

Interfaith

In recent years, in the UK, I have noticed a growing warmth in relations between, for example, Christians, Muslims and Jews. This has often taken the form of practical action to relieve the discomforts that others are facing. I'm thinking of the kind generosity of Muslim brothers who, in late 2016, made their way from the Midlands to help folk in the north whose lives and communities were turned upside-down by calamitous floods. More recently there have been numerous other examples of faith groups working together to offer food to the hungry. Most recently we have seen generosity, kindness and grace among communities traumatised by terrorist atrocities in London, Manchester and elsewhere. The Grenfell Tower fire, tragic though it undoubtedly was, has given rise to new dimensions of inter-faith co-operation and sharing and growth in mutual understanding.

In the course of this I have been greatly encouraged to see two particular developments. First, the various faith communities have been willing to open the doors of their various places of worship to members of other faith groups and to engage in conversation about what(for them) it means to be a believer. And second, in occasional confrontations with far-right groups displeased with such co-operative work, there has been a flowering of grace and courtesy in response. All this prompts expressions of thankfulness to God.

There seems to be, here, an opportunity for some kind of breakthrough in the way faith communities relate to one another. What is the link between 'spirituality' and 'religious belief and practice'? If we believe that spirituality makes no sense if it is detached from its roots in real community, in belief, observances and practice, how are we to identify the goal of spirituality as something we hold in common across traditions? And how do we counter the suggestion that the things we hold as non-negotiable in our own particular religious tradition are obstructing the search for a common language for a common humanity? How can we work for a world of faiths which genuinely expresses mutual respect for difference without compromising our own integrity of belief and practice. These are questions I believe we must keep on asking.