



The Rt Hon Baroness Scotland QC

21 November 2012

'Faith as an arbiter of peace'

Transcript of The Rt Hon Baroness Scotland QC's lecture

It was a great privilege for me to be asked to make a contribution to this series of lectures. Not least because there are those of faith and those of none who are going to speak at these lectures for us to debate and discuss what role faith has, if any, in the way in which we run our society. And it was good to be able to add my voice to the so many that you will hear.

Now in the United Kingdom we have really prided ourselves on being a multi-racial, multi-cultural, multi-religious country which has for centuries enjoyed peace within our borders with very little interruption. Ours has, in the main, been a history of tolerance and restraint. And the valiant struggles that have peppered our history have, in the main, been won by the moderate and temperate, as opposed to the violent and intemperate. But the gains have really been hard fought and hard won.

After the Second World War, the British, from the four corners of the Commonwealth, came home, and the impact on the culture, diversity, and complexity of the migration has been very significant. My family was one of those migrant families. My mother and father came to London with 10 children, and I was the youngest of the 10. My parents always told me I was their tenth only child, because they always said that they only had one of each of us. Now, migration from British people from all over the world coming home has added to the richness the wealth and well-being of our country. But it has also brought its challenges, a need for greater understanding, and an appreciation of difference not only in culture but also in religion, too. Theoretical understanding of the 'other' no longer suffices when the 'other' is your neighbour, goes to school with your children, to work with your wife, plays competitive sport with your son, challenges your space in the work place, does or does not kneel beside you in your place of worship and forms part of the bodies, institutions and the very government that determines the rules by which you live your life. Understanding the 'other' takes on a dimension in the United Kingdom of today which was not dreamt of in the United Kingdom of yesteryear, where understanding and tolerance could be navigated at a distance, and the chance of your children living with, marrying, and sharing their lives with the 'others' was a remote and dismissible possibility.

Faith in the current context, where it is upfront and personal (as my children would tell me), is a very different creature. It's a journey which we in the United Kingdom have travelled for the whole of the Queen's reign. Her love of the Commonwealth and her understanding and love of their people have formed part of the patina which has shaped the backdrop of the struggle for peace between the races, religions and regions of this country for the last 60 years. Faith is



sometimes said to represent hope over experience. It is what is necessary to be able to keep on believing that peace within the classes, religious and non-religious, and peoples of different regions is possible. It is faith which has caused the leaders of the great faiths of our country to bind together, to meet, to talk, to listen and to try to better understand each other, each strong in their own belief, but each hungry to find a channel through which their belief in God can flow. For those of faith, it is the belief in which they have in the “eternal other” which binds them to seek to better understand. And the extreme edges of most religions are really similar, where anger, violence, intolerance and belief in superiority usually lies. But the centre of all of the great faiths are similar, too: the thirst for peace, the hunger for justice, parity of treatment, kindness, humility, selfless acts of charity, compassion, and love. In all the great faiths, you’ll find that right at their very heart. Like our human DNA, more than 98% of the great faiths’ message is the same, providing comfort and succour for those in pain and in need of solace, and a recipe for a life well lived. The tragedy of our history is that the norm is to concentrate on the 2% which separates us, as opposed to the 98% which joins us one to the other. The 2% is always of great importance: it is that which distinguishes us one from the other, making us male or female, black or white, strawberry blonde or brunette, Protestant, Catholic, Muslim, Hindu, Sikh. The 98% is that which makes us human, each in the eyes of God, in whom the majority of the world believe, in one form or another, his child.

In 1953 a young Muslim gave Michael Henderson, a prolific writer on issues of peace, a book, *The Sayings of Mohammed*, which said, “I am a believer.” Actually, the foreword was written by Mahatma Gandhi in 1938, and this is what it said,

I am a believer in the truth of all the great religions of the world. There will be no lasting peace on earth unless we learn, not merely to tolerate, but even to respect other Faiths as our own. A reverent study of the sayings of the different teachers of mankind is a step in the right direction of such mutual respect.

