



Stand for a Generation.

Contributor to the ECCEN conference:

Lecture three: Friday morning 30th September 2016.

Mr Phill Moon. (B:Ed Hons.) Founder of Bradford Christian School: Bradford West Yorkshire UK. Bradford is a city of 340,000 people, many of them migrants, immigrants and refugees who have made the city their home.

Our continent is becoming characterised as a place where our broken and abused neighbours want to come and live with us...in their millions.

What we are being asked by our Muslim neighbours who flee to our relative peace, security and stability is essentially this: 'For mercy's sake, share the good things that you have with us and our children.'

We are living through a hugely challenging world crises where we, the 'haves', are being beseeched by the 'have nots' for our help. Because the numbers are so large, the problem is just as much logistical as humanitarian, the solution must be political as well personal. God will raise up people who can make a political response; they are few but significantly placed.

How will we as ordinary individuals and as educators respond? What I have to share comes in the form of three questions:

1. How do we personally respond to change as Christians?
2. How do we as leaders, lead change in our communities?
3. How do we equip our students to be future leaders in our communities.

My background as an educator:

- Before starting Bradford Christian School, I worked in a school of 600 pupils, 98% of them were muslims. What did I learn there?
- We have a school where 70% of our students are Christians, but whom 30% are not; some of them are Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus. What have we learned about building an inclusive community within our school?
- I work with children from 20 different nations in our small school. What have we learned about cultural diversity?
- I work with families from over 20 different churches or expressions of Christianity. What have we learned about harmony within a diverse Christian community?
- I have lived and worked and interacted with Muslim neighbours in my home city for 35 years, what have I learned?



1. How do we personally positively respond to change as Christians? To become a Christian is to start on a journey of change and transformation. You soon come to realise that its not the changes that you are prepared to make that matter but your response to the ones that God wants to make in and through you. God wants us to both respond to change continually and to initiate change.

I first began to understand this as a 21 year old. I had finished my education and was setting out in the world. In my own plans I had mapped out a pathway that seemed good to me. And then one day in a quiet encounter with God, I heard him say, I know that you want to serve me, and I have a list here for what I want you to do. If you want to begin to receive my list for your life, you will have to first give me the one you are writing for yourself.

I gave God my list, and all that it stood for. I did not go to New York to continue my studies, which was my plan, but stayed and sought God's will for my life in Bradford. I believe that the decision to give God permission to rule over your dreams is one of the most important decisions you can ever make.

The truth of God does not change, but we need to change to take hold of more and more of it. God's grace is unchanging but we must change to be more in receipt of it and to be able to give more of it to others. And when it comes to doing the will of God on earth, we have to be prepared to change our ideas on what our life should consist of to be able to move in his infinitely better plans and purposes.

Most of us do not have the courage to do the things that God wants done in the world, but God can only work through people who are prepared to do such things. For this reason you must be prepared to go where God leads and what he makes clear to you. You must be prepared to change in regards to God, all the time.

My first job was in inner city school and I encountered Muslim students, some from low income families and some from difficult and deprived backgrounds. And reaching out to challenging young people I had to allow myself to be led by the love of God. But as I reached out to them unreservedly, I noticed that the most unlikely people began to respond to me...and this is still my experience. Last week I was chatting to one of the Muslim parents in my school at a reception evening for students joining a new part of the school. I have known this parent for two years and on the occasions that our paths cross, we always talk about issues of faith. He said to me. 'You, know, we have our son in your school because we like you. Me and my wife pray for you every night that you will have wisdom to lead this school.' How would that sit with you?

There has always been a level of racial tension in my city, and sometimes it has erupted, making national, and, at times, international news. At one time tension was heightened by a head teacher who made ill advised comments about the ethnic origins of his students. There were protests and labour strikes around the school. There was unrest in the city and I was concerned, like many others, for the peace of my city. I was also overwhelmed, like many others, by the complexity of the problems. But I realised I was in a position to do something about it. I prayed for a job in that school



as a peacemaker. I gained a job as the old headteacher was removed. My first day was the new headteacher's first day. I introduced myself and explained that I had prayed for a job in the school and that I had prayed for his appointment as an instrument of peace and that I would continue to pray for his as he sought to restore the trust of the community served by the school.

