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Interfaith Relations in the Context of a Multifaith City

Introduction

Something was stirring in Britain in the late 1980s regarding the place of religion in political and social life. In 1987 The Inter Faith Network for the UK was founded in order "to advance public knowledge and mutual understanding of the teachings, traditions and practices of the different faith communities in Britain and to promote good relations between people of different faiths in this country." This twofold purpose was designed to help make the UK a place marked by "mutual respect and understanding" (IFNUK n.d.). The need for "mutual respect and understanding" reflected a mood among those who were beginning to embrace the growing calls for dialogue and cooperation between religions.[1] A safe space for encounter, exchange and learning would have obvious advantages for a Britain becoming more self-conscious about its emerging multifaith demography.

Earlier in the 1980s, the mainstream churches too were beginning to recognise the need to engage more positively with other faith communities. It was no longer satisfactory to view people of other faiths as simply objects for conversion to Christianity. The Church of England established the Inter Faith Consultative Group, a body whose remit was to help the church respond institutionally to other faith communities. The British Council of Churches in 1980, through their Committee for Relations with People of Other Faiths, produced a first booklet commending the virtues of interfaith dialogue to the churches. The booklet had been inspired by the World Council of Churches landmark production of *Guidelines on Dialogue* in 1979 (WCC 2010). The Catholic Church, following the inspiration of Vatican II to other faiths as presented in its ground-breaking document, *Nostra Aetate*, was making overtures to other faith communities in a new openness.[2] Other bodies promoting a new rapprochement among people of faith would emerge in due course. For example, it is worth citing The Three Faiths Forum, founded in 1997, "to encourage

[1] As an indication of changing cultural mood the Inter Faith Network lists 60 founder member organisations, see http://www.interfaith.org.uk/about-ifn/background. The 2013 AGM lists 200 organisations in membership of the Network.

[2] *Nostra Aetate* was 50 years old in 2015 and the occasion of numerous consultations in the UK and around the world.

friendship, goodwill, and understanding between people of different faiths, especially between Muslims, Christians and Jews" (3FF). The Forum has been active through educational work in schools and higher education institutions, and more recently it has enlisted the Arts as a medium for bringing people of different faiths together.

But there was another side to religious change in Britain at that time. In 1988, the author Salman Rushdie published *Satanic Verses* and a storm of protest was unleashed among the Muslim community. Rushdie was perceived as pouring needless scorn on Islam and demeaning the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him): a boundary of respect had been transgressed. Protests erupted on the streets of Britain's cities where Muslims were a significant minority, and indeed across the world. Suddenly, it seemed that religion which was meant to be a private affair between the individual and God was not content to be so marginalised. But this was angry religion (see Weller 2009).

These two stirrings have framed the place of religion in public life and interfaith relations in Britain's cities since the late 1980s. On the one hand, there was the summons to dialogue and co-operation for the sake of the common social good; on the other hand, there was religion, which was not prepared to play the game of dialogue at any price. The fact that the Muslim protest over Rushdie was not a protest against dialogue and co-operation but against a socio-political mood which seemed indifferent to the cherished beliefs and practices of Islam, and by extension other religions too, did nothing to dampen feelings that the management of interfaith relations was not going to be easy in Britain's multifaith cities.

What happened next skewed everything. In the late summer of 2001, riots in some northern towns and cities (Bradford, Oldham, Burnley) threatened to bring to an end Britain's benign experiment with so-called multiculturalism, the view that cultures and ethnicities should be encouraged to flourish on their own terms without worrying too much about integration into general British culture (for an interesting discussion on the relation between society, multiculturalism and religion see Billings 2009). Then, adding to the anxious mood, on 11 September that same year came the audacious sight of two hijacked planes smashing into both towers of the landmark World Trade Center in Manhattan, a third into the Pentagon, and with a fourth most certainly destined for the White House but had been grounded in Pennsylvania. These were examples of what Mark Juergensmeyer, in his ground-breaking analysis of religiously motivated violence, called "performative violence" (Juergensmeyer 2003), that is, deeds intended as public declarations that radical religion was "at war" with "the West." From then on interfaith relations would be called upon to tackle the default assumption that religions are the cause of all wars in the world and all unrest between different groups in society. The many-sided agenda of interfaith relations was set to be derailed by the need to attend solely

to religion's potential for social and political separatism and even violence. Britain is no stranger to multiple presences and influences. We bear the marks of invasion (Romans, Vikings, Normans etc.) and the consequences of having been an empire. Christianity may have been dominant for roughly 1500 years, but with immigration on an unprecedented scale since the Second World War, bringing cultures and religions which hitherto had been the stuff of travellers' tales and the romantic imagination, all that was about to change. In the twenty-first century, with the deepening of globalisation, diversity, plurality, and religious difference have come to define the character of many cities. Analysis of the census of 2011 by researchers at Manchester University shows how "Britain's cities are more ethnically diverse than ever before" and that there are local authorities existing where no one ethnic group is dominant (Simpson 2013). Although this analysis is of ethnic as opposed to religious diversity, it nevertheless provides some indication of the changing face of Britain's major centres of population.

