

“Go and make disciples of all nations” Preaching the Kingdom or Religious imperialism?’

Timothy Radcliffe OP

When Gareth did his degree in Theology at Oxford, he chose as an optional paper ‘Comparative Religion’. Typically it never occurred to him that he might study the texts in translation, and so over the summer he acquired a working knowledge of Chinese and Japanese. This was very disconcerting for his tutor who did not know a word of either language! So I had to find a tutor in the School of Oriental Languages who told me that he could not imagine how anyone could have so rapidly learned so much. So it is in honour of Gareth’s interest in this area that I wish to offer a few thoughts on the relationship of Christianity and other religions¹. Having been for nine years a Jack of all trades and Master of the Dominican Order, I have no special expertise, except about airports and exotic foods. But this never inhibited the vigorous arguments that Gareth and I had about everything, usually with copious whisky, and which I miss more than I can say.

At the end of Matthew’s gospel the risen Jesus said to the disciples, ‘Go and make disciples of all the nations’. Christianity was from the beginning a missionary religion. That is why it was transformed in the first few years from a Jewish sect into a faith that includes us. From the middle of the last century onwards we can see a growing doubt about this mission. What right have we to export our faith? And especially after September 11th, we may wonder if we are not adding to tensions around the world, as Christians and Muslims compete with claims for the truth?

In *The Dignity of Difference: how to avoid the clash of civilizations*, Jonathan Sacks, the Chief Rabbi, wrote that ‘September 11 happened when two universalist cultures, global capitalism and an extremist form of Islam, each profoundly threatening to the other, met and clashed.’² It was the impact of two total and incompatible visions of the world. Religions are rather inclined to these universal visions about God and humanity and that is why the danger zones of violence around the world are often linked to the encounters between religions. So Sacks appeals to all the world faiths to respect what he calls ‘the dignity of difference’, otherwise the world may blow apart. He wishes to start a conversation about how this may happen.

Sacks argues that the Hebrew Bible shows how this may be done. It begins with the history of the whole of humanity, with Adam and Eve, Noah

and the Tower of Babel, and then it narrows its focus to one nation, Israel. He says, 'By any conventional standard, the order of these stories is precisely wrong. They begin with universal humanity and only then proceed to the particular: one man, Abraham, one woman, Sarah, and one people, their descendants..³' Most Western ways of understanding the world start from the particular, the local, and work their way towards the universal and the abstract. This leads to vast universal claims, total ways of looking at the world, which breed violence and intolerance. But Sacks suggests that by doing the opposite Judaism shows us how to respect difference, and to honour the stranger, rather than trying to gobble everyone up into a single system or creed or culture. Judaism believes in a universal God, the God of all humanity. But it does not believe in a universal faith which all must adopt. 'Truth on earth is not, nor can it be, the whole truth. It is limited, not comprehensive; particular, not universal'.⁴

This is an attractive thesis, though not all of the Chief Rabbi's own community have found it so. It combines deep faith and humility. There is one difficulty. I believe that my own Christian faith does indeed make universal claims. We do profess that Jesus Christ is the one in whom God's promises to humanity find their fulfilment. I believe that his death and resurrection transformed humanity's relationship with God. This is a central claim of the New Testament. We are commanded to go and preach this faith to all nations. How can we be true to our faith while respecting the dignity of difference? How can we avoid contributing to the clash of civilizations? "Go and make disciples of all nations" Is that preaching the Kingdom or religious imperialism

Judaism and Christianity share the Jewish Scriptures that are our Old Testament. Sacks reads these as telling of the movement from the universality of Adam and Eve to the particularity of Israel. Christians see here another story, which leads from the old Adam to the new Adam who is Christ, two universal figures. The competition between these stories has led to immense suffering for the Jews and ultimately contributed to the horror of the Holocaust. My argument in this article is that these stories need not exclude each other. These children of Abraham need not fight, like Esau and Jacob. Indeed if we Christians so tell our story that Judaism is silenced, then we have not spoken rightly of Christ. A universalism that crushes and eliminates the story that Sacks tells is not the true story of Jesus. This is what the Holocaust has taught us. September 11th invites to take a further step in dialogue with Islam, Abraham's other descendant.