I did not know what his response would be, but it was favourable. In fact I went from language support teacher, to RE teacher, to Year Head to Deputy Head teacher to acting Head teacher within five years. I found that God was pleased to use me as a Christian in a predominantly Muslim school. My time at the school was significant, and in a quiet way we defused violent tension and averted unrest in our corner of our city. This is just one way how God used me. (Qumar's story... Qumar was 10 years old when he was in my class. His mum had breast cancer, and he refused to come to school, fearing that when he got home, she might be dead. I took his education home to him three lunch times a week and kept his education going and the educational welfare department off his parent's back. In five or six weeks, it became clear, that his mother would live, and he came back to school. His father, a fierce Shi'ite Muslim happened to be chair of Governors for the school, appointed me to be deputy Head of the school. I explained that I was planning to start a Christian School within a year. He said he understood why but in the meantime would I like to lead in the school. So as Christian I had a job as deputy Head, and as it happened, due to the illness of the Head, acting Head for that year. A Christian leading a school of Muslim children. It was a privilege. On my last day, the chair of governors kissed me and simply thanked me.)

I believe that God is looking for people who he can use to do his will. Quite often he seems to delight in working cross culturally. Sometimes this work is at its most powerful and speaks most to the world when it is counter cultural and unexpected? What are the opportunities that God gives you to reach out to others who are not Christians around you? Are you praying about the opportunities that God gives you? Are you prepared to act in response to His promptings? Are you obedient in taking the love of God to the people around you, even when the barriers seem to be the most unsurmountable?

When a religious expert of the law asked Jesus who his neighbour was, he was answered with a parable in which a victim's enemy was the one who did him the most good. Think about that. A Jew was beaten and left for dead, two leaders within his own community left him in his state and walked on by. It was his enemy who stopped and helped him, compassionately, practical and at his own expense

There is enmity in the world between Muslims and Christians. Our religious differences make us suspicious of each other. What we perceive to be unsurmountable barriers cause us to walk on by when we see each other in need. Yet now hundreds and thousands of our Muslim neighbours line our borders seeking to find refuge in our continent. As Christians, we might be seen by the rest of the world as the most unlikely people to reach out and to help because of our historical and religious differences. Non religious people would have less problems in reaching out, because they do not see through religious filters, simply on the basis of another human in need. However, this parable makes



it clear that we are exactly the people who should reach out and help in this situation. How can we be so in possession of grace and mercy ourselves as humans at the hands of God and not be prepared to reach out to other human beings who are in the same place of need as ourselves.

2. How do we lead change in our communities?

The apostle Peter had been taken through many painful changes in his relationship with Jesus. Peter still saw himself as being shaped by his Jewish background and upbringing. The most fundamental change to his world view began on a rooftop as he sat hungrily waiting for his meal. When given the command to eat from anything that God showed him, he refused. This happened to him three times and each time Peter refused what God was telling him he could and should do. After the three episodes, the matter was still undecided in Peter's head and heart. Mystified as to the meaning of this experience, Peter was disturbed from his thoughts by a knock at the door. It was the servants of Cornelius. And only after a conversation with this gentile did Peter realise the meaning of his strange vision. The good news of the gospel was for the gentiles as well as for the Jews.

And thereafter Peter acted out on this conviction for the rest of his life. Because of his obedience you and I, non Jewish people, are secure in our identity as people accepted by the living God, but also the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This fact is accepted by all of us, we rejoice to be together in this conference hall, united in Christ and each as acceptable to God as our ethnic neighbour. But for the world at the time that this was revealed, this was a mind blowing announcement.