In relation to the growth of plural cities, it is interesting to note a shift over time in much of the language which attempts to categorise problems involving tensions between different groups. The language of race relations in the 1960s gave way to discussions about ethnicities, which in turn transmuted into issues of cultural strangeness and was eventually framed in terms of religious difference. It is possible, moreover, to observe this shift, notwithstanding the fact that these distinctions are incapable of neat categorisation. The failure by political authorities and academic commentators to acknowledge the foundational role of religion in the lives of believers was finally coming to be seen as short-sighted.

In summary, interfaith relations in the multifaith city have come to be dominated by issues of community cohesion, the compatibility of traditional religious culture with modern democratic secular culture and anxieties over religiously-motivated violence. One could be excused for thinking that the emerging dialogical agenda from the 1980s, of "mutual respect and understanding," seems rather tame by comparison.

Case Study: Leicester

Leicester is said to be one of the foremost multicultural and multifaith cities in Britain. This means that the encounters between faith communities have become a significant factor in the cultural, social and commercial life of the city. In Leicester, interfaith relations matter. It is worth reporting the national census figures for religious affiliation from 2011 in comparison with 2001 to give an indication of why this is the case:

	Leicester	Leicestershire	England & Wales[3]
Christian	106,872 (32.4%)	392,363 (60.3%)	33,243,175 (59.3%)
	125,187 (44.7%)	452,347 (74.2%)	35,251,244 (71.7%)
Buddhist	1224 (0.4%)	1546 (0.2%)	247,743 (0.4%)
	638 (0.2%)	904 (0.1%)	139,046 (0.28%)
Hindu	50,087 (15.2%)	18,508 (2.8%)	816,633 (1.5%)
	41,248 (14.7%)	12,331 (2%)	546,982 (1.1%)
Jewish	295 (0.1%)	528 (0.1%)	263,346 (0.5%)
	417 (0.1%)	615 (0.1%)	257,671 (0.52%)
Muslim	61,440 (18.6%)	9096 (1.4%)	2,706,066 (4.8%)
	30,885 (11%)	4939 (0.8%)	1,524,887 (3.1%)
Sikh	14,457 (4.4%)	7978 (1.2%)	423,158 (0.8%)
	11,796 (4.2%)	4972 (0.8%)	327,343 (0.6%)
Other	1839 (0.6%)	2381 (0.4%)	240,530 (0.4%)
religions	1179 (0.4%)	1287 (0.2%)	143,811 (0.3%)
No religion	75,280 (22.8%)	176,123 (27.1%)	14,097,229 (25.1%)
	48,789 (17.4%)	92,810 (15.2%)	7,709,267 (14.8%)
Not stated	18,345 (5.6%)	41,966 (6.5%)	4,038,032 (7.2%)
	19,782 (7%)	92,810 (15.2%)	4,010,658 (7.7%)
Totals	329,839 (up 17.8%)	650,489 (up 6.7%)	56,075,912 (up 7.8%)
	279,923	609,578	52,041,916

It is well known that interpreting census data is no easy task. For our purposes here, we can note that Leicester has a far higher proportion of people from non-Christian backgrounds compared to the national picture. In particular, Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs form a significant proportion of the population. Compared with 2001, the main shift in the demographic has been an increase in Muslim population, overtaking that of Hindu communities. Muslims now form 18.6% of the city's population compared to 15.2% Hindus. Christian affiliation shows a drop in numbers in line with national reporting. One other feature of the changing demographic is that, with increased wealth, a proportion of Hindus and Sikhs have begun to relocate to areas immediately outside of the city. This is less true for Muslims as the pull of the local mosque also has an effect on their geographic loyalty. Within the city itself, the shifting balance between Hindu and Muslim population has triggered some occasional frustration among Hindu communities, especially when government funding for projects involving Muslims is perceived to be biased towards one communal identity.