Most religions live from a narrative that shapes their relationship with the divine other, God or the gods, and with the human other, the stranger. These stories enable believers to negotiate their way between the Scylla and Charybdis of sameness and difference. To oversimplify considerably, for Israel and Judaism this story is of the Exodus from Egypt and the gift of the law at Sinai. This is more than a story about its origins. It is the story that its believers live now. As it says in the Mishnah, 'In every generation a man must

so regard himself as if he came forth out of Egypt, for it is written, *And thou shalt tell thy son in that day saying, It is because of that which the Lord did for me when I came forth out of Egypt.* Therefore are we bound to give thanks, to praise, to glorify, to honour, to exalt, to extol and to bless him who wrought all these wonders for our fathers and for us'.⁵

The history of Israel and Judaism is the unfolding of the meaning of this story. It's retelling is never finished and will not be until the Kingdom. There is an ever deeper entry into the meaning of this liberation from slavery and the encounter with God in the wilderness. And this happens above all through the shocks of history. History taught Israel slowly the meaning of this story. This was above all a history of dispossession, of the loss of what appeared to be at the heart of Israel's identity. After Solomon it was all downhill. The Kingdom was divided and finally the people went into exile. The Temple and its liturgy were destroyed. Israel became just a minor province in the Persian Empire, and then a puppet Kingdom within the Roman Empire. Everything is stripped away. All that it is left with in the end is its identity as the people who met God at Sinai and received the Law. As James A. Sanders wrote, 'Sinai, which we never possessed, was that which we would never lose'.⁶ The story told of how God brought Israel out of Egypt with a strong arm. Moses sings to the Lord, 'for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea.' (Ex. 15.1). But after Solomon that strong arm was ever less evident. There were not many powerful deeds. And this very powerlessness plunged Israel and Judaism into the mystery of its relationship with God, and what it meant to be a people who received the law.

What is fascinating is that is that it was other faiths that gave Israel the words in which to tell of its relationship with its own God. It was other religions, which completely contradicted the tenets of Israel's faith, which gave it the language in which to describe its Exodus and the gift of the law. For Israel the religion over against which it defined itself was above all that of Canaan. It was as different from the austere faith of Israel as could be, with its gods and goddesses: El, Ba'al, Astarte, Asherah, Anat and so on. These gods lived their own lives, falling in love and fighting wars. It was a typical Near Eastern religion, with myths of fertility and war. Nothing could be further from Israel's worship of the jealous God Yahweh. But judging from thousands of figures of the goddess Asherah which archaeologists have found scattered all over seventh and eighth century Israel, then it was the temptation to which she often succumbed, like ascetical monks unable to resist a divine soap opera.

The paradox is that Israelite religion is as different as could be from the religion of Canaan, but Israel's faith is utterly permeated by Canaanite religion, as John Day has shown in *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*.⁷ When Israelites talked about their relationship with Yahweh, who tolerated no other gods, then they used the language of Canaanite myths. When they prayed to their only God, then they adapted Canaanite songs to El and Ba'al. And when they talked of the law that Yahweh gave them on Mt

Sinai, they drew upon the legal traditions of their oppressors, Babylon, Assyria and perhaps Persia. They could only talk about what was unique in their life with the help of all those other polytheistic religious traditions which surrounded them and which they rejected.

Yahweh had no rival gods to squash and slaughter and no goddesses to pursue and marry. The only stories that one could tell were of his relationship with human beings and above all with Israel. In perhaps the oldest text in the Old Testament, the Song of Deborah in Judges 5, Deborah is apparently described in terms borrowed from the myths of the goddess Anat⁹. She takes the place, as it were, of the absent goddess. And when Israel describes the Exodus from Egypt, then one can see echoes of the myth of the slaughter of the monster Mot. The worship of a single God demythologized the stories of the gods, and gave Israel a language to speak of its covenant.

The story of the Exodus and Sinai is like the DNA that permeates every cell of a foetus and enables it to absorb nourishment from its mother and grow bone and flesh, muscle and nerves. The narrative, like the DNA, enables a religion to absorb and transform what is other in the development of its self. So we can see in Israel that respecting the dignity of difference is not about sealing a religion off from what is other. For it is in its encounter with what is other that it discovers itself. This is true of Christianity as well.

