour – have found echoes in the teachings of many other prophets through the ages, but the Christian faith is not based on those teachings (helpful and practical and essential though they are). The two creeds which define our faith, and which we recite at Eucharist and Evensong, don't mention His teachings at all – they just state that the Son of God became fully human, that He died and that He rose again!

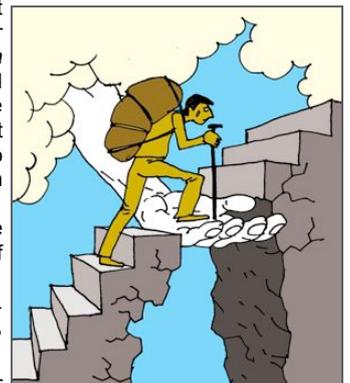
One of the words that trouble some people is the word **faith**. Many think of it as applying only to religion. That is not so, for everyone, whether we realize it or not, lives by faith. What is faith? **Faith is putting your active trust in a theoretical belief** – it's something we all do every day. For example we believed Anjum Anwar when she said that there would be conference today, and so we made the journey to the cathedral expecting it to be so. And it was. We had put our belief into action. We believe that banks will keep our money safe, and so we entrust our bank with our money – on the word of a bank manager whom we've never seen, but who, so we have been told, is reliable – and it is so.



And it's just like that for the Christian faith. Jesus said, 'Come unto Me ... put your trust in Me and I will be with you wherever you go.' We may believe about Jesus, but until we believe in Jesus we shall never know if He can be entrusted with our lives.

And this belief-in-action, this faith, produces 'works'. St. James wrote (2.26) 'faith without works is dead'. And more than that, the implanting of the Holy Spirit into the lives of Christians produces 'fruit' – love, joy, peace... (Galatians 2.22-23).

And that's it! Once we have realised Who Jesus is, (either by an immediate conversion – like St. Paul, or more gradually) we spend the rest of our lives working it out, day by day. And when we fail (as we all do), we pick ourselves up, dust ourselves off and start all over again, because God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him (not believes about Him) should not perish, but have everlasting life. The problem is that some of us (many of us?) are not too sure about these basics.



How greatly do Christians admire the devotion of Muslims who pray five times a day, and also their teaching of children, some of whom begin to memorize the Qur'an from the age of 4. Would that more Christians were as faithful in our devotions.

A former Archbishop of York once said that the Christian faith is like a meal; many of us enjoy the appetizer, but few go on to the main course!

When Dr Hussain spoke, he explained the Muslim faith so clearly.

He said: The teachings of Jesus and of Muhammad are indeed relevant. Muslims believe that God is the absolute Guide and that He has always had prophets who spoke God's words in every country and in every age throughout the world.

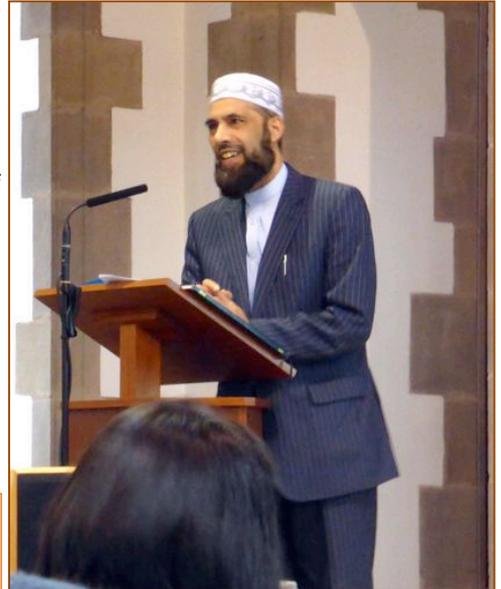
God has given us intellect so that we may reason, and Muhammad was the latest prophet-guide given to the world by God.

Beliefs become apparent through attitudes and actions. [Faith!] We have been created here for a purpose – everyone needs to discover what God's purpose is for each one of us.

The message of the prophets is that we share a belief in one God. [The Christian Trinity may be a stumbling block to some?] God is the absolute Creator, for we are His creation, therefore we must love Him.

So many religions have their idols of 'wood and stone' – i.e. our own desires made in our own image which could be made to fall in with our plans.

So we need to be released from our idols – for example accumulation of wealth for its own sake. Our idols, whatever they may be, influence our attitudes, actions and behaviour. Muhammad set about revealing the difference between illusion and reality.



Muhammad helped us understand who we are and that **everyone can be, should be, a representative of God.**
All of us, today, need to hear and act upon this message.

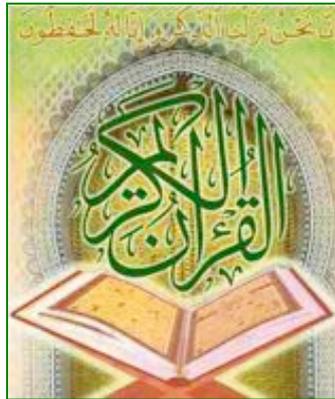
Advertising's purpose can be said to deceive us to buy things that we don't want and don't need.

Lack of moral values is one of the major problems today, therefore laws have to be introduced to try to curb these errors.

The Sermon on the Mount sums up how we should live our daily lives.

Dr Hussain noted that Islam became the founder of modern science – which was built on the investigation of God's world. (For example, **Algebra**: from Arabic *al-jabr* 'the reunion of broken parts'. Mathematics was developed in medieval Islam.) 'Use your intellect,' said Dr Hussain, 'for it is one of God's great gifts to us all.'

There were many questions.



All thinking people ask three questions ;Who am i, why am i here, and where am i going?

- He helps us to understand who we are, providing us an identity, vicegerents of the Almighty and has freed man from; fear, guilt, oppression and demigods
- He teaches us the meaning and purpose of life, attainment of Divine pleasure
- prepares us for the hereafter, shows us our destiny, he is our intercessor on the day of judgement

And, after lunch, there were seminars for small groups when topics such as

What would Jesus and Muhammad say about our environment?

How would Jesus and Muhammad relate to our youth today?

How would Jesus and Muhammad respond to our economic/political crises?

Would Jesus and Muhammad approve of the way that interfaith work is rolled out in our communities?

From Wikipedia: The Qur'an is a revelation very specifically in Arabic.

The speaker in the Qur'an - in the first person - is God talking directly to man and so it should be recited only in the Arabic language.

Translations into other languages are necessarily the work of humans and so, according to Muslims,

they no longer possess the uniquely sacred character of the Arabic original.

It has been said that the Bible is a collection of writings by many different authors.

The Qur'an is a dictation.

Anjum Anwar said that we will use this project to create conversations between Muslims and Christians during the coming months.

This day's presentation promises much for increasing our mutual understanding.

Thank you, Anjum!