The remainder of this chapter will give an impressionist-cum-reflective account of interfaith encounter in one multifaith city. Some cities in Britain, such

[3] Census 2011. Data in the second line is from the 2001 Census. I am grateful to Riaz Ravat BEM, Deputy Director of the St. Philip's Centre for Study and Engagement, Leicester, for these figures.

as Birmingham, Burnley, or Bradford, have felt the impact of an increase mainly in the Muslim population over the last forty years. However, this has not been mirrored in Leicester for very specific reasons. In the early 1970s the dictator President of Uganda, Idi Amin, expelled his south Asian population from the country, and the city of Leicester experienced an influx of a largely Hindu commercial middle class from a number of East Africa countries. Nevertheless, since 2001 the Christian-Muslim relationship, for obvious reasons, has occupied a great deal of time and energy within the dynamics of the total multifaith mix of relationships.

It was often claimed that Leicester is a "model for interfaith relations," with the result that the city has received numerous visitations from various government departments over the years. The promotion of Leicester as a "model multifaith city" could well be a convenient fiction, yet it does have some credibility. One major indicator of this is that the city so far has not succumbed to communal riots such as rocked the northern towns of Bradford, Burnley, and Oldham in the summer of 2001. These riots were the result of clashes mainly between unemployed and marginalised young white adult males and young British Muslim adult males who felt equally marginalised by a host cultural system that had failed to respond to their needs as a second- and third-generation immigrant group and who were by now British nationals (for analysis of the riots, see Cantle 2005). I shall say more about this later.

Precisely why Leicester has managed to escape riots is not easy to know, and this is especially so given that the folklore of the city harbours the memory of an infamous advertisement taken out in the Uganda Argus of 17 September 1972, which warned Ugandan Asians against coming to Leicester. The advert read: "In your own interests and those of your family you should accept the advice of the Uganda Resettlement Board and not come to Leicester." In spite of such warnings, the ethnic minority communities in Leicester continued to grow. By 1995 the city council reported that "People of Asian origin now constitute over a quarter of the City's population" (LCC 1995). By 2011 that figure approached 40% of the city's population. In the immediate aftermath of such immigration, racist tension in the city began to show but credit must be given to the city council for being pro-active in combating racism in the city. For this reason, among others, a large part of why Leicester has been able to maintain a degree of equanimity between its host and immigrant communities could well be the fact that so far the political far right (British National Party and English Defence League), in its efforts to exploit racist elements in the city, has not managed to gain much of a foothold. But it is also the case that the Leicester Council of Faiths has worked steadily over the past 25 years, building bridges of trust between faith communities and between faith communities and the civic life of the city (Clark and Race 2013).

Let me now outline three broad phases of development in interfaith relations since those influxes of the 1970s. These are sequential to a degree, but not in the sense of one phase superseding the previous one; it is more a case of one phase folding into another.

Building Basic Trust

The Leicester Council of Faiths began as a response to an international crisis, and this has continued to be a central factor driving its work ever since. Its story begins with the assassination of Mrs Indira Gandhi in 1986, and it continues with 9/11, 7/7, the invasion of Iraq, the war in Afghanistan, the so-called War on Terror and its aftermath in the Middle East region, and every act that could precipitate international tension thereafter. Recalling the initial days, Archdeacon David Silk, the first Chair of the Council of Faiths, wrote after the death of Mrs Gandhi, when tension arose in the city: "It was clear to me that Leicester needed a simple instrument to serve as a forum for the faith-leaders to meet, to talk together as equals and to become friends …" (Race and Clark 2013: 10-11). The necessity for this simple act has become the norm everywhere when building interfaith relations, but we ignore how revolutionary a step the simple goal of friendship was at that time.

A second significant factor, set to shape the future, was Silk's approach to the lord mayor of the city to host a first meeting. This both provided neutral ground and also sent a signal that the purpose of interfaith work was to be for the common good of the city and society as a whole. These were strategic decisions, but they were also theologically significant: belief systems were secondary to the necessity to develop ethical common ground between the faith communities, or at least an ethical tacit agreement to work together.

