Select Committee on Citizenship and Civic Engagement

Uncorrected oral evidence: Faith Groups

Wednesday 6 December 2017

10.35 am

Watch the meeting

Members present: Lord Hodgson of Astley Abbotts (The Chairman); Baroness Barker; Lord Blunkett; Baroness Eaton; Lord Harries of Pentregarth; Baroness Lister of Burtersett; Baroness Morris of Yardley; Baroness Newlove; Baroness Pitkeathley; Baroness Redfern; Lord Verjee.

Evidence Session No. 19 Heard in Public Questions 163 - 171

Witnesses

1: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis; His Eminence Vincent Nichols, Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster.
Examination of witnesses

Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis and His Eminence Vincent Nichols.

Q163 **The Chairman:** Your Eminence and Chief Rabbi, thank you very much indeed for coming today to give us the benefit of your very wide-ranging experience on this important topic, on which we are now drawing to the end of our evidence sessions.

A list of interests of Members relevant to the inquiry has been sent to you and is available. The session is open to the public and is being televised for BBC Parliament. A verbatim transcript will be taken of the evidence and will be put on the Committee’s website. A few days after the session, you will be sent a copy of the transcript to check for accuracy, and it would be helpful if you could advise us of any corrections as quickly as possible. If, after this evidence session, you wish to clarify or amplify any points made during your evidence or have any additional points to make, you are most welcome to submit supplementary evidence to us. Could I ask you to identify yourselves, and then we will turn to the questions?

**Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis:** I am Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis.

**Cardinal Vincent Nichols:** I am Vincent Nichols, Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster.

Q164 **The Chairman:** To begin with a general question, how would you describe the current state of civic engagement in the UK?

**Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis:** My Lords, thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to share some thoughts with you today.

Overall, on civic engagement, I believe that there are many strong points within our society today and there is also room for lots of improvement. To give some context to the current situation, we are experiencing a new development within our society, taking us somewhat away from previous divisions into a newly divided society. Previously, when you asked people to identify divisions within the political framework in our society, they would talk about east and west, left and right, conservative and liberal. Today, we are finding that there is a new fault line differentiating between drawbridge up and drawbridge down, between inclusive and exclusive, and a “them and us” mindset that is leading people to choose between particular values and universal values. This is finding its expression, for example, in attitudes towards immigration: to what degree we will allow our borders to be open to outsiders or shut our borders to them; to what degree we will engage openly in free global trade or favour local businesses; to what degree we will allow others to permeate through and influence our own culture or prefer to preserve our own unique culture. The responses that people have to these questions will inform them at a time of national elections and referenda.

This now means that there is a schism within some circles between the particular and the universal. Within the Jewish tradition, as is the case within many faith traditions, we embrace both. We believe in a very
strong particular identity and, thanks to championing that identity, we believe that we are well placed to be responsible citizens for the sake of all our society. When you have people who are championing only particular values without any interest in universalism, that serves no good to wider society. Similarly, when you have those who are only interested in universalistic values and do not respect the right of people to their own particular identity, that too is unhealthy for our society.

Cardinal Vincent Nichols: I echo the Chief Rabbi’s thanks for this opportunity and very much wish you well in the work of this Select Committee. It is a very important area, as the Chief Rabbi has illustrated in those perceptive comments.

Overall, we see the best of civic involvement at times of emergencies. On Monday evening, there were citations for all those who responded to the last three tragedies in London and they showed remarkable generosity and bravery. On the other hand, as the Chief Rabbi says, there are these fault lines, and the one that strikes me most is the people who feel that they have no investment in our society, that they are incapable of making a contribution, and if that contribution is not wanted in the labour market it is very difficult for them to find the motivation to contribute as a volunteer. The level of long-term volunteering is not great. I was given the figure of 15.2 million people volunteering once a month. In a population of 60 million, that is not very many. As the Chief Rabbi said, we are getting to a situation where we lack an overarching narrative of what it means to be part of this society. I could continue for a long time, but I will stop there.

Q165 Baroness Barker: Good morning. Thank you very much for the thoughts and analysis that you have outlined about the creation of a universal context in which to pursue individual or particular identities.

We talked some weeks ago to the Inter Faith Network about examples of their work on building communities. Would you like to talk from your point of view about what you see as examples of faith communities working with government to build that overall context in which we have a strong society?

