

## INTERFAITH INSIGHT

# Experiencing and learning from interfaith perspectives

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The interfaith agenda in the United Kingdom is another enlightening experience during our time here in Cambridge.

The other day, the sermon at Trinity College (where Isaac Newton studied and whose statue graces the entrance of the chapel) was delivered by Dr. Daniel Weiss, the Polonsky-Coexist Lecturer in Jewish Studies in the Faculty of Divinity.

In this very Anglican service, we heard about the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber, who worked and wrote as a German.

His teaching and his opposition to Nazi nationalism led to his teaching and lectures being banned and his emigration in the late 1930s to Palestine, where he then became a professor at the Hebrew University.

He is best known for his book "I and Thou," published in German in 1923 as "Ich und Du."



Kindschi

The book had a considerable influence on Christian, as well as Jewish thinking and later led to his interfaith work and dialogue between Christians and Jews.

In his book he makes the distinction between true personal encounters — I-Thou relationships — and encounters in which the other is more of an object or one who provides a service or function, which he calls the I-It relationship. He emphasizes the relationship with God must always be an I-Thou relationship involving a deep personal connection with the divine.

Another interfaith experience in Cambridge happened at the conference on "Reconsidering Religious Radicalism."

## RADICALISM VS. EXTREMISM

Christian, Jewish and Muslim scholars from a variety of fields from history, political science, philosophy and theology discussed the distinction between radicalism and extremism.

Featured speakers included Lord Maurice Glasman, a Labor Party leader, director of the organization Faith and Citizenship, and vocal critic of the "commodi-

fication of human beings" by many in the economic and financial community.

An active Jew, he seeks to work closely with mosques and churches because of the importance of a religious vision in public policy.

While he did not use the Buber terms, he was clearly critical of the "I-It" relationships that drive much of the modern economy.

Glasman talks about three kinds of power: state power, money power and relational power. The first two seek to control by the use of force and money to create order. Relational power, however, comes from community interaction and negotiation seeking the common good.

At the same conference, we heard from Dr. Usam Hasan, scientist, major leader in campaigning against extremism and advocate for religious reform within Islam. He stressed the importance of working from inside the Muslim community, and using language meaningful to that community to expand the understanding of terms such as "umma" to mean more than just



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LONDON MAYOR SADIQ KHAN

a Muslim community, but the whole of humanity.

From the interfaith perspective, it also is of interest to note the recently elected mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, is a Muslim. Prior to his election he was a member of Parliament, the only Muslim among the 74 members representing the city of London, which has a Muslim population of 10 percent.

When discussing what it means to be British, he pointed out the two words often used are tolerance and fairness. But "tolerance is not enough — you tolerate a toothache," Khan said. "I try to be tolerant when I hear some commentators tell me that

my religion threatens the values of this country. But full acceptance must be rooted in fairness, not mere toleration."

It is refreshing to hear this kind of talk from a political leader here in England, especially from one who commented he would like to visit and discuss with mayors of U.S. cities such as Chicago and New York — but might have to visit before the election since he then might be banned from entering the country because of his faith.

Let us embrace these interfaith perspectives as we seek the common good for our country and for the world.

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