Early in the life of the Council of Faiths it was agreed that neither syncretism nor proselytisation would be permitted. Silk reflected further:

> Instead, we began to learn about one another's faith traditions *from the inside*—not with the mind only but with the heart and soul. Religion for each of us is not just a shopping list of propositions, or even a code of behaviour. Rather, it is a pattern of living. I found that I could attend Friday prayers at the Mosque and sit quietly at the back, feel at home and feel at prayer. Gradually we found ourselves attending one another's celebrations and beginning to feel accepted. (Race and Clark 2013: 10-11)

Since those initial days, mutual support in the face of potential unrest arising from troubled international events became a regular feature of Leicester's response to international crises. It signified a naturalness that also helped to prepare the way for the Council of Faiths response to 9/11. After that world-changing event, relations with Muslim communities have occupied centre stage, nationally and locally. But through all of the atrocities, wars and acts of violence, in Leicester it seemed best to handle the repercussions multilaterally. The result is that an important principle emerged: that an attack on one com-

munity should be treated as an attack on all communities. If, after 9/11, it was Muslims who became the objects of vilification in society at large, then they must be shown appropriate solidarity. Put differently, the solidarity principle amounted to the following: do not let the tensions of international unrest affect the relations between faith communities in the city.

Let me cite one example of a common statement, which emerged from the growing interfaith friendships. It concerns the knotted problems inherent in the Israel/Palestine dispute:

> In Leicester, we pledge ourselves to work for the continuation of the good relations that exist between our three communities and not to allow disturbance elsewhere to lead to fear or suspicion between us. We all oppose discrimination and violence, based upon spurious religious or political grounds or inflammatory media reporting. We pledge ourselves to remind our co-religionists of the sufferings experienced by all communities, not just our own, and to oppose extremists of all kinds including those within our own community. (Cited in Wingate 2005: 146)

This statement emanated, appropriately, from the Family of Abraham Group, a dialogical endeavour of encounter between Jews, Christians and Muslims. One might add that the question "Do you know what causes me pain?" emerged as a paramount indicator of whether or not the religious other is really valued as a friend.

My point in mentioning all of this is twofold: first, there emerged a symbiotic relation between the principle of solidarity/mutuality and the growth in trust between communities, and, second, it became possible to separate the local and the global even as they remain so intertwined. Leicester citizens *are part of* international politics, but they *are not responsible* for everything that happens.

In relation to the particular features of Christian-Muslim relations, it is easy to get side-tracked into historical dilemmas and falsely view the present through the prism of the past—the invasion of Iraq in 2003 being a case in point when it was seen as an echo or even repeat of the medieval Crusader mentality. On the other hand, a multilateral outlook allows the present bigger picture of interfaith relations to frame the approach.

Nevertheless, it would be naïve to assume that the process of building trust has been politically neutral. Again, in terms of Christian-Muslim relations, not only Muslims but churches have officially been against the invasion of Iraq, and undoubtedly this helped to shape relationships of trust. If the churches had not spoken out against the invasion of Iraq it is not unreasonable to suppose that relationships would have reconfigured dramatically. It is of course impossible to answer this. No doubt the principle of "the good of the city" could still be accepted as a valid rallying point, but relationships between Muslims and oth-

ers might have possibly become more fragile. However, this must remain speculative.

In the aftermath of 9/11 Muslims felt themselves supported by a multilateral approach from faith-leaders and others. But of course solidarity cannot be offered in a wholly uncritical manner. In some areas of the city, in the early days after 9/11, there were Muslims who were pleased at what had happened: a blow had been struck at the might of US world hegemony. So a fissure opened up: Was there a balance to be struck between support for the mainstream Muslim world and condemnation for those who sponsor or perpetrate violence conveniently labelled as terrorist or extremist? The distinction between "moderate" and "extremist" is of course a convenient strategy for government rhetoric.

The balancing was tested further with 7/7, the bombings in London on 7 July 2005. Now the UK was victim of its own home-grown acts of terror. The country was compelled to ask about what had been going on under our noses. Then, in Leicester, a remarkable thing happened: the church representatives responsible for interfaith relations were approached by Muslim friends for help with the issue of how to help alienated (mainly) young men join the mainstream Muslim community. In the light of 7/7, Muslims were being pushed further into a corner by the government, the media and the public, but it was the history of trust in Leicester that provided the access needed for making the approach that was made. It led to frank discussion of the issues—issues of vulnerability and feelings of helplessness in the face of the felt enormity of the problem.