Ghandi also said, “We have to be the change we wish to see in the world,” and I agree. That change should start with understanding the basis of all the great faiths and studying them and what joins us. So, I am a Catholic, but I’ll tell you a little more about my background because I’m not really. Jesus was asked by someone in my profession, the law, “What is the greatest commandment of the law?” and Jesus said to him

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it, You shall love your neighbour as you love yourself, on these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

The two commandments Jesus gives were of course not new. He deliberately quoted the central tenets of another religion, namely Judaism. You can find the first commandment in the Book of Deuteronomy and the second in the Book of Leviticus. Further, much of the same spirituality of compassion can be found in the words of the Buddha and in the Sikh and Hindu faiths. It's also in the Holy Koran which states, "If anyone saves a person it will be as if he has saved the whole of humanity." And the Holy Koran also states, "We have made you into nations and tribes so that you may know each other", the same sentiment found in each of the great faiths.

Now I have to confess that that is a tenet upon which I was brought up. As you know I am the tenth of my parent's 12 only children and a product of a mixed marriage. My mother was a devout Dominican Roman Catholic who said the Angelus four times a day, and my father was a devout Antiguan Methodist who read the Bible every day, or rather always seemed to because I swear he knew every passage in the Bible by heart. They married in Dominica in 1937 by Papal dispensation, and I'm told that they were the first couple of mixed faith who were allowed to be married by way of a full nuptial mass in the Catholic Cathedral. I think that their Ecumenical union was seen at the time as quite extraordinary because neither was prepared to give up their strongly held belief in their own faith. So had my father not died in January 2007, they would have been married for 70 years, and neither ever converted to the other's faith, although their appreciation and love for the faith enjoyed and believed in most sincerely by each grew stronger with every year of their marriage. I can still see my father now, looking at my mother, and my father would listen with pleasure as my mother said the Angelus and tell her when her Mass was on the television (and in the Caribbean, trust me, it can be on the television 24/7). My mother would welcome the Methodist Minister into our home when he came to visit my father when he was too infirm to leave the house. Their love for each other and their love and appreciation for difference was one of the exemplars that I will remember always, as I will also remember my father looking at my mother, she being 88 and he being 7 years older, and telling me that he still thought that she was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen in his life. Now that is what I would like to achieve.

So, whilst I was growing up in Walthamstow we lived next door, I mean right next door, to an orthodox Synagogue. On the corner adjacent to my house was a shop run by the Patels whose kindness and consideration made everyone welcome. I spent so much time in the Synagogue whilst I was growing up that I became known, with the rest of my family, as the only black Jews in Walthamstow. Now we were allowed to join the Jewish youth club, and we'd switch on the lights on Shabbat in the winter and help to make the Sabbath more comfortable if the need arose. And always my parents would say,

Look for what joins you. Every person on this earth is God's child and you should look

for him in the faces you see. Know that what you say and do to others you are saying and doing to him. You are not responsible for what others say and do, but you are responsible for your reaction to them. That is within your control. God has given us each a talent, and it is our job to find that talent, hone it and use it for the benefit of others and through his grace all things are possible.

Those are the tenets that I grew up with and so did all my brothers and sisters, seven boys and five girls. It's an approach that has stayed with me throughout my whole life. I am a woman of faith, and I am not ashamed to confess that all I have achieved in my life has been by God's grace. Every good thing that has been done by me has been at God's inspiration, and where I have failed, it has been my own error. I am often asked,

How is it possible, that you, a child from a tiny island in the Caribbean with little more than 60,000 people, born into a large family of 12 children, the daughter of a carpenter, brought up in Walthamstow in the east end of London, educated in a comprehensive school, neither Oxbridge-educated nor affluent could end up as the first woman to be appointed Her Majesty's Attorney General in the 700 year history of that office?