Cardinal Vincent Nichols: Your question was quite precise about faith communities working with government. From the Catholic point of view, there are obviously long-standing and very effective partnerships with government, particularly in education. We educate 10% of the pupils in this country in a way that from the point of view of external examination is very satisfactory and robust. I think of the long history of co-operation on overseas aid, of our regular stance of urging people to take part in elections and to be participants in the process, and of formal statements, which we have reflected here in this country, of emphasising and upholding the dignity and the importance of a political vocation.

However, there are also negatives, which perhaps I could illustrate with a story, which Baroness Morris will be familiar with. One of the best drop-in centres for homeless people in Birmingham is the Fireside Centre. It was
run by very dedicated people led by a community of religious sisters. Their one principle was that they would never accept any government funding, because it always brought with it a perception of how things should be done and an overinterfering control, they felt. On the whole, Catholic charities in this city, such as the Cardinal Hume Centre, The Passage and many others, will deliberately limit themselves to accepting never more than 45% to 50% of government funding not only to protect their sustainability when government funding goes down but to have a sense of, “Here we have an ethos that we want to protect and promote, because we believe it is humanly sound and full of recognition of the dignity of the people for whom we are working”.

There are other points I could make, but the co-operation with government, except on those large, well-structured fronts, is variable. We have recently seen a number of examples where, as the Chief Rabbi has said, there is an insistence on one set of values to the detriment of others, which has also seen some of our partnership with government come to an end because there has been no space to tolerate a particular perspective. That is a bit ironic when we spend our time proclaiming that tolerance is a great British value.

Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis: If you will allow me to refer to a number of events during the past months, we held a very special Sabbath, called Shabbat UK, through which we called upon all Jews in the UK to engage with the Sabbath and to observe it. It was a remarkable success, and from the Prime Minister down we had messages of support for this initiative through which we championed our own particular unique faith and values. Just two weeks later, we celebrated Mitzvah Day, and over 40,000 volunteers in the UK from the Jewish community were engaged in activities well beyond the borders of the Jewish community. I was privileged to accompany the Cardinal when we went to a centre in south Hampstead to help with the packaging of parcels of clothing for the poor in this country. I am sending, on behalf of my office, some top Jewish university students to Ghana in a few weeks’ time to help with social responsibility projects there, as we did a year ago when we sent students to India, with great messages of support from government. Perhaps most significantly of all, my wife and I visited a centre in Bradford that has been created by World Jewish Relief, utilising funds raised within our community, where we witnessed the help that is being given to Syrian refugees in this country. That centre relies very heavily on a significant grant given by the Home Office. Here we have a Jewish initiative to help Syrian immigrants from abroad with government funding to enable us to be responsible citizens and to care about the universal values that are so central to us.

I will go one step further, because the question related to what government are doing. It is important to concentrate on the messages coming from government as to the tone that is being set within the country. Sometimes, I believe it is right, but sometimes I sense all too often that religion is perceived to be part of a problem within our society rather than being appreciated as something of enormous value to our
society. Those who are religious have roots, something of pride and something to live with and to live for, and in utilising religion responsibly they are well-placed to be outstanding citizens. I often wish that there would be a more healthy tone being set from government down within our society and, rather than trying to banish religion from the public square, instead, appreciating its central role within our society.

**Cardinal Vincent Nichols:** I think you can tell that the Chief Rabbi and I understand each other well. I was privileged to be at his installation in which he said that one of the main principles of his term of office would be to help Jewish charities to turn outwards and to serve the wider community, which he achieves steadily step by step. I quoted 15 million volunteering. In the Roman Catholic diocese of Westminster there are about half a million Catholics. We put in our report to the Charity Commission two years ago that they contributed four million hours of voluntary work, and in this year’s report we give an account of 840 different outreach projects being put forward through the Catholic community, often in co-operation with others, to try to reach out to the needs of society. To back up the Chief Rabbi’s point, religious faith, with the stability and the vision that it gives, is an immense resource, not a problem.

**Baroness Pitkeathley:** I am sure we have all been very interested in those examples you have given us about how people of faith engage, but what barriers do people of faith face in engaging in their communities and how could these barriers be removed?

**Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis:** Going back to my initial thoughts about the divide within our society, the strongest barrier is when people perceive their religious belief to encourage them to build walls around their own particular entity. Therefore, it is hugely important that faith leaders today encourage the members of our communities to look outwards and to guarantee that the principles, elements and beliefs of our faith exist to enable us to be responsible citizens within society.