Summarising this whole section, let me list briefly four factors in the *visibility of basic trust* that emerged in Leicester.

i) Taking a common stand—for example, a joint gathering of shared prayer outside of the town hall in solidarity on the eve of the invasion of Iraq and in the anticipation of a backlash against ordinary Muslims. It was a gathering to pray for peace and not to demonstrate against war, though it may have involved elements of the latter in the minds of some participants. Inevitably, there is the risk of not being able to control all of the public perceptions. Some see a demonstration; some see prayer; some make a connection between the two.

ii) Raising funds jointly—for example, funds raised in mosques and churches were dedicated to Christian and Muslim charities, i.e., a Christian hospital in Gaza and a Muslim project in Bosnia, or Christian and Muslim projects in Africa and India.

iii) Sharing food—for example, following Ramadan and Easter, each community inviting the other to a celebration meal.

iv) Sharing fun—for example, a football match between the diocesan clergy and imams of the city captured the imagination of the media and even of the city's MPs. So an Early Day Motion in the House of Commons on 26 January 2006 attracted 32 signatories and commended both the efforts of the two teams and the progress made in Christian-Muslim relations in Leicester (see Parliament 2006).

It might seem anodyne to have emphasised basic trust so much, but in reality it underlies everything else, and it is costly work requiring endless patience and real listening.

Community Cohesion

This has become a central driving force from the government point of view. In 2002, the Local Government Association produced a report which stated that faith communities are vital for

> good health, as providers of pastoral care, promoters of citizenship and community development, voices for social justice, and as a locus for gatherings of people in varying economic and social positions, of differing political views from a range of ethnic backgrounds with shared concerns. (Wingate 2005: 143)

In recognition of this social capital, the government made sums of money available for the pursuit of interfaith activities which it deemed would improve community cohesion. In Leicester, for a number of years and beginning prior to 9/11, the city council financially supported the employment of an administrator with the Council of Faiths. This is evidence of an enlightened city approach long before the emphasis on community cohesion had developed. It is also recognition that "race relations" was not sufficient as a framework for understanding the new multifaith situation that now prevails.

Unfortunately, in the current economic climate this funding has now been withdrawn both to the Council of Faiths but also to The Race Equality Centre (TREC). The city mayor has started up another group in which he meets with "community leaders," but these have turned out essentially to be faith leaders. The Council of Faiths continues, but without funding from the city council.

Nevertheless, it is worth pointing out some of the significant achievements that have been made on a multifaith basis in relation to community cohesion. In a report entitled *Embracing the Present, Planning the Future* (2004), researched by Riaz Ravat and produced and published by the Faiths Regeneration Project closely allied to the Council of Faiths and the Anglican Diocese of Leicester, the following profile on social action by the faith communities of Leicester was documented:

- 240 faith groups across 14 faiths operate in Leicester
- 443 social projects function, including support for people with HIV and AIDS, assistance for asylum seekers and refugees, football

coaching and childcare provisions.
- Faith groups service all parts of the city, with at least two faith organisations in every city ward.
- Over half of all faith groups are engaged in social action (52%).

Volunteering within the faith communities is extensive. 83% of projects were aided by volunteers, which amounted to an in-kind contribution of nearly £5 million per year. Further, faith groups operated in some of the most disadvantaged areas of the city.

The report concluded that faith groups are trusted organizations rooted in local areas, able to cater for hard-to-reach citizens by offering faith and culturally sensitive environments for their spiritual and social needs. The follow-up phase of this work was planned so as to increase working with various statutory and voluntary bodies/agencies in order to provide better services on many local community and institutional (e.g., prison, hospital) levels.

The general point here is that the potential for faith involvement in working for community cohesion is substantial across all sectors of the social world. Yet, in my view, this was not fully reflected in the debates centred on the role of religious institutions in relation to community cohesion. The official Home Office report, entitled *Community Cohesion* (Home Office 2004), from the Independent Review Team chaired by Ted Cantle following the riots in 2001, had little of significance to say about religion. It mentioned segregation but only in relation to faith-foundation schools. The report's main focus was on political and economic access to power and resources.

At the launch on 27 March 2006 of the newly formed Institute of Social Cohesion, a collaborative project between four universities (Leicester, De Montfort, Warwick. and Coventry) analysis tilted in the direction of wanting "to provide a new approach to race, diversity and multiculturalism."[4] Ted Cantle gave the opening lecture at the launch and advocated the view that multiculturalism was now a more complex matter than so-called "racial integration" *per se* and which a previous generation had imagined. There needed to be a balance, he asserted, between the categories that specify the commonalities of belonging in society and the private arenas supporting diversity. Is the debate about ethnic or religious identities, or is it really about power and resources? Cantle chose the latter. In other words, in basic sociological secular mode, politics and economics were the areas which appropriately articulate our common belonging while diversity remains a function of other more optional

[4] The Institute, based in Coventry University, has since been folded into a new Centre for Social Relations.

spheres, such as race, culture, or religion (for Cantle's general approach, see Cantle 2008). But this will not satisfy all religiously-motivated people.