Judaism and Christianity are both heirs to the story but differently. Judaism has lived it as a story of survival. Jonathan Sacks wrote a deeply moving book called *Will We Have Jewish Grandchildren: Jewish Continuity and How to Achieve it*⁹. He points out that the first reference to Israel outside the Bible is on a slab of black granite in the Cairo Museum, which announces the destruction of Israel: 'Israel is laid waste, his seed is not'. 'The first reference to Israel outside the Bible is an obituary notice'.¹⁰ But Israel always survived, because that is its vocation. When Frederick the Great asked a Lutheran pastor for a proof of the existence of God, he replied 'Your majesty, the Jews.'

Sacks wrote, 'At Sinai, Israel and God entered into a solemn and mutually binding pledge: the covenant. Israel would dedicate itself to God. God, in turn, would protect Israel. The Jewish people would exist, in Jeremiah's words, as long as the sun and the moon shone and the waves roared in the sea. Israel would be God's witnesses, and their eternity would mirror His. Jews survived for a simple reason. Interwoven in our history was something larger than history: Divine providence'.¹¹ 'The Jews', he writes, 'saw their identity not as an accident of history – who they happen to be – but as a religious vocation – who they are called to be'.¹² So the story of the Exodus was a story of the survival of this particular nation, which is why the Holocaust was the supreme crisis. How could that story be told in the face of six million deaths.

Christianity's story is of the new Exodus in Christ. But this was read as the Exodus from particularism into universality. St Paul wrote, 'For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew

nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.' (Gal. 3.27). So a universal saviour offers a universal identity. But we have told this story in ways that have done violence to the identities, and indeed the lives, of particular peoples, above all the Jews. At the Last Supper Jesus broke bread and gave it to his disciples saying, 'This is my body, given for you'. He did not only give us his body; he gave us his story to tell. He was dispossessed of his narrative, and we have used it violently. Perhaps we must learn also a certain dispossession, a letting go of the narrative. Then we will glimpse how this is truly a universal story and one that respects the dignity of difference.

All the Abrahamic faiths are marked by violence. As Sacks points out, 'the first recorded act of religious worship leads directly to the first murder'¹³, that of Abel by Cain. The Exodus begins with the firstborn of Egypt dead in their beds and their warriors drowned on the seashore. The Christian story climaxes in a brutal execution. Our faiths cannot be sanitized. We can never tell a story of Jesus dying in bed as a contented old man. But how can we as Christians tell our foundational narrative in a way that does no violence to others? The paradox is that Judaism has deepened its faith by facing the apparent powerlessness of the God who brought them out of Egypt with a strong arm. For Christianity it has been the contrary. We have had to struggle with how the followers of the powerless Christ can have wreaked such violence on other people. For Judaism the question has been how to tell its story in the light of violence endured. For us, it has been in the light of violence inflicted. This is why the Holocaust is such a crisis for both our faiths.

In the rest of this article I wish to look, briefly and superficially, at three violent moments: the conquest of the Americas, the Holocaust and September 11th. I will ask how each moment provokes a re-telling of the death and resurrection of Christ. Each of these traumas has invites us to purify our story of its potential for violence. Each invites us to change our understanding of the actors in the drama. Maybe we have discovered that we were playing other roles than we had thought. We had thought that we were Cordelia only to discover that we are Goneril and Regan, well, especially Regan! Each of these events changes the way in which we understand how our time relates to the time of that story, how we live within its temporal structure. I would also just like to hint at how both Judaism and Islam may help us to retell this story more beautifully and truly. They, who have been our 'others', can help us to tell our own story.

The conquest of the Americas questioned a way of telling the story of the death and resurrection of Christ which is summed up in the phrase: *Extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*. The medieval Church believed that the resurrection of Christ marked a new time for all of humanity. After this time no one had any excuse for not believing in Christ. The whole world had encountered the gospel. If Jews and Muslims rejected Christ, then they sinned. One read the passion narratives as the story of one's contemporaries. The Jews were the people who

rejected Christ and called for his blood. The gospel narrative told of 'us' and 'them', and drew the clear lines between those inside and those outside.

