

THREE FAITHS FORUM



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Educating in Interfaith

"Educate for co-existence," said Dr Georgette Bennett, President of the Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding, New York, when she spoke as part of a panel at St. Ethelburga's Centre for Peace and Reconciliation yesterday about the Tanenbaum Centre's innovative primary and secondary school education programs promoting interfaith and the need to be true to one's own beliefs without demonising the other. "We have to confront contradictions within our own text from which the demonising arises," she said. Practical programmes in which the teaching of theology becomes user-friendly, and academically integrated programmes for primary schools which incorporate basic skills of literacy and numeracy were the most effective approach.

Iftikhar Malik, Director of the Luqman Foundation UK, spoke about Muslim youth not seeing themselves as part of the mainstream and that they have yet to discover their role in mainstream culture. He felt that the fault lay in the lack of serious debate on Islam within the community and that no serious material was available for study in the training of Imams. The Luqman Foundation was creating independent educational programs for both Imams and educators.

Dr Sumaya Al Yusuf, Head of IB curriculum at King Fahad Academy, Acton, remarked that Muslim faith schools were resistant to adopt "inter-religious" education because of the fear of losing their Muslim identity.

Laurie Rosenberg, Headteacher at Simon Marks Jewish Primary School, London asked, "What is an educated 21st Century citizen and how can we ensure that tomorrow's society will have the leaders to build a safer and more moral society?" He felt that each faith must get its own act together in order to pave the way for mutual understanding. "Simon Marks is a hub of dialogue within the community," he said, "faith schools must not shut themselves off but bring parents together in dialogue and create community education centres."

After a lively discussion from the floor, Dr Bennett closed the meeting by saying, "There is a fear that people will be homogenised. In my experience in dialogue, actually the opposite happens. By putting oneself in the place of the other, one becomes more grounded within his/her own faith. The need to distinguish between universal and particularistic parts of each religion and deliver educational programs to tackle these and other issues in primary and secondary schools is imperative now more than ever."

Rev Dr Marcus Braybrooke, Co-Founder of The Three Faiths Forum took the Chair.

The seminar was organised by The Three Faiths Forum upon being awarded a grant from the Home Office for the recruitment of an Educational Officer.

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