**Cardinal Vincent Nichols:** Without wanting to repeat what the Chief Rabbi has said, we also suffer from ignorance. Maybe that is partly self-inflicted, but there is no doubt that the level of religious illiteracy is considerable. It means that people cannot even read their landscape. In Dollis Hill in north London, 15 years ago on a Sunday morning, there were a lot of cars parked and some people walked along, obviously a long time living in this country. They looked and said, “What’s going on up there? Is it a car boot sale?” Somehow, we are failing to help people understand the culture and the world in which they live. The privatisation of religious belief, which the Chief Rabbi has spoken of, the lack of clear messaging about what is and what is not important and in our stance towards religion are very important.

In contrast, for example, Her Majesty’s Christmas message every year is a very important moment, because she, in that wonderful way, spells out what gives her stability and what can offer stability very widely in society,
which she symbolises. There are many things, but the one I would put at the top of the list would be a lack of religious literacy.

**Baroness Morris of Yardley:** This is a very interesting discussion about your views on working with government. I was reflecting on the Cardinal’s answer and I can see that the box-ticking, the top-down, the overzealous attitude sometimes of government and their officials can get in the way, but you hear that from anybody who takes government money. They always find that to be a burden, and I understand that very often it is true, it happens. Can we explore that a little more so far as faith is concerned? I thought of examples of projects that the Roman Catholic Church has done, and I am sure the same is true of the Jewish faith, which run counter to the prevailing political views or values, and I can see the point you were making, but were you talking more widely? For example, in Birmingham, it was the Catholic Church working with poor people in my former constituency where there would be no difference of values, and were they overbearing even then, for example, in the rules that might pertain to adoption agencies, which you might have been doing, as opposed to the work you might be doing with poor people in any constituency?

**Cardinal Vincent Nichols:** Sometimes it is prudence and sometimes it is instinctive. Sometimes caution in accepting too much funding from a government source is prudent, and with recent cuts a lot of Catholic charities have survived whereas others have not. Sometimes it is an instinctive lack of trust. People are very uneasy about becoming arms of the State. I will give you two examples.

We recently opened a house for women rescued from trafficking. It is a house that we support entirely from raising funds and it costs us £350,000 a year. We have not become part of the national referral mechanism because it has conditions and consequences to it and we wanted to offer an unconditional welcome and hospitality to women who have been rescued from trafficking. I know that Kevin Hyland is working hard to have that national referral mechanism adjusted to make it more open. That would be one example.

Another example would be The Passage behind Westminster Cathedral where there was, at one point, the beginnings of an intrusion that wanted The Passage to act as a point of control of undocumented, illegal immigrants, which it was not willing to do. Those are two examples of a hard edge where co-operation with central government can bring its consequences which would run counter to the instinct that we want to offer a very unconditional, protective and creative environment.

**The Chairman:** Chief Rabbi, do you want to add anything to that on the interface between government and voluntary groups?

**Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis:** I am not sure that it is relevant to us. I hear what the Cardinal has said.

**Baroness Barker:** The Cardinal spoke about fault lines, and it is our job
to explore some of those. There are tensions between the practice and beliefs of some faith groups and some sections of society, such as women and the gay community. Do you support the Government’s actions to date against faith schools which have failed to uphold “fundamental British values”? You will see in our questions that we question the term “fundamental British values”, but for these purposes we take it to mean a broad-based understanding of what it is to be a British citizen.

**Cardinal Vincent Nichols:** It is a very interesting area. What strikes me is that the British values that are listed and commonly spoken about, if I understand it correctly, have their origin with Ofsted and that is the perspective that first presented these values. You know better than me that the search for a list of British values goes back a very long time. It is interesting that in the Ofsted presentation of these things they belong in a section of education that is to do with spiritual, moral, social and cultural education, so there is the clear indication that British values, as stated, have a spiritual foundation, that they can best be presented in the context of a spiritual, moral, social and cultural perspective.