The answer is simple, isn't it? It just has to be by God's grace because it couldn't have been anything else. So my parents believed that every person is the arbiter of his own good fortune, and, if you worked hard and put yourself at God's service, all things were possible according to God's will. The essence was being ready to serve and use whatever gifts God gave you to help his people, who were not just the people you knew or the people who were like you, or of your kind, or you were friendly with. God's people included all those who weren't: those you had never met but may be affected by the choices you made, what you did and what you failed to do. Each of us was a channel of God's peace. We were God's hands to do his work, his feet to walk beside others, His mouth to speak the words which would bring balm and succour to those in despair, his ears to listen and to learn, his heart to love and to share and to show compassion. We, all of us, are and would always be his body, if we choose. I am truly my parent's daughter, and it is and has always been what I have chosen too.

I have been called courageous, bold, and brave, usually by civil servants in an attempt to save me from myself, when they're trying to tell me that what I want to do is impossible, bordering on the vaguely insane. But I don't believe them. I have tried to be faithful, and I believe by doing that it has been possible to bring about change. By having faith, change was possible, for human beings are capable of great kindness and great generosity of spirit, and together, through joint endeavour and by God's grace all things are possible. So it's been possible for me to believe in the impossible and for others to think I'm mad for believing it. It is by and through faith and working with others of faith and those of none that we, whilst the Labour party was in govern-

ment working with others in the third sector, business, local government, and compassionate individuals, we together, reduced domestic violence in our country between 2003 and 2010 by 64% and reduced the economic cost of domestic violence to our country by more than £7 billion per annum. In 2003 when I started, I was told that that was not possible. One in four women in our country would suffer from domestic violence at some stage in their lives. In 2003, 120 women died that year which was two or three women a week and 20 men. It affects between 750,000 – 950,000 children. If I give you an example, in London, in 2003/2004 49 women died. I was then Criminal Justice Minister, so I know that each death cost the State from investigation to completion about £1.1 million. Of those women, two thirds of them had two or three children. So the cost to our economy that was estimated in 2003/4, was £23 billion: £3.1 billion was public sector, £2.7 billion was loss of profitability to business, and £17 billion was pain, injury, loss and suffering. I was told that there was no way we would get agencies across government to work together, that we would never get the third sector to work together with the local authority and individuals. It couldn't be done, I was told. I believed by God's grace it could, and that determination was such that I didn't give up. Together, with much work done by so many other people in governments and fantastic other ministers in government, we worked very hard together with the third sector and together we changed things. We brought in multi-agency risk assessments, we looked at what the victim needed, and we saved lives.

By the time I left government in 2010, things had changed. Now, the Assistant Commissioner of Metropolitan Police knew me very well. Whenever I rang him, he'd say things like, "I haven't got your numbers yet" because he always knew I was asking how many people had died. I was also asked at one stage, "Minister, when will it ever be enough for you?" and I said, "When the figure is nought because until the figure is nought, we, my friend, have work to do." And it wasn't nought, but when I bumped into the poor person who normally gave me the figures at a dinner or lunch he promised me, (I don't know if he was really pleased to see me). I said, "So, what are my figures?" and he told me that in London, in 2010 five women had died. Now, me being the totally unreasonable woman I am, I would say, "Five is too many, but not bad." At the end of that time, leaving government, I have been very concerned that the figures are going back up, and there is a very real need from us to make sure the paradigm in which so many of the victims and their children have lived, does not go back up, does not change. For that reason, I created the Corporate Alliance Against Domestic Violence and then the Global Foundation To Eliminate Domestic Violence, which together with Peace One Day has formed The Global Truth 2012 To Reduce Domestic Violence. Through our partnership, we were only created a year ago, and once again I was told I was crazy because they said, "But Patricia you have no money." To which I said, "And your point is?" because everyone who has helped me to create The Global Foundation and to create The Corporate Alliance has done it *pro bono*. They have not charged our charity one penny, and together we're making a difference because through our partnership with Peace One Day which was created last December, we have been able to reach over 280 million people this year, and by 2016 it should rise to over 3 billion people. If only 1% of this number are truly accepting of the message, just think of the difference that we will make in our world. We shared our methodology with Spain in 2006, and my colleagues in Spain tell

