

Erzbischof Dr. Rowan Williams

**Erzbischof von Canterbury Dr. Rowan Williams erhält  
Woolf Institute of Abrahamic Faiths 'Building Bridges Award'**

*Der Erzbischof von Canterbury, Dr. Rowan Williams, erhielt den "Building Bridges Award" des Woolf Institute of Abrahamic Faiths. Die Auszeichnung würdigte sein Engagement für die Auseinandersetzung mit zeitgenössischen kulturellen und interreligiösen Fragen. Die Preisverleihung fand bei einem Fundraising-Dinner des Woolf Institute im Londoner Middle Temple statt. In seiner Dankesrede spricht Erzbischof Williams über Abraham in den jüdischen, christlichen und muslimischen Traditionen und betont, wie wichtig der Dialog über die Abrahams der verschiedenen Glaubensrichtungen ist. Die Vorstellung von Abraham variiert in den jüdischen, christlichen und muslimischen Traditionen. Im Judentum wird er als Vater des jüdischen Volkes betrachtet, der bereit war, seinen Sohn Isaak zu opfern. Im Christentum wird Abraham als Vater des Glaubens angesehen, der Gott bedingungslos vertraute. Im Islam wird Abraham als der erste große Prophet gegen die Götzenanbetung betrachtet. Alle drei Traditionen betonen Abrahams Bedeutung als Symbol für Gottes Treue und die Ablehnung von Gewalt und falschen Götzen. Der Dialog zwischen den Traditionen bereichert unsere Vorstellungen von Abraham und hilft eine gemeinsame Vision von Gewaltfreiheit und Menschlichkeit zu entwickeln.*

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Your Excellency, my Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen. It's with a very deep sense of gratitude and honour that I rise to speak this evening. I want to thank the Institute for the work they do and the inspiration they provide. And I want to offer those words of thanks very much on behalf of all those who work with me with such skill and dedication in the cause of inter faith dialogue.

It is indeed true, as Ataulah [Siddiqui] you have already suggested that inter faith dialogue takes a great deal more of my time and energy than I ever expected it would when I first began this job. But my involvement could not have been as it has been without the skill, the devotion, the enormously hard work of staff of Lambeth and elsewhere who have made this possible. And I want to take this opportunity of thanking them too.

The Woolf Institute which is undoubtedly a beacon of good practise in respect of inter faith dialogue is an institute devoted to working with the Abrahamic faiths. And I wanted this evening to share with you just a few thoughts on what Abrahamic faith might be. And I do so conscious of one of the discoveries that you very soon make in inter faith dialogue; which is that you think you know what other people are talking about. If you're going to have a dialogue, you have to realise that you don't.

Christians, Jews and Muslims share a good deal of vocabulary, a good deal of history and of course the records of many great prophetic figures. And yet one of the

fascinating aspects of dialogue or triologue is to discover how differently those figures work in the imagination of our different faiths.

For those of us who are Christians, the figure of Abraham is probably most clearly associated with that quotation which St Paul so frequently uses; "Abraham trusted God and it was counted to him for righteousness."

Abraham in the Christian imagination, it seems, stands for a leap of faith, an act of trust which overcomes both narrow loyalties and the conviction, the toxic conviction that you can persuade God to be on your side by activism. For the Christian, Abraham is the father, not only of many nations in the ethnic sense but of those communities across the world which have found the grace and the courage to let go of any attempt to manipulate God, to put God in their debt, to treat God as their servant, rather than the other way round.

Abraham trusted God, stepped out in trust. And out of that stepping out in trust came a community beyond the imagination of any one nation, any one interest group. So runs the Christian imagination.

But turn for a moment to the Jewish imagination. Some of you may know a wonderful book by the Jewish philosopher Emil Fackenheim on Judaism and modern philosophy which contains a long and eloquent chapter essentially saying that the trouble with Christians, especially Christian philosophers and even more post Christian philosophers is that they have misunderstood Abraham totally. Abraham is not the hero of existentialist freedom stepping out in naked trust and groundless faith. Abraham certainly in some strands of the Midrashic tradition, Abraham obeys God's command to sacrifice Isaac because he knows that through it God is about to manifest once and for all decisively, irrefutably his commitment by bringing back those he has chosen from the edge of death. God is not testing Abraham's faith, God is giving Abraham an opportunity to manifest the fact that God's promise once given is non negotiable.