The conquest of the Americas began to jolt the Church out of this story. There was the raw shock of the encounter with millions of people who had never heard of Christ, and had no part in that story. How could they have rejected Christ? It was the shock of reality. Albert Pigge, a Flemish theologian who was two years old when Columbus arrived in the Americas, wrote, 'If you say that by now the gospel of Christ has been sufficiently promulgated in the whole world, so that ignorance can no longer excuse anyone – *reality itself refutes you*, because every day now numberless nations are being discovered among whom, or among their forefathers, no trace is found of the gospel ever having been preached, so that to all those people up to our time Christ was simply unheard of.'¹⁴

It was above all the Dominicans at the university of Salamanca in Spain who challenged the old story, and surely this was because they were in close contact with their brethren in what is now the Dominican Republic. Their brethren shared with them the violence of the encounter with the indigenous people. The shock of reality was not merely the existence of these people but the violence that they endured at the hands of the Spaniards. One can feel the anger in the words of the famous sermon by Antonio de Montesinos, on the First Sunday of Advent, 1511 when he confronted the Spaniards with their treatment of the Indians: 'Are they not human? Do they not have rational souls? With what right do you make war on them? Are you not obliged to love them as yourselves?' And Bartolomé de Las Casas kept alive the fire of indignation through his sizzling reports. The Christian Spaniards were the idolaters, worshipping gold, and the pagan Indians were Christ crucified.

How did this experience of brutal violence change the way in which the Christian story was told? Back in Salamanca, Francisco de Vitoria questioned whether it is enough just to announce the gospel for people to be culpable of rejecting it. How could they be blamed for rejecting Christ when they see the cruelty of the Christians? He wrote, 'It is not sufficiently clear to me that the Christian faith has yet been so put before the indigenous people and announced to them that they are bound to believe it or commit fresh sin. I hear of many scandals and cruel crimes and acts of impiety, hence it does not appear that the Christian religion has been preached to them with such sufficient propriety and piety that they are bound to acquiesce in it'¹⁵. Pigge applies this same principal to the Muslims. If they have never had the gospel convincingly preached, how can they be blamed for rejecting it? These people, the Muslims and the Indians, are being treated no longer just as actors in our narrative of Christ's death and resurrection, with walk on parts in our story. They are conceived of as subjects, centres of autonomous awareness, looking at us and listening to us and making their own judgments. Furthermore, they are not necessarily playing the parts we had assigned them. For they are Christ crucified and it is the Christians who nail them to the cross.

A second evolution was in relationship between the narrative and time. St Thomas Aquinas had accepted that Gentiles who lived before the coming of Christ could have been saved by an implicit faith in Christ, but after Christ, an explicit faith was necessary. The narrative had a single chronological structure, the time in our Christian history when Christ rose again. Domingo Soto, another Salamanca Dominican, argued that the American Indians lived within their own time and for them the moment of decision was not the date that Christ rose from the dead but the moment that they encountered him. Before that they could be saved by implicit faith. It is the time of their narrative and not of the history of the Church that matters.

These may seem to be two small theological nuances, a slight opening of the doors of paradise to those who are not Christians. But I would also read them as a loosening of the Church's hold on its foundational narrative. The story of Christ's death and resurrection becomes less an absolute possession of the Church, and more a story that we offer to those who live it in their own way and in ways that we may not have anticipated. The violence of this moment produced a slight opening of our universal story to difference, to respect for the stranger.

The unutterable violence of the Holocaust shook our confidence in the possibility of telling any story of faith at all. How could the Jews tell a story of the God who does marvellous deeds when he did nothing at this moment? How could Christians tell the story of our powerless Saviour on a cross when his followers had complicity in this violence? What story could either faith tell anymore? Reflecting on Auschwitz, E. L. Doctorow wrote, 'To presume to contain God in this unknowing story of ours, to hold Him, circumscribe Him, the author of everything we can conceive and everything we cannot conceive... in *our* story of *Him*? Of her? Of whom? What in the name of our faith – what in God's name – do we think we are talking about?'¹⁶ Rabbi Irving Greenberg said, 'No statement, theological or otherwise, should be made that would not be credible in the presence of burning children.'¹⁷ What can any of us say in the presence of burning babies? I only do so in response to the Chief Rabbi's invitation to keep the conversation going.

When we listen to the recitations of the passion narratives during Holy Week, there are phrases that have become almost impossible for us to bear, especially from the gospels of Matthew and John. How can we repeat these words: 'And all the people answered, "His blood be on us and on our children" ' (Mat. 27.25)? When we hear such passages we may be tempted simply to dismiss them as subsequent corruptions of an initially pure and authentic Christianity. The original story has been deformed by later prejudice and unchristian hatred. Such delving behind the texts for some earlier story that is innocent is as futile and fruitless as the search for the historical Jesus. One always ends up with what one wants to find. Rather we must accept that it is precisely the horror of the Holocaust that may help us, tentatively and humbly, to try to tell the story of Christ better. Rowan Williams, speaking of

the individual search for identity, wrote that 'the self is not a substance one unearths by peeling away layers until one gets to the core, but an integrity one struggles to bring into existence'.¹⁸ Similarly the story that gives the Church its own sense of identity is not one to be attained by peeling away the layers until one gets to the core. After the Holocaust we are involved in the struggle to bring it to word newly. The gospels themselves may help us to do so.