That is where the discussion gets very interesting, because what strikes me about the British values, as stated, is that they are—I do not want to be too crude—a bit rootless. They may be rooted in social custom, but what is the root of tolerance? I always think of tolerance as a fruit and it grows out of something. I have a stance towards another person that enables me, because I understand something, to be tolerant of them because I recognise their dignity and the importance of difference. If we keep picking the fruits of tolerance and not attending to the roots of the tree, it disappears, which is what we see: tolerance becomes cynicism, cynicism becomes indifference, indifference hardens and we end up going down the road that leads to hate incidents and hate crimes. Even Ofsted, in its documentation, says, “These values need their spiritual root”, which is what we are not attending to enough, and that is where faith schools, which have a clear understanding of the roots of these values, have a very important contribution to make.

Thinking of some of the schools in Birmingham that got classed under the “Trojan horse” headline, they were not faith schools but local authority schools. That would not have happened in a faith school because it knows what it is based on and where it is going. There is something very important about being ready to explore what lies behind the fairly arbitrary selection of British values, that they need roots.

We had a fascinating seminar in Oxford a couple of years ago, which tried to explore the link between human rights and human dignity. Whereas human rights find legal expression, which is proper and right, human dignity is much more difficult to codify, yet it asks the question, “Where do these human rights come from? What is it about the human person that gives them an innate dignity and, from that dignity, a flow of rights?” Rights are not given by a state, they are recognised by a state, but a state is never the source of a person’s rights. It is innate in the person, and unless we are ready to explore what that innate dignity of the human person is it becomes very individualised and subject to
precisely the analysis that the Chief Rabbi gave at the beginning between the individual and the universal.

Lord Blunkett: I do not want to preclude the Chief Rabbi from commenting on this, but this is fascinating stuff. Given the Catholic Church’s stance on particular moral issues, how do we avoid the toleration of the intolerable, recognising that tolerance inevitably springs from benign acceptance of something that you do not actually agree with because, if you agree with it, you do not have to tolerate it? This goes back to my old tutor many years ago who used to argue this to the point where, in the end, I had lost him, but it is important in terms of faith. If you are teaching tolerance of things that fundamentally you do not necessarily agree with, that allows that debate to take place, but at what point, given that you have used the analogy of not tolerating something because it was unacceptable, do you fall over into toleration of what you would consider to be intolerable?

Cardinal Vincent Nichols: I would go back, if I may, to the Chief Rabbi’s point that the very drama of living a religious faith is that you embrace fundamental values and principles, which you try to uphold, and then you live with all the divergences that human life throws up. If I may go back, for example, to the same-sex marriage debate, at no point did the Catholic Church object to same-sex marriage, and it did not speak against it; we spoke in favour of our understanding of marriage as between a man and a woman. You are smiling and you think it is a point of sophistry, but it is not.

Lord Blunkett: No, but it is a good way out of it. The Catholic Church has always been a better politician than politicians.

Cardinal Vincent Nichols: It is to see the positive. If I may take the example of the adoption agencies, the very effective, compassionate Catholic adoption agencies were put out of business because, if I put it positively, we held to our understanding of the paramountcy principle, the prime importance of the child. Therefore, we held to the view that a child, unless there is some remarkable circumstance, is best served in nurture as they were created in nature, by a mother and a father. It was that positive principle that we were not allowed to uphold. It was not that we were intolerant of others but we wanted to maintain a principle, which we still would believe strongly to be the human good.

Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis: The concept of tolerance, which has correctly been asked about, does not imply acceptance. The Hebrew word for “tolerance” is “sovlanut”, from the root “sevel”, which means discomfort. We are not at ease with this, but we allow it to take place out of respect for others to have their space and the opportunity to express themselves how they wish. The best analogy I can think of is the symphony orchestra in which we have separate instruments, each one making its own unique sound and, under the baton of the conductor, blending together to produce perfect harmony. Surely this is what we should strive towards achieving within our society. We have different faith groups and those who do not consider themselves to be religious at all,
people from different backgrounds and different cultural values. We need to respect people for who they are and where they come from and, under the baton of human co-operation, we need to blend together to produce that harmonious society, not through uniformity but unity, which means respecting differences and enabling us to thrive in that way.