me that in 4 years they have reduced familial homicide in Spain by 25%. Just imagine what our world would look like if we could share this with every country. We believe that we would increase our GDP across Europe by 21% if we could do that. And boy do we need that increase. So domestic violence still affects people, still makes a terrible difference. The life chances of children are seriously affected by witnessing or experiencing such violence. They will often fail to thrive, fail to meet their developmental and educational milestones and suffer long term and lasting damage. Such children are over represented in the criminal justice figures. Higher percentages are found to suffer from mental illness, drug addiction and over representation in the criminal population. So bringing peace to the home is a major challenge, and it is a problem for all faiths and those of none, but is something that each and every one of us can, if we choose, do something about. I hope that what will happen today is that we will decide to do something about it.

But it's not the only area that we have seen people of faith binding together to bring peace. We saw it on the 7th of July when bombs struck London with such viciousness. The 6th July had been a fantastic day of great joy and achievement for the United Kingdom. We had brought the Olympics home to London, beaten off the competition by the French and other such delightful people. How did we do it? We were displaying the fruits of our multi-lingual, multi-cultural, multi-faith population. We displayed to the world and made plain that if the games came to London, the peoples of the world would be coming home because every race and every creed could be found in the faces of the New Britain. They would find their food, their language, their humour and their faith; a *mélange* which would delight and entice, welcome and thrill. People of all nations living together, in peace, in our country and we would put on an Olympics similar to that which the world had never seen. Rejoicing in our diversity, we would inspire a generation. That was how everyone felt on 6th July and then came the 7th. We'll remember that that peace was utterly shattered on the 7th, and I'm sure that the men of violence believed that with their bombs they would shatter our faith in each other, divide and separate us from our faith. The bombs were planted in areas where diversity thrived, and where many Muslims were affected and died with Londoners and people of other faiths. The bombers doubtlessly hoped our joy in the Olympics would be diminished, if not extinguished, replaced with fear and dissent, and our harmonious co-existence between the faiths would be fractured. One of the magnificent testaments to the journey by faith to peace, which many in our country have been on, was provided in the response of the faith leaders and our religious communities to that atrocity. With what appeared to be one voice they said, "We will not be divided. We will stand together for peace, cemented in our determination that terrorists and the harbingers of hate will not succeed."

So from the terrible act there came hope. Perversely, there was reason to feel pride as London struggled back to her feet within 24 hours. Londoners got back on with their lives with the determination not to be cowed and to stick it out, together. Our newspapers were filled with almost shocked surprise that the union between faiths steeped in hard work and hard won understanding had actually born fruit, and the fruit was peace. The Archbishop of Canterbury



expressed the feelings of everyone when he spoke of his horror and grief following the explosions in London and speaking whilst on an interfaith visit to West Yorkshire said,

The appalling events in London this morning have shocked us all, so I want first and foremost to extend my personal sympathy and condolences to everyone who is suffering and grieving at this time. All those caught up in this tragedy, and that includes of course the emergency services whose selfless dedication and commitment is so vital at times like this, all are in my own prayers and in the prayers of a great many people. As it happens I have spent this morning with Muslim colleagues and friends in West Yorkshire, and we were all as one in our condemnation of this evil and in our shared sense of care and compassion for those affected in whatever way. Such solidarity and common purpose is vital for us all at this time of pain and sorrow and anger. We in the faith communities will have to continue to stand and work together for the well-being of our nation and the shared understanding of the life that God calls us to. I hope that we shall all keep that vision alive at this deeply sad and testing time.

And they did.

When the Olympics finally came, as we all remember, they came in triumph, the triumph that everyone had hoped for. Not just because we won so many glorious medals, though that helped, but because the United Kingdom was displayed in all her glory: multi-cultural, multi-lingual, multi-faith, happy, helpful, at peace. We did inspire a generation, and I think we did it by faith, faith in what's best in this country, faith in each other, those of faith and those of none.

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