In my conversations with Qumar's father, I did not argue religion, we did not trade doctrine and theology. He knew what I believed as a Christian and I knew that he believed as a Muslim. We did on occasion make reference to these differences. People rarely change their worldviews on the strength of another's arguments. We may refine what we believe about other people's views but we do not make huge conversion changes. God is the only one that I know can achieve this on a regular basis, and of course he does. It was not my words that touched his heart, it was my actions. I did as much as I could, and I expect that God could do the rest. On a number of occasions, I was welcomed into the home of a Muslim and invited in to the front room where only the men would sit and I would be asked to give an account of the Christian gospel and so that is what I did. One time I was visiting a home of a boy who had been absent from school for a week or two, it was a routine check. The mother told me that her husband had died, had been laid out upstairs in the house and an evil spirit had entered her son. My Sikh translator informed the mother that I was a Christian and that I would pray to Jesus and the evil spirit would be driven out of her sons body. Two hours later, and after a struggle this is what happened.

The Kingdom of God is for others other than you and your kind. It is for more people than you can welcome and accept. And just as we have found a place of acceptance with God, we must understand that God has room for all of those we currently find hard to accept. God's love for humanity is greater



than our theology can accept; its greater than your way of life can accept and its greater than your prejudices will allow.

Having had this experience in my city before we started the Christian school, I realise now that I had been shaped in the type of school that we were to run. 30% of our families are non-Christian and some are of no professed faith. We are clear that we are a Christian school and what that means in terms of what we will teach about Jesus. Yet 30 or 40 of our families who are non-Christian pay fees each month to see their children educated in this Christian environment.

We have 20 or 30 different churches represented in our school and almost as many churches represented on our staff. We have argued over the things that Christians argue over. However, on a daily basis we understand where our prejudices come from and how they are formed and that really the things that we have in common and the things that we can agree on are more significant than the things that divide us. We have learned as a staff to 'keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.'

We have children of 20 different churches which range from brethren and reformed churches through to Pentecostal charismatic house churches through to African community churches big on faith, healing and prosperity. After twenty three years of running such a school, can I tell you the most positive outcome amongst the Christian students. It's this. My generation of Christian believers grew up going to just one church, hearing just one set of doctrines, being shaped and moulded by just one set of traditions. We drove past other churches, but never went inside. Any good in these churches stayed there and was often viewed with suspicion and prejudice, even mild prejudice. We rarely did anything with any other types of Christians other than those from our own denomination. Our students have been to most of the other vibrant churches in our city as guests and welcomed visitors. Our students know the missions and the characteristics of more churches than their own. They seek out where the life is and they go for that life in their hunger to find reality for their young Christian lives. Could you handle such openness?

From my background in my city, we have always been open to people of other faiths. Our school should not work. Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims should not find themselves comfortable in a Christian school should they? But they do in ours. Interestingly, 3 years ago, our head boy was a Muslim. We appointed him as a prefect, but not as head boy. We did not think his character was strong enough. Six months into the year, we surveyed the student body on the performance and integrity of our prefects. There was an overwhelming swell of support for our Muslim prefect from his fellow students. 'Sir,' our Christian students cried, 'Awais has everything in his character that you would want from a head boy. He has stepped up in his service and leadership in the school; he deserves to be our Head Boy'. We were pleased to give him that title and that role.

So what are you going to allow in your school and under your leadership as Christian leaders? How are you going to live out the great commandment to 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind' and, 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' In asking who your neighbour is, will you settle for the religious response and walk on by the needs of the non-Christian world around you, or will you bend over someone in need who might



consider you an enemy until you prove yourself, by your actions, to be otherwise.

3. How do we equip our students to be leaders in our communities.

Your students already know what they would like to do in the world around them?

They are already as compassionate as you, they are probably likely to be less prejudiced than you and they are less likely to be stuck in their ways, they have less barriers and obstacles to acting generously than you do.

Your students are capable of kindness beyond what you have the courage to show, they are possibly more prepared to be extravagant in the help they would give to others than you are.