What still seems absent from "official" debate is a robust acknowledgement of the importance of religious affiliation in public and social life. Yet for the religiously-motivated to contribute satisfactorily to public debate surely they will need to develop better models for living pluralistically as co-religionists than has been possible so far. Perhaps this is the agenda for the next stage of engagement with community cohesion.

One watershed moment of testing for the city of Leicester in relation to issues of community cohesion and the challenges of interfaith relations came in 2010. The right-wing extremist group, the English Defence League (EDL), announced its intention to stage a protest march through the city centre on 10 October. Although its public purpose is the denunciation of "Islamic extremism," it is commonly accepted that the object of EDL's agitating is Islam in general and the presence of Muslims in Britain. EDL had a not insignificant following in Britain and has learned the techniques of social networking for mobilising their supporters on to the streets. The police applied successfully to the home office to ban a march through the city but allow a stationary demonstration on the edge of the city in an area known as Humberstone Gate East. About 2,000 police officers were deployed, 17 arrests were made and 1 policeman suffered a broken leg in the confrontations which took place. An opposition gathering by United Against Fascism was also organised (BBC 2010).

In the event, the general verdict was that less violence had been perpetrated than had been anticipated. This was largely due to the strong police presence and the containment tactics they employed. But there was also a significant coming together of various faith groups in the city, organised chiefly through the Leicester Council of Faiths, the St. Philip's Centre for Study and Engagement, and the Federation of Muslim Organisations. Communication networks of support were put in place, messages of solidarity against a common enemy were sent out, and the city's Cathedral opened its doors and created a multi-faith vigil the evening before, with participation from members of different faith communities and attendance from across all sectors of the city's life. Muslims, Hindus, Humanists, Christians, Sikhs and others joined forces and lit candles for peace in the city. Without the history of trust-building over more than twenty years, there is reason to think that this would not necessarily have happened, at least not so readily and with so much ease of conviction as was evident.

The day following the riot-that-wasn't was also significant. The city council arranged for a day of celebration and partying in Humberstone Gate East. A staging was erected for a festival of multiculturalist spirit—with dancing, music, and drama from different cultural and religious groupings. The city council

arranged for a Community Cohesion Charter to be made available for signing. Celebrities and local politicians made speeches extolling the virtues of diversity and the value of different cultures living harmoniously in one city and being able to withstand the threat of the enemy without. The city's slogan "One Leicester" was much vaunted and held high as an aspiration which had now demonstrated a degree of robustness in the face of threat. At the close of the partying the streets were hosed down with water and the city centre "cleansed," enacting a baptism-like quasi-religious symbolism which was not lost on some.

Vigil-Solidarity-Celebration: these are three moments representing a further milestone in the testing of a city's commitment to cultural diversity, community cohesion, and interfaith engagement. Moreover, in the analyses which followed, where "culture" ended and "religion" began was impossible to measure, but neither did it seem to matter.

Clearly, standing in solidarity against a visibly perceived enemy is in some respects an easier challenge to rise to than the hard work of building bonds of trust in the ordinary circumstances of daily living. But neither should the achievement be underestimated. Deeper analysis might draw out the observation that mingled with EDL's racism and Islamophobia are other grievances, such as unemployment, immigration, social alienation, feelings of powerlessness and marginalisation among many who inhabit so-called outer city "white" estates. In some respects, the scapegoated anger directed at Islam and Muslims is the tip of a many-layered iceberg of grievances which are also shared by more than those who turned out to agitate. These are likely to be the greater challenges facing the work of a city's faith communities in their shared endeavour to contribute to community cohesion.[5]

[5] In the context of community cohesion, a further example of scapegoating worth noting was the local dispute, at times nasty, in 2012 on the council estate of Thurnby Lodge on the edges of the city. A small Muslim group made application to acquire a community centre (formerly used as a scout hut) for their prayers, but a protest group took root and events were drawn out for a whole year. Islamophobia played its part, as on Boxing Day a pig's head was left outside of the centre. National far right groups became involved and added a conflictual presence. The resolution involved the Muslim community, as-Salaam, acquiring their own "Peace Centre" and the protesters taking over the old hitherto under-used scout hut. Christian leaders led efforts to support the Muslim community in establishing a mosque and promoting community cohesive relations. But the patience and generosity of the Muslim group played a major role in helping to bring about co-existence.