**Cardinal Vincent Nichols:** Spoken like a true rabbi.

**Baroness Barker:** As a member of one of these communities, to be tolerated is to be treated differently in our society rather than to be understood or appreciated. I would like to counter some of the impression that the Cardinal has given. As members of this Committee have heard me say before, I am an ambassador for the Albert Kennedy Trust, the gay youth homelessness trust, and 25% of young people who are on the streets are often from the LGBT community with a higher incidence of homelessness than in the rest of the population. In many of the cases they see not one religion but religion as a factor. While religious and faith communities certainly have a great contribution to make towards integration and stability in society, they are also, for some of us, a source of unease and hardship. I come back to the point about schools and the importance of doing what you suggest, which is to enable schools to emphasise the universal as a very basic part of their teaching and then the specific.

**Cardinal Vincent Nichols:** I would not want to give the impression for one minute that we do not have our problems; every community does, because there are the same streams and currents that run through any community. Yes, I am happy to admit to mea culpa, but the foundations are right. A Catholic is taught every day that to give is better than to receive and there is an innate training, if you like, towards generosity, compassion and forgiveness, but we get it wrong quite often.

Q168 **Lord Harries of Pentregarth:** We are all familiar, particularly you, if I might say so, with the idea of a faith journey—baptism, bar mitzvah, marriage and so on—but what do you think of the idea of a civic journey, and if that is possible what do you think the Government might do to make this a reality?

**Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis:** First, I do not understand why a personal faith journey needs to be detached from a civic journey; one can be integrated into the other. To give you an example, the most significant point within the life of a young Jewish boy or girl is bar mitzvah or bat mitzvah, when a boy is 13 and a girl is 12. In the vast majority of our communities, we have the concept of twinning where the boy or girl will twin their happy occasion with an unfortunate person somewhere in the world who is not able to do so or with a charity or a good cause. Each individual marks his or her significant personal milestone with our society and utilises it as a springboard from which to engage constructively and responsibly with society. If the Government choose to have some civic milestones as well, anything that can encourage people all the more to engage better and more responsibly with society, is fine. I would hope
that, if that were to ever happen, it would not clash with our faith milestones where one would have to choose between one and the other.

I believe that we are missing a trick and that there is something missing in Britain that could be a British equivalent of America’s Thanksgiving. Yes, we have the Royal Family, which is the closest we come to it with the Queen's message at Christmas, as the Cardinal mentioned, and significant Royal Family moments—thankfully, there is another one to look forward to. Beyond that, we are missing an opportunity to celebrate our Britishness as British people. We need a day in the year on which we can express that with pride and can concentrate on our British values.

I am also aware of the fact that the vast majority of people are not familiar with what British values are. If you were to stop somebody in the street and say, “What are the four key elements of British values?” I am sure they would not even know there were four and would have no clue. We need a day and I would highly recommend the introduction of such a day, which would significantly enhance our opportunity to celebrate our British values.

Cardinal Vincent Nichols: Echoing, in a way, what the Chief Rabbi has said, moments in a journey need a sense of journey and destiny, that we know where we are trying to go and these are the moments of our progress. It is that underlying sense of purpose and narrative that has to be more than personal achievement and has to have communal dimensions to it and a communal vision of what we want to be. We would use a phrase, such as “the kingdom of God”. What are we trying to do here and what are the resources? How do we spell out our vision? In a way, the Empire did, but with the negative consequences that we live with today. If there are to be stages of citizenship, it needs a narrative and something that encapsulates our sense of purpose as a nation, which is not easy.

Q169 Lord Verjee: Do you think that the Government’s fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs represents a good list? Your Eminence and Chief Rabbi, you have talked about that, and the consensus is that perhaps the list, which originally came from Ofsted, needs to be expanded. How would we go about expanding that list and what would your ideas be on getting to a consensus of how to come up with a new list, a new definition?

Cardinal Vincent Nichols: I met the historian, Mr Starkey, a couple of years ago and he said, “No, no, it’s a wicked sense of humour and a willingness to queue that are the key British values”, but he was being very mischievous. I am not sure about extending it because then the list has almost as many things as there are contributors. If I were to make a contribution, I would like to see a greater emphasis on religious freedom, not just tolerance of religion but freedom for religious expression. The challenge is to deepen those values and find their roots and foundations, which I have spoken on already.
Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis: I agree with what the Cardinal has said. For me, what we have is all right, because you could debate this endlessly, and wherever you go on this you will never come up with something, such as the Ten Commandments, which were given from God, so that is it; they are authoritative and we have them. We will not come up with that with regard to British values. A lot of thought has gone into it. These are solid values and certainly they tally with the essence of the Jewish faith. It is good to have a small number of headline values because, otherwise, it is too much for people to comprehend and cope with. As the Cardinal said, with each one, we can drill down, we can debate, thrash out the issues and come to a deeper and better understanding. Let us now do the work of improving our values rather than debating what they are.

