

## **Highfield Lecture: Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali – ‘Conflict and Conviction’**

**An Outline by Peter S. Williams of the Highfield Lecture,  
21st February 2016.**

Audio of the lecture and the Q&A period is available @  
<http://www.highfield.org.uk/index.php?id=1810>

Christianity & Islam are the two great missionary religions of our time.

A very long story of encounter, of conflict, and of co-operation.

Christians, Jews and Muslims have always lived together in history.

### **7<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> Centuries**

Mohammed traded with Christians and Jews & whether or not his first wife was Christian, she had Christian family members.

Islam was against polytheism - Mecca was a centre for the cult of ‘the daughters of Allah’.

Muslims became refugees, leaving Mecca for Abyssinia, emphasizing the common ground between Muslims and Christians re Jesus (e.g. born of a virgin)

Mohammed later went to Medina, becoming the temporal ruler and well as the spiritual leader.

In Medina Mohammed promulgated a ‘Constitution of Medina’ prescribing equal rights and duties for all citizens – this was the constitution of the first ‘Islamic State’!

This state of affairs did not last. Muslims became suspicious esp. of Jews in Medina, that they were collaborating with the Meccan enemies of Muslims. Some Jews were exiled, others sold into slavery or beheaded.

Christians meeting Muslims to make a treaty were accommodated in Mohammed’s mosque and allowed to practice their own religious rites therein.

Differing beliefs about Jesus continue to be the key point of difference between Muslims and Christians.

Relationship via tribute was a later model of non-Muslim to Muslim relationship.

Islam expanded into the Judeo-Christian world and then into the Persian Empire by military conquest. Muslims destroyed a number of Zoroastrian, Jewish and Christian communities – but different Caliphs’ looked differently upon this use of

extreme violence towards non-Muslims. There was a move to expel Christians from the Arabian peninsula.

A system of discrimination was set in place whereby, for example, Christians must pay an extra tax to show their subservient nature, were excluded from the armed forces, the civil service, could not ride horses, and could not repair or build churches.

Subject peoples, including Christian clergy, contributed to Islamic civilization.

### **13<sup>th</sup> Century**

The Mongols devastated the civilized world. E.g. in 1258 the Mongols destroyed Baghdad. They were less hard on Shia Muslims, having had previous contact, so the brunt of the Mongol violence fell on the Sunnis.

The Crusades were called because Muslims were blocking pilgrimage to the Holy Lands, the destruction of the church of the Holy Sepulchre, and due to fear that the Constantinople would fall to the Muslims. There was good and bad conduct on all sides.

Muslim power passed from the Arabs to the Turks, resulting in the Ottoman Empire, which lasted until the end of WWI.

The Ottoman ruler took the title of Caliph – although he didn't qualify (e.g. wasn't Arab). His justification was that he was the only Muslim ruler engaged in Jihad – a claim echoed by some today. But, the Ottomans gave high levels of autonomy to other religious communities, and later as fellow citizens.

### **20<sup>th</sup> Century**

Post WWI, the rise of nationalism after the loss of Empire. The rise of Arab nationalism was very influenced by Christians.

Various visions of Islamism began to challenge these nationalisms in the 1950's. Islamists had negative views of Western Colonialism and Neo-Colonialism (e.g. the Suez crisis) and of Western influence upon nationalism.

1979 the Iranian revolution, fermented by economic inequality.

### **21<sup>st</sup> Century**

Islamists reject the separation of religion and state, have a particular interpretation of Sharia law and believe in the return of the subjugation of non-Muslims and in the return of lands lost to Islam.

### **The way forward:**

- It would be good if Christians and Muslims could come to an international agreement upon the question of when armed intervention is to be permitted.
- Reciprocity as commitment to a common defence of fundamental freedoms – some progress has been made in dialogue.

cf. Peter S. Williams' YouTube Playlist on 'Islam' @  
<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLQhh3qcwVEWjhD84EB0jEG5PswCOcDsmJ>