They are perhaps more able to carry responsibility than you think they can. They may be more able to hear the voice of God and be more willing to respond. They have their lives before them and they want their lives to count. We are more likely to have most of our lives behind and be more likely to want to preserve what we think is of value.

But they are immature and unrealistic, naïve, likely to make errors in judgement, unlikely to see the consequences of their actions or able to live the levels of responsibility that their hearts would like them to move in. They are only just emerging into the reality of spiritual warfare that you have walked in for a generation. Psalm 127 tell us that our 'children are like arrows in the hands of a warrior'. For both generations, it is difficult to commit to. It's a real challenge for us to live in such a way that our children see us as warriors. As imperfect as we might think we are, we need to invest what we know in the next generation. It's a real challenge for younger people to submit to working with us in this way...it is vital that we make ourselves available to our students. If we are Godly and our students delight to work with us, then in this relational working lies the keys to their potency.

However, we tend only to invest knowledge in our students not trust. We do not commission them well and we do not release them, we don't involve them in what God is doing until they are 'grown up.'

I have always tried to apprentice the young people in our care in the things that I know God wants to do on the earth. When my own children were 14, 13 and 12, we spent Christmas in a Romanian orphanage. Instead of opening hundreds of pounds worth of presents, we bathed and rubbed with oil, abandoned babies in a Bucharest orphanage. We decided that speaking words to our children had limited impact concerning what was of worth and so left our cultural comfort zone to see what life was like for someone else completely different from our experience of life.

The world is having a negative and damaging impact on our Christian youth. What's the antidote? Protect them, closet them, keep them sanitized from the world they see all around them, the world they can access on the phone in their pockets or the social media groups they join. Or we could lead them out into exploits where they can begin to meet the needs of the world around them with the love and power of the God inside. We can begin to put them in a place where they can experience for



themselves what it is to be constrained by the love of God and empower by the might of God to fulfil his plans and purposes for the people of the world. Should not this be part of a Christian education?

What have we learned about doing this:

Tell students that God has a plan for their lives.

- Illustrate that God has a plan for their lives which involves being helped by people from the older generation; Give them examples from your own lives, from the lives of your community from history and from the scriptures.
- Give opportunities for young people to experience serving God and living as Christians as part of their education in your Christian Schools.

In my 30 years of working with young people, these are the key principles I have learned

(Keep your eye on the clock....illustrate with anecdotes)

- **Compassion**

Young people need to be understood and accepted with their passions and also with all the foibles that make them incomplete and raw in their responses to life.

- **Introduction to the person of God**

If God is good and if He is real, and if He is worthy of dedicating your whole life to him, then make him known, through what you teach and through what you share. If God has revealed Himself to you, share what He has done with your students. Once they know Him for themselves, they will follow Him. He wants you to bring your students to Him for the future he has for them.

- **Commitment**

Be consistent and always available to them, live with them outside of your classrooms. Do what you say you will do. Live what you say you are about, let them examine your life to see what a Christian can look like.

- **Counsel**

When you are invited to, speak the wisdom that you have acquired in your decades long journey with God. Young people are impressed with words when they are authentic.

- **Teach them to discern**

What is the point of developing a Christian world view? It is to equip your students to understand the way the world works and how God works in the world.

- **Communication and relationship**

The basis of all of this is the bedrock of a solid and appropriate relationship between you and your students and one that encourages and includes communication that is helpful and healthy

- **Investment.**

What do you think your students are really capable of and are you giving them the opportunity to work to their potential in the things that can't necessarily be measured or tested in your academic



classroom. What can you give them to do in the safety of your school? What can they put into practice in real ways within your school community when it comes to serving others and serving God?

- **Commissioning**

Where can you assign short term projects which enable your students to work together with others and under your leadership to practice doing good?

Make a list of the types of people you would hope your students would turn out to be. Turn it from a wish list to an action plan. Don't just sow in a classroom seeds you hope will one day take root and grow; take them out of your classroom and actually lead them in the service of their neighbours.