And thus in that Midrashic tradition Abraham and the sacrifice of Isaac are understood as those events which once and for all establish the fact that God has promised to be with his people. And that therefore sacrifice as a means of placating God or bribing God is forever a thing of the past and the blasphemous idea that the taking of human life can somehow glorify God is once and for all decisively put behind.

Abraham is the father of a community that has left behind violence, the kind of violence that seeks to manipulate the holy. The kind of violence that fails to recognise that God's purpose is always towards a people, a community. The sacrifice of Isaac is the establishing of a community on firm ground forever. Forget the individualism of Christian readers, remember that it is in Isaac that Abraham's seed is named and that seed is a community.

And then the Muslim imagination comes into play. In the Qur'an Abraham's dealings with his son are perhaps less prominent than Abraham's dealings with his father. Abraham challenges his father's idolatry, warns his father that the cult of the heavenly bodies is empty, futile and blasphemous. How can stars and planets which rise and set be divine? He promises his father that he will pray for him but he cannot protect him from the truth of God when it is manifest.

Abraham is the first great protestor against idolatry. And not only against idolatry but against inherited idolatry. Against those lazy habits which assume that you can identify God with what you have received by tradition, by ethnic inheritance and by custom. Abraham stands for the newness of the true God over against the stale fictions around idols.

Which is our Abraham? Happily I don't think we have to make a choice because the glory of truly attentive dialogue is that our imaginations are enriched by one another. And an imagination enriched by all these three strands of understanding Abraham is an imagination perhaps very particularly attuned to the needs of our world at the moment.

We need certainly an imagination that tells us not to be anxious, not to be constantly attempting to put God in our debt. Not constantly seeking to be absolutely assured that God is on our side and therefore on nobody else's.

We need an imagination, yes of faith, of stepping out in trust towards God and for God's sake towards one another. Abraham trusted and it was counted to him for righteousness. But we need also an imagination which not unconnected with that first point says decisively 'sacred violence is a thing of the past and the sacrifice of human life has been once and for all declared to be abhorrent to the true God'.

We need a conviction that the divine love and justice are so strong, so consistent that they need no defence by human violence. And indeed, as I have suggested in one or two other places, it ought to be the case that people whether Jews, Christians or Muslims who believe in a transcendent God ought to be the strongest opponents of sacred violence because they know God is greater than any defence of God we can offer.

We need that Midrashic imagination of the sacrifice of Isaac as the moment when the doors have last closed on holy violence and God's commitment to the community of justice is once and for all made plain.

But this is also a world where idolatry is by no means a thing of the past. Where inherited custom, the association of the divine with what we're used to, what makes us comfortable and makes us feel safe is as much of a problem as it was in Arabia, in the Bronze Age.

We need an imagination that resists idolatry that challenges false, limiting, trivialised ideas of God. Because if we have false and limited and trivialising ideas of God then we shall without any doubt have false trivialising, limited ideas of human beings. And the imagination that will keep the world's peace and secure the world's future is an imagination that sees the depths, the potential and the glory of human beings. And for that we as people of faith believe we need the imagination of God to keep the imagination of humanity alive in the world.

So in the encounter of Abrahamic faith, all those Abrahams come into play as we look out at a world which needs the hope that these different strands of imagination can offer. What the Woolf Institute has provided and continues to provide, and by God's grace will continue to provide, is an environment where these different kinds of

imaginative wisdom can meet without competition, without struggle, with question and challenge but without anxiety.

And I give God thanks for the work that the Institute has done because it will help all of us keep alive those things, those visionary horizons which we need in order to remain human in a society which seems obsessively to want to be less than human. And in a world where in every sense human beings are becoming an endangered species. So I wish every blessing to the Institute.

I thank Ed [Kessler] and all his colleagues for the visionary work that they have done and all those elsewhere who have supported it financially and practically and in prayer. I pray that that work will go on being the kind of inspiration that it has already been for so many. And once again on behalf of myself and all those who have worked with me, I thank you with all my heart for the honour done this evening and the delight of your company. Thank you.

Quelle:

*<http://rowanwilliams.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/587/archbishop-receives-inter-faith-award.html> (2024-05).*