The Jews can no longer be seen just as actors in our story, playing the roles that our story gives them. We have mythologized the Jews and given them walk on parts in a story they do not recognize as their own. As one scholar said, we have used the Jews to think with.¹⁹ This narratival violence was complicit on the monstrous violence of the Holocaust. But our Jewish elder brothers and sisters have their own story to tell, of election and survival, as witnesses of God's fidelity. The violence that we have inflicted shows that we have not told well our own story, of the man who turned the other cheek. What happened at the Holocaust revealed the potential for violence in the way that we understood what happened to him.

This means that the Jews even until today are an intrinsic part of our identity. We cannot say who we are apart from the recognition of who they are. When John Paul II addressed the Jewish community in the synagogue of Rome in 1986, he said, 'The Jewish religion is not "extrinsic" to us, but in a certain manner, it is "intrinsic" to our religion'.²⁰ So it belongs to the proper telling of our story that it is not the only story to tell. This was explicitly recognized last year by the Pontifical Biblical Commission: 'Christians can and ought to admit that the Jewish reading of the Bible is a possible one, and in continuity with the Jewish Sacred Scriptures from the Second Temple period, a reading analogous to the Christian reading which developed in parallel fashion. Both readings are bound up with the vision of their respective faiths, of which the readings are the result and expression. Consequently, both are irreducible'.²¹ This represents a vast sea change in our understanding of our universal story. Paradoxically, it can only be heard as properly universal if it gives a place to their particular story. We must hear the good news of Judaism if our gospel is to be good news too. Our own DNA is a double helix, of Judaism and Christianity.²²

Finally we recognize Christ's story as Jewish. The Jews do not only have the role of being the accusers. They may occupy all the roles. They are the disciples, and they are Jesus, as well as the crowd and the high priests. The accusations, the words that we dread to hear, were words of a debate within Judaism. The violence of these words is that of a family argument, like the violent words of the prophets against Israel. In so far as we allocate any role to the Jews, then after the Holocaust it must above all be that of the victim, the crucified one. They are not 'the God killers' but God's chosen one. In the words of Pope John XXIII: 'We realize that the mark of Cain stands on our foreheads. Across the centuries our brother Abel has lain in blood which we drew or shed tears we caused forgetting Thy love. Forgive us for the curse we
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falsely attached to their name as Jews. Forgive us for crucifying Thee a second time in their flesh. For we knew not what we did'.²³

Now we return to where we began, September 11th. You may remember that Sacks described that as the moment 'when two universalist cultures, global capitalism and an extremist form of Islam, each profound threatening to the other, met and clashed'. The violence of that terrible day confronted us with the hidden violence of our economic system which, as it is presently structured, does indeed bring wealth to millions but which also produces poverty and an ever increasing inequality. Two third of the inhabitants of our global village live in the slums, on less that the subsidy which is given to every cow in the European Union. On 9/11 that violence came home to us. As Rowan Williams wrote, 'Every transaction in the developed economies of the West can be interpreted as an act of aggression against the economic losers in the worldwide game. However much we protest that this is a caricature, this is how it is experienced. And we have to begin to understand how such a perception is part of price that we pay for the benefits of globalization'.²⁴

This violence is the fruit of modern global capitalism. I am not against the market as such, but its present operation is linked to the interests of the powerful nations. And historically it has deep links with a certain form of Christian universalism. It can all be neatly symbolized by the opening of the Suez Canal. The company founded in 1858 to build it was called *La Compagnie Universelle*. The papal nuncio gave a rousing speech in which he appears to compare the opening of the Canal to the creation of the world, as the breath of God hovers over the waters. All of humanity is being gathered into unity. '*O Occident! O Orient! Rapprochez, regardez, reconnaissez, saluez, étirez-vous!*' Needless say, all this is happening under the guidance of the Christian God: 'The cross is erect respected by everyone in the face of the crescent'.²⁵ It is also worth remembering that the fastest growing form of Christianity in the world today is American Evangelical Protestantism, which is profoundly linked to the initiation into American values and western capitalism.²⁶

So the violence of 9/11 must make us pause and wonder whether we must not go further in rethinking how we tell the story of Christ's death and resurrection. I know little about Judaism and almost nothing about Islam but ignorance has never stopped most Dominicans from spouting. So I will conclude with some very brief, and tentative remarks on how Islam might help us to tell our story better.