Dialogical and Educational Encounters

This phase in the life of multifaith Leicester increased exponentially during the late 1990s and during the first decade of the new century. Perhaps this was inevitable. For since the early 1970s the priority for most immigrant communities was the establishment of access to cultural services and to local power structures in civic life and once that was achieved it became possible to turn to other matters, such as the self-conscious interest in what faith communities might learn from one another. This has been enhanced in Leicester not only by a number of well-known figures in the interfaith field but also, in relation to Islam, by the presence of the conference and research-based Islamic Foundation at Markfield near to the city.

Dialogue Groups

Leicester spawned a number of dialogue groups and training opportunities and this was a sign of maturity. Let me list briefly a number of examples.[6]

a) The Muslim-Christian Dialogue Group

This met on a regular basis since December 2000 and was based at St. Philip's Church, a very multifaith parish area on the edge of the city centre. Besides theology and scripture, a range of subjects were addressed, such as racism, education, international tensions and their effect upon Leicester, asylum questions, mission and conversion, law and *sharia* questions, Islamophobia, science and religion debates, the place of Mary, Jesus, and Muhammad in the respective faith communities. The meetings exhibited a seriousness that did not shy away from issues of religious truth.

b) The Muslim-Christian Women's Group

This group, again, met at St. Philip's Church regularly until 2008. The atmosphere was one of friendship and shared spirituality, with prayers and readings included as a routine within meetings. The methodology was centred on life events and daily concerns. Personal stories and family events were shared, and barriers broken down, as well as serious engagement taking place around contentious issues. Support was given to asylum seeker work as well as the common work with the other Christian-Muslim Group. One highlight was when members of the group made a powerful presentation at the 2004 Parliament of the World's Religions in Barcelona and also made representation with the other group in Brussels and Paris, at Soul of Europe conferences and at Muslim-Christian Awareness Week gatherings where Leicester has been almost

[6] The St. Philip's Centre for Study and Engagement lists only two dialogue groups: Christian-Muslim and Christian-Hindu. My comments here relate to a more historic period when a number of groups were beginning. A Christian-Hindu group was tried from time to time, but for reasons not known was not able to be sustained, though the hopes are rising again through St. Philip's Centre (St Philip's Centre 2013).

the only UK participant selected to share their work. In more recent times, the "Women's Group"—since folded into the "Muslim Christian Women's Network"—in partnership with the Christian Muslim Forum, has launched an inspirational directory of groups and activities in Leicester and Leicestershire entitled *Women of Faith Leicestershire Directory 2013*.[7]

c) The Family of Abraham Group (Jews, Christians, Muslims)

This was always a small but important group in Leicester, for although the three traditions hold a basic monotheism in common they have so often found themselves at odds with one another. But concentration has been on building up a growing understanding of the commonalities and differences between the faiths in their theologies and practices. Part of the methodology has been to meet alternatively in a synagogue, church, or mosque, which in itself has been its own learning experience.

St. Philip's Centre for Study and Engagement

In 2005, a new institution emerged in Leicester: the St. Philip's Centre for Study and Engagement in a Multi Faith Society. A research study, initiated by the Inter Faith Consultative Group of the Church of England, into the issues of Christian presence in areas of the country which had become demographically dominated by communities of Muslims, Hindus, or Sikhs, revealed that the church as a whole needed to reflect more deeply on questions of Christian identity, mission, and theology in a multifaith society (CoE n.d.). Analysis of the 2001 Census revealed the emergence of 550 Anglican parishes with more than 25% citizens belonging to other faith communities or 10% to any one faith other than Christianity, 950 parishes which had 10% of other faiths, and some parishes with as much as 80% of other faiths.

The report recommended that at least two centres for study and engagement be set up and one of these was to be in Leicester. St. Philip's Centre (closely allied with St. Philip's Church) was opened in 2006 in an area of the city which has a dominant Muslim population. It is an education and training as well as community-building resource with an ecumenical board of trustees, which initially included the Diocese of Leicester, Roman Catholic, Baptist, Methodist and United Reformed Churches. The Patron is the Archbishop of Canterbury and HRH Prince Charles strongly commended the Centre during his visit in 2009. In the initial phases of its life, the Centre established links with the Henry Martyn Institute in Hyderabad, South India, a Christian mission, dialogue and social justice centre for relations mainly with Muslims. These developments again reflect the symbiosis between the local and the global in interfaith relations.