Baroness Lister of Burtersett: Perhaps I could take a step back from that. A number of people who have given evidence to us have questioned why we are calling them “fundamental British values”. It goes back to your interesting opening remarks, Chief Rabbi, about the universal and the particular. They would argue that these are not values that are particular to Britain and could arguably be perhaps not totally universal but universal for democratic citizenship. Do you think it is helpful to describe them as “fundamental British values”, or would there be better ways of talking about them as, say, the values of Britain citizenship, which has been suggested to us, or the values that we share in Britain?

Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis: I am absolutely okay with “British values” while we are outward-looking and we embrace all humanity. We are British and are proud of our Britishness and it is important for us to highlight the elements of our way of life, which perhaps distinguish us, in some respects, from others due to our history and the functioning within our society while highlighting, of course, that we are all members of civilisation.

With regard to the term “fundamental”, I am okay with it, with one reservation. In some instances, fundamental values can lead towards fundamentalism, which would be in the event that they prompt people to adopt an extremist approach whereby those who are championing fundamental values have no tolerance for the particular values of a particular entity within our society. In the event that such values are used dogmatically as a stick with which to beat faith groups or other particular interest groups would be a huge pity and would go against the spirit of what the values are about. Apart from that, I am okay with the terminology.

Cardinal Vincent Nichols: Very interesting. I suppose that in the word “British” we are packing in all the complex issues about identity. Of course, everybody lives with various facets to their identity. I am sure there would be people who would say, “Don’t foreclose that too easily. The values are of this country and this country is Great Britain”, so there is a certain logic to it, but, as the Chief Rabbi has indicated, even that very stance can be abused and become something quite objectionable.
With “fundamental”, I would have a little reservation, because I do not think they are fundamental. There are foundations beneath these values and, therefore, it is a misnomer to call them “fundamental”. I like the suggestion that the Chief Rabbi has just made of some work in linking these particular values to our history. It would become very important, for example, with the issue of democracy and the issue of tolerance, and in that sense to relate them more clearly to this country’s historical experience would validate more strongly the use of the word “British”. They are British because of our history and not so much because of their nature. Because of their nature, they are human values.

Baroness Lister of Burtersett: Something your Eminence referred to earlier, that the empire was not always a very happy history, raised the question of how our history as an empire is reflected in these particular values.

Cardinal Vincent Nichols: It is complicated.

Lord Harries of Pentregarth: I would like to focus on a slightly controversial area with the Chief Rabbi. There are some wonderful Jewish schools in London and Manchester that are very much part of the mainstream and are much sought-after, but as we know from television programmes, what we read in the press and what has been done by Ofsted, there are some other independent, free-standing Jewish schools that do not come under your jurisdiction. Do you have any words of wisdom or advice about how the Government might approach this? There is a fundamental clash between what people would regard as fundamental British values about the equality of the sexes, for example, and what seems to be being taught in certain schools.

Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis: Work is under way, through conversations between the Department for Education and representatives of various schools, to discuss this very issue. It is not as if nothing is happening on what we can come up with to suggest in this regard, but it is an issue that is being treated and looked at. From the point of view of the Jewish schools you have mentioned, there is a very keen desire to champion British values within the schools while being true to the religious principles which they follow. I am very hopeful that we can achieve a situation in which everything should be all right in respect of what the objectives are.

Lord Harries of Pentregarth: You do not think that there are occasions when there is a fundamental clash where we have to face the fact and have to choose? Would you agree that not everything can be negotiated?

Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis: I do not think any of us would agree to a one-size-fits-all statute whereby everybody has to hold identical views, identical policies and an identical way of life. We need to provide room for people to behave according to their own traditions and in the spirit of their faith while being an asset to and enhancing our society, in the spirit of what I was speaking about earlier. Where there can be some elements of a clash is the reason why people need to talk to determine a way
forward which is acceptable to government, is true to British values and in a way which does not compromise our Jewish tradition.

**Cardinal Vincent Nichols:** This is slightly a divergent point that I would like to contribute. Yesterday, I was at St Mary’s University where we announced and launched a new course, a certificate in education for teaching Islam. It is the fruit of a long discussion with Islamic leaders and its aim is to enable anybody who wants to teach Islam, whether they are Islamic or not, to be trained in a way that has all the critical disciplines of a modern educational system that we would agree.