Last April I visited the Al Hazar mosque with the Prior of our community in Cairo. After prayers we sat and talked with three young men who were studying at the University. One of them, Amro, has remained in contact with me, especially during the Iraqi war. It has been beautiful to see him sharing his questions about his faith with a Catholic priest, and even as to whether he should become an imam. I felt welcomed into this stranger's heart and home. When I read Louis Massignon, perhaps the greatest Western expert on Islam in the last century, I understood a little of the special quality of that

relationship. He explains how Islamic hospitality brought him back home to his Christian faith. The welcome that he received in this same university and in Mesopotamia opened him to welcome the divine stranger into his life. He developed through his studies of Islam a theory of 'sacred hospitality' in which one even offers to shares the stranger's sufferings. Charles de Foucauld talks of exactly the same experience of hospitality. Pierre Claverie, the Dominican bishop of Oran who was assassinated in 1996, speaks of being a guest in the house of Islam. This led Muslims to offer him a protective wall of security when his life was threatened by extremists. This deep sense of hospitality for the stranger is in violent shock with our world of the global market. The global market gives no hospitality. It is ruthless. And all over the world, Muslims from traditional cultures, feel violated by it. Markets, Yes. The Arab world was built up by trading. But the world as one big market, No.

What are the roots of this Islamic welcome to the stranger, so at odds with the usual image of intolerance? David Burrell of Notre Dame said in a lecture in Cambridge last year that 'the very presence of a stranger elicits a welcoming response from them.' Why? 'It may have something to do with the call of the Qur'an, the way it calls for a response from the listener. And since that response takes place in a communal setting, we are then linked together as responders to the creating Word of God, and so begin actively to participate in what is generated in the synergy between call and response.' Although we do not share the same faith, and indeed Muslims regard our revelation as superseded by that of Mohammed, yet we are respected as fellow hearers. Perhaps the profound Islamic sense of the transcendence of God may relativize any exclusive religious identity.

A fascinating article by Dr Tim Winter of Cambridge University grounds this openness in the absence in Islam of a covenant with a particular community of people, a people set apart. He refers to a Qur'anic passage (7.172) which 'does speak of a primordial covenant between God and every human soul, sealed before the creation of the world. In Muslim reflection, Islam is not a compact with a particular section of humanity, but is the eschatological restoration of this primordial pledge, one of whose "signs" is the Hajj to the House which is "for all mankind" (2:125)'.²⁷ So in that sense Islam is not exclusive. Its universalism is not the universal claim for a particular people. There are no anonymous Muslims, merely human beings who are called to acknowledge the unicity and justice of God. God has sent prophets to all nations to make known his will. At the last judgment some Muslims believe that Moses will plead for Jews, Jesus for Christians and Mohammed for everyone. Winter maintains that 'a scriptural doctrine of non-categoric supersession has in practice often underpinned a level of religious coexistence which has been sustained for many centuries and can today easily support a theology of an authentic esteem for the Other.' Islam supersedes Judaism and Christianity not by being a new people of God, but as the disclosure of the truth of God will for all human beings.

Islam has been for one and half thousand years that ‘other’ over and against which the Christian West has defined itself. So it is not surprising that it was an extremist form of Islam that made a violent protest against the economic system that is centred in the West. Would it be entirely crazy to dream that Islam might help us to understand all those others who suffer deprivation and misery at our hands? Islam might even help us to make another step forward into the mystery of the story by which we live. It might help us to tell our story in a way that respects the stranger as a fellow listener to the Word. It might teach us hospitality towards the strangers of our global village. It might lead us to become more humble when we talk about ourselves as ‘the People of God’. It might loosen our presumptive grip on the story of Christ. We must share it as Christ shared himself. If we are to make disciples of all nations, then we must become disciples, students, ourselves.