[7] See http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3RccMI5zP0k. See also the Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/groups/339404379481976.

The Centre's primary purposes remains twofold: to equip churches for appropriate ministry, service, and witness in a multifaith context and to play a part in promoting a more cohesive and safer city, country, and world by enhancing work for co-operation between people of all religious traditions. A sample of its work has included:

1. running training courses for a range of groups, lay and clergy, secular and multifaith, to learn about the importance of religious commitment in society and about what is offered specifically by each faith community;
2. providing opportunities to learn, reflect, and engage in dialogue;
3. offering a consultancy and educational resource to churches, locally, regionally, nationally and internationally;
4. providing a focus for study and research. (For the first two years, educational courses working towards postgraduate awards at certificate, diploma and master's levels in interreligious relations were validated through Birmingham University; since 2009 this has been established through De Montfort University in Leicester itself).

In my view, these developments in response to interfaith diversity have been among some of the most exciting within the Church of England during this whole period, and interest in the work of the St. Philip's Centre has been considerable. Courses were devised for local people, for theological students from the regional theological training centres, for medical students attending Leicester University, and use was made of it by groups mainly from northern Europe, especially partnering with the Church of Sweden, which is also puzzling over how best to approach its own multifaith realities in a changing landscape.

A major part of the Centre's work has been in Christian-Muslim relations. This was partly the result of geography—the local Masjid Umar is adjacent to St. Philip's Church and Centre. But the Centre also signed a Memorandum of Agreement with the Markfield Islamic Foundation, and this cemented their working relationship (Markfield). At Markfield courses were established to train clergy and imams jointly in pastoral care issues, such as chaplaincy to hospitals and prisons. Such joint training is itself a remarkable development, and it springs from the trust won over the years.

The work of the St. Philip's Centre was extended further in recent years, and it became one of four locations involved with the launch of the national Near Neighbours project. Government funded, this project aims to increase local engagement among faith communities. Designed to assist and stimulate the coming together of people in neighbourhoods, the fund is founded on the principle that communities build trust and partnerships from within their own localities and according to limited visions and needs in particular places rather than as a result of top-down social engineering from government. The model being pur-

sued is a variation on community development. In terms of the debates concerning the concept of "social capital"—interactions between people which promote "bonding," "bridging," and/or "linking"—the Near Neighbours project is most obviously closest to "bridging": hoping to stimulate relationships of trust across wide differences of culture, religion and identity, a process described by the sociologist Robert Putnam as "sociological WD-40" (Putnam 2000: 23). From such relationships the further hope is that civil society gains in quality of participation.

If part of the conceptual background to Near Neighbours has been "social capital" theory then it remains an open question whether or not a community development or social capital model is sufficient for bringing about a multifaith society at ease with itself. For the underlying issue of precisely how religious communities, each with their comprehensive worldviews, might make their ongoing contributions to developing a democracy, which has a habit of forcefully challenging some of the taken-for-granted assumptions of those worldviews inherited from former historical eras, remains highly contested if not essentially an unknown.

Concluding Remarks

In Leicester's multifaith city, interfaith relations have been built on the following common ground: respect for spiritual vision, ethical priorities in the struggle for social justice in the city, confronting racism, and venting opposition to perceived unnecessary military adventures in countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan. Differences of belief and cultural norms between the faith communities are seldom faced head-on, except perhaps in limited controlled circumstances or educational settings. Communities have been content thus far, on the whole, to live side by side and, to a very limited degree, to learn from one another.

What I have described, and to a degree analysed, are the dynamics of adaptation to new realities, both for a city as a whole and for faith communities in large measure shaped by their own historical cultures and linguistic limitations. The picture will inevitably be different in other cities and locations. Moreover, other significant issues arise to sit alongside earlier anxieties—for example, national concern over immigration, tougher laws relating to extremist tendencies, refugee and asylum issues. How a city responds to these developments will in part depend on earlier building blocks that are in place. But what this analysis demonstrates is that nothing can be achieved by ignoring the faith identity of the city's citizens, and this is something which challenges both the secular authorities and the faith communities themselves.

What the future holds for a multifaith city like Leicester is impossible to predict. Rallying around common fears is insufficient for a sustainable future.

Something more positive will be required. Perhaps a greater self-conscious exploration of common values would be a better harbinger of the next steps. But, in order for that to happen, the faith-communities will need to face their inherited historical suspicions of one another and engage in much deeper dialogue about different religious worldviews than has so far been the case.[8]

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