**Lord Blunkett:** Is this the one that is linked to a new app?

**Cardinal Vincent Nichols:** No, this is different. It is a fairly traditional course in St Mary’s University that will meet the highest standards of educational practice and enable those who wish to be teachers of Islam to have that qualification and the disciplines that we would recognise as necessary for the coherent contemporary teaching of religious faith. That kind of step is important, because it is the first step in enabling our society to understand far more deeply what the Islamic faith is rather than some of its caricatures and disruptions that we are faced with often.

**Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis:** To add another point that is pertinent in the context of Jewish faith schools, I am exceptionally proud of our faith schools and the extent to which our faith schools are always close to the top of the leagues with regard to secular excellence and the extent to which our pupils are encouraged to become outstanding, responsible citizens.

I want to mention another event which took place last month. I was privileged to be in Glasgow for the opening of the Calderwood Lodge and St Clare’s primary schools. This is a world first. The school was officially opened by me and the local Catholic bishop. Calderwood Lodge has been a Jewish primary school in an area in Glasgow which the Jewish community moved out of, and similarly St Clare’s needed a new campus, so the local authority invested £17 million in building a brand-new, state-of-the-art campus that incorporates a Jewish school and a Catholic school. They share common facilities in a central area while maintaining their own faith traditions and education and the pupils play in the playground together and have a number of shared assemblies. This is an outstanding model of co-existence, which we should roll out for people to appreciate, of engaging with others successfully and in a healthy way while being proud of our own traditions.

**Q171 Lord Blunkett:** Throughout the discussion this morning, which I have found very enlightening, we have touched on the interesting issue of the personal giving, personal commitment, volunteering and the outreach versus the political engagement. Your Eminence, you will be able to identify better than I can the Latin-American bishop who said, “When I give to the poor, I’m a saint. When I try to avoid them being poor, I’m a communist”. I would like both of you to comment on the engagement with the political, with a small “p”, arena in terms of change. I mentioned...
earlier that I met with the Catholic bishops, and it was true of the Anglican Church and the Jewish fraternity, when I was Education Secretary and they were the best negotiators I have ever come across.

Baroness Morris of Yardley: I would second that.

Lord Blunkett: How do we translate the personal into the broader community that we have mentioned?

Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis: It is such a great question, Lord Blunkett. On Yom Kippur, our Day of Atonement, the holiest day of our year, part of our liturgy is to repeat the prayer of the High Priest in the temple. On that day, he prayed to God that God should not listen to the prayers of travellers. It is the only instance in which we have a prayer asking God not to listen to prayers. Why do we ask God not to listen to the prayers of travellers? Because travellers, or tourists, always pray for good weather.

Lord Blunkett: This is a truly Jewish story.

Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis: They put their own personal interests before the interests of wider society. Therefore, we pray to God to turn a deaf ear to the pleas of those who are not mindful of the overall interests of our society. We accept that, as individuals, we have a responsibility through our individuality to general society.

The second point is the teaching of Maimonides, who identified for us eight levels of charity. I will not take you through all eight, but I recommend them highly to you, and the very highest level of charity is when you teach somebody to be able to assist himself or herself not to be dependent on charity. As Confucius said, “If I give somebody some fish, that person will eat on one day. If I teach them how to fish, they will eat for the rest of their lives”, which is certainly something that our Government should be investing in.

Cardinal Vincent Nichols: I do not know if I can add much to that. I have to admit that it is more and more difficult for a voice to be heard, particularly in a rather sharpened political arena these days, unless it has an evidential base. To me, that is the logic of encouraging people to be strongly committed to the hands-on work of contributing to the well-being of society and, out of that base, to be able to make an argument. We heard in the House of Commons yesterday the descriptions of levels of poverty. For me to be able to add to that, I have to be able to say, “And this is what we are doing”. I cannot look to any religious status that I have as giving a political edge to what I say, but I have to look for an evidential edge to give some weight to what I want to contribute.

The Chairman: Thank you both very much. We inevitably get involved in the detail, but it is very important that, from time to time, we get the narrative, the big picture and the roots. On behalf of the Committee, thank you for coming along to make sure that we lift up our eyes to the hills.