As a Christian I do found my faith on the death and resurrection of Christ as the definitive moment in God’s relationship with humanity. We have seen that the Holocaust has transformed our understanding of that event. The DNA which is our foundational narrative is a double helix, which links us from the inside with Judaism. September 11th may lead us further. Islam has a different relationship with us. I am not suggesting a triple helix! Yet it too may teach us how to tell our own story better.

Think of the cross by which we sign ourselves. The first representation of the cross is on the doors of S Sabina where I lived in Rome for nine years. They date from 432. Is it a coincidence that we only dared to represent this symbol of Roman Imperial cruelty when Empire had just become Christian? This cross became the symbol of the aggression of the crusaders. We are living a slow education in the meaning of the cross and of the one who ‘humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross’ (Phil. 2.8). In Hispaniola Las Casas saw the indigenous people crucified by Spaniards. In the Holocaust we have seen our Jewish brothers and sisters crucified on this same cross. Maybe now, after 9/11 Islam can help us to loosen our grip a little more on the story of Christ, so that its true universality may be better seen.

As Rowan Williams wrote after September 11th, ‘Can we think about our focal symbol, the cross of Jesus, and try to rescue it from its frequent fate as the banner of our wounded righteousness? If Jesus is indeed what God communicates to us, God’s language for us, his cross is always both ours and not ours; not a magnified sign of our own suffering, but the mark of God’s work in and through the deepest vulnerability; not a martyrs’ triumphant achievement, but something that is there for all human suffers because it belongs to no human cause.’²⁸

A month before his assassination, Pierre Claverie said:

‘The Church fulfils her vocation when she is present on the fractures that crucify humanity in its flesh and unity. Jesus died spread out between heaven

and earth, his arms stretched out to gather in the children of God scattered by the sin which separates them, isolates them, and sets them up against each other and against God himself. He placed himself on the lines of fracture born of this sin. In Algeria we are on one of these seismic lines that cross the world: Islam/the West, North/South, rich/poor. And we are truly in our place here, because it is in this place that one can glimpse the light of the Resurrection.'

- 1 These thoughts were first aired in the Margaret Beaufort Institute's Mary Ward Lecture 2003.
- 2 *The Dignity of Difference: How to avoid the clash of civilizations*. London and New York 2002. p. 20
- 3 Ibid. p.50 The author's italics.
- 4 op.cit. p.64.
- 5 Pesahim, 10.5, translated by Hebert Danby Oxford 1974 p.151
- 6 *Torah and Canon* p.53
- 7 Sheffield 2000
- 8 P.C. Cragie, 'Deborah and Anat: A Study of Poetic Imagery (Judges 5)', *ZAW* 90 1978, pp.33–49. Day disagrees, op.cit. p.137
- 9 London 1994
- 10 ibid. p.6
- 11 ibid p. 32
- 12 ibid. p.39
- 13 *The Dignity of Difference* p.46
- 14 Francis A. Sullivan *Salvation outside the Church? Tracing the history of the Catholic response* New York 1992, p. 80 My italics.
- 15 ibid. p.72.
- 16 From "Heist" quoted by Robert W. Bullock, 'After Auschwitz: Jews, Judaism and Christian Worship' in ' "Good News" after Auschwitz: Christian Faith within a Post-Holocaust World' ed. Carol Rittner and John K. Roth, Macon, 2001, p.69
- 17 'Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire: Judaism, Christianity, and Modernity after the Holocaust' in *Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era?* , ed. Eva Fleischner ,New York, 1977, p.23
- 18 *On Christian Theology* Oxford 2000 p. 240.
- 19 Quoted by Rowan Williams, *Writing in the Dust: Reflections on 11th September and its aftermath*. London 2002. p.65. He does not mention who this scholar is.
- 20 Quoted in *The Jewish people and their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible*. The Pontifical Biblical Commission, Rome, 2002, p. 196
- 21 c.f. previous note p.51
- 22 I owe this image to comments by Dr Janet Martin Soskice.
- 23 Quoted in Eliezer Berkovits, *Faith after the Holocaust*, New York 1973, p.26
- 24 op. cit note 17 p.58
- 25 *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* London, 1995, p.91
- 26 J.D Hunter and J Yates, 'In the Vanguard of Globalization: The world of American globalizers' in ed. Peter L. Berger and Samuel P. Huntington, *Many Globalizations: cultural diversity in the Contemporary World*. Oxford 2002 p. 323–357
- 27 'The last Trump Card' in *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 9/1999/2, pp. 133–155
- 28 op. cit p.77f