

Al Azhar Cairo 2008

The Joint Committee, which is composed of a delegation from the Anglican Communion and from Al Azhar Al Sharif held its seventh annual meeting in Cairo on 18-19 November 2008 corresponding to 20-21 Dhu Al-Qa'da 1429. This was held in accord with the agreement signed at Lambeth Palace on 30 January 2002 by the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Grand Imam of Al Azhar.

The Joint Committee heard and discussed the following papers:

1. Citizenship in Islam (Dr Muhammad El Shahat El Gindi)
2. Islam and Citizenship (Sheikh Ali Abdel Baki)
3. The Role of Religious Leaders in Promoting the Rights of Citizenship (Most Revd Mouneer H Anis)
4. ' "A Common Word" and "A Common Word for the Common Good" ' (Rt Revd Michael Nazir-Ali)
5. The Anglican Communion – Al Azhar Dialogue: past, present and future (Mrs Clare Amos)

As part of the Joint Committee's review of its work over the past six years since the dialogue agreement was signed, it wishes to restate the goals expressed in the original agreement. These goals are:

1. To encourage Anglicans to understand Islam and to encourage Muslims to understand the Christian faith.
2. To share together in solving problems and conflicts that happen sometimes between Muslims and Christians in different parts of the world, and to encourage religious leaders to use their influence for the purpose of reconciliation and peace making.
3. To work together against injustice and the abuse of human rights among different nationalities and to spread the good teaching of both Islam and Christianity.
4. To encourage institutions on both sides to play a positive role in development.

There was particular focus this year on the issue of 'citizenship'. We discussed both the rights and duties of citizens. Underlying our assumptions about citizenship, justice and human rights is our belief in the love of Almighty God for us and our love for God. Both Muslims and Christians believe that God created human beings and has distinguished them from all creatures.

The paper 'Citizenship in Islam' made clear that in countries with a majority Muslim population both Muslims and non-Muslims should equally enjoy both the privileges and duties that accompany the status of citizenship. We heard about the important role that religious leaders have in ensuring that the rights of citizens are properly observed. We acknowledged the need for members of different religious communities to cooperate with each other to consolidate the principle of equality in citizenship and the respect for human rights.

We recognise the importance of ensuring that children in our schools are properly equipped with the tools to enable them to play a part as full and constructive citizens in their societies. With this in mind we recommend the availability of books and suitable religious educational resources that affirm the concept of citizenship and mutual respect. We also recommend that Muslim and Christian school children should make visits to the institutions of the other religious community to learn more about each other's religion.

In our discussion we examined situations in our world where these models for citizenship are not currently being met. We expressed our sadness about the difficult situation which faces the followers of our two religions in many countries of the world. We particularly mentioned the suffering of the Iraqi and Palestinian people, we declare our solidarity with them both in eradicating the causes of suffering and violence which affects the followers of all religions there.

Having looked together over the topics we have explored during our meetings of the past five years, we have decided to nominate five topics that we wish to explore during the coming five years. These are:

1. The foundational principles and goals for dialogue in our respective religions.
2. Ethical questions, particularly medical ethics.
3. Ensuring that all human beings benefit from scientific research.
4. How to ensure that human solidarity and collaboration works in a way that does not disadvantage some nations.
5. Developing the culture of peace rather than the culture of clashes between religions, cultures and civilizations.

We believe that by selecting five topics in this way we will have the opportunity both to study these in some depth, but also have the space and flexibility which will allow us to discuss and respond to issues that may arise suddenly at particular times. We are conscious of the need to approach these topics in a spirit of humility and self-examination as well as asking questions and seeking clarification from each other.

We heard about the progress of the study exchange between younger scholars which we originally established in 2005, and committed ourselves to facilitating a further series of exchanges in the next few months.

The members of the Joint Committee agreed to keep channels of communication open throughout the year between the two sides of the dialogue and to encourage additional ad hoc meetings in order to address any urgent issues which might arise.

We agreed that the Joint Committee should meet again in autumn 2009 in London.

Signed

The Rt Revd Dr. Michael Nazir-Ali -
Bishop of Rochester

Sheikh Abdel Fattah Ali Alaam

The Most Revd Dr. Mouneer H Anis -,

Sheikh Ali Abdel Baki Shehata

Bishop of Egypt
President Bishop of the Episcopal Church
in Jerusalem and the Middle East.

Dr Yvonne Haddad

The Most Revd Alexander Malik,
Bishop of Lahore,
and Moderator of the Church of Pakistan

Mrs Clare Amos

The Revd. Canon Anthony Ball

Dr Taha Mustafa Abu Kreisha

Dr Abdalla Mabrouk el Nagat

Sheikh Ali Muhammad Fathalla

Sheikh Omar El Deeb Muhammad

Dr Muhammad El Shahat El Gindi

Dr Abdullah Al Nagar