Distinctly Welcoming

Richard Sudworth

Christian presence in a multifaith society

Do you or your church lack confidence in reaching out to those of different religious backgrounds?

Here is a clear, practical guide to the core issues and challenges facing churches in their engagement with those of other faiths.

- Earthed in real life – lots of stories
- Accessible style – readable and interesting
- Biblically rooted – creative reflections from Scripture
- Professionally credible – examples of good practice
- Practical suggestions – how to take things further

‘If you live in the 19th Century you probably won’t need to read this book. If you live in the 21st, you must’. Gerard Kelly

Richard Sudworth is a CMS mission partner and a consultant with the organisation ‘Faith to Faith’. Having previously worked in North Africa, he is now based in a Muslim-majority area of Birmingham.

www.scriptureunion.org.uk

ISBN 978 1 84427 317 1
DISTINCTLY WELCOMING

Christian presence in a multifaith society
DISTINCTLY WELCOMING

Christian presence in a multifaith society

Richard Sudworth
With love to my fellow-travellers in this diverse world:
Fiona, Nellie and Dylan
Endorsements

‘Being a Christian amongst people of others faiths is so fundamental, so essential a thing in 21st Century Europe that you’d think we’d have all spent many hours thinking about it. But we haven’t – most of us have given little or no thought to this hugely significant aspect of our life and mission, and our responses are cobbled together from equal measures of fear, ignorance and self-righteousness. Not so Richard Sudworth.

Richard is passionate, articulate, biblical and determined, and he brings to his subject the considerable fruit of many years of patient practice. This is a lively and well-paced book, avoided the pitfalls of “dull worthiness” so often associated with inter-faith dialogue. Reading it will bring rich rewards for the church worker or missionary in a multi-faith context; for the youth worker in any contemporary urban context, or just for the concerned Christian who wants to live in the real world that actually surrounds us rather than the fantasy created by an out-of-date and out-of-touch church. If you live in the 19th Century you probably won’t need to read this book. If you live in the 21st, you must’.

Gerard Kelly (Crossroads International Church, Amsterdam)

‘I am really excited about this book. How we as Christians relate to other faiths and cultures is one of the two big mission challenges we face (along with the care of the creation). This book reframes the debate in a way that takes it out of the old arguments and domains and opens it up in fresh ways. Richard’s passion and wisdom shine through and I hope his dream comes true that a new generation will engage in the debate and take up the challenge’.

Jonny Baker (Church Mission Society)
Distinctly Welcoming

‘An accessible and thought-provoking introduction to one of the crucial questions facing Christians in a plural post-Christendom culture – how to move beyond assumptions, fears and stereotypes to engage graciously, hopefully and sensitively with members of other faith communities. Combining cultural analysis, mission theology, biblical reflection, stories and practical application, this book encourages us to celebrate the diversity of our emerging culture, discover God at work in unexpected places and share our faith in the context of friendship and mutual respect’.  
Stuart Murray Williams (Urban Expression)
# Contents

Acknowledgements 11  
Foreword 13  

1. Introduction: back to the future 17  
2. Give me back my mission 27  
3. No limits; just edges: distinctive faith 41  
4. Telling it like it is: evangelism in a multi-faith context 55  
5. Serving with distinction: community action and other faiths 67  
6. Young at heart: youth and children’s work 83  
7. Reconciling with distinction: Christians as agents of change in a diverse society 99  
8. Bringing it all back home: a church that welcomes and includes 115  
9. Fuel for the journey: spirituality for interfaith work 129  
10. My space? Embracing a post-Christian society 143  

Postscript 157  

---

9
Acknowledgements

Many thanks to:

Andrew Smith, aka Smeeee, for providing the material on Youth and Children’s ministry in Chapter 6, ‘Young at Heart’.

Joy Madeiros, for the foreword and her work on Chapter 3, ‘Distinctive Faith’.

Kumar Rajagopalan, for permitting reproduction of his story and the provision of his material in Chapter 8, ‘Bringing it all Back Home’, on an inclusive church.

Thanks also to:

Ann Bower, Gill Marchant, Robin Thomson, Nigel Pimlott, Martin Thomas and Jonny Baker for comments, suggestions and constructive critiques.

Toby Howarth, Pall Singh, Paul Francis, Smeeee, Richard Woods and Paul Bendor-Samuel for inspiration, encouragement, mentoring and friendship. This book is but the smallest fruit of your investment and vision in my life.

www.distinctlywelcoming.com
Britain, whose Head of State appoints the Archbishop of Canterbury and whose Bishops sit in the House of Lords, is slowly waking up to what it means to have an increasingly multi-faith identity. On the one hand, it welcomes its new image. From what we are led to believe, the face of multicultural Britain made all the difference to the successful Olympics bid. However, the confusion about whether crosses or veils can or should be worn and the endless discussion about what it means to be British indicate that the nation is not as much at ease with its identity as some glossy presentations would have you believe.

But it’s not all bad news. Over the last few years, Government has successfully encouraged faith groups and communities to come to the table as equal partners in community regeneration and development. It has also introduced religious discrimination regulations to protect people in employment; the Equality Act outlaws discrimination on the grounds of religion and belief in the delivery of goods and services and legislation also exists to protect people from victimisation based on religious and racial hatred. The diversity agenda now firmly recognises religion and belief as a difference in terms of identity, along with other categories of difference such as race, age, gender, disability and sexual orientation and, for the first time in the UK, there is an officially recognised body – the Commission for Equality and Human Rights – that has responsibility for advising on matters relating to discrimination on the grounds of religion and belief.

However, while the public is learning to respect religious rights at the level of dress, food, prayer times and holy days, and recognises that Government should ensure faith communities are
engaged as partners, many faith groups and people of faith still encounter suspicion, prejudice or religious ignorance.

It would seem that, while the existence and even the activities of faith groups are acceptable, the faith of faith groups is still very problematic.

Is this, perhaps, because a large portion of the British public now have no experience of religion for themselves, and do not know what it means to have a faith motivation or how to relate to it? Not so long ago, even if you had rejected faith for yourself, it was more than likely that you would have grown up in a churchgoing family or had a relationship with a family member who ensured that you went along to a place of worship. But this kind of experience is far less common today.

Or is it because the battle for ‘secularism’ has been won hands down? The role of the Church has receded significantly by comparison to what it was two or three centuries ago and religion has become essentially a private matter. Church has been relegated by the media to an army of ‘do-gooders’ who are willing but not very relevant and, worse still, often not very professional. Alastair Campbell, No 10’s famous one-time communications guru, will only ever be remembered for telling the nation that ‘we don’t do God’. So, despite the increased interest in spirituality and the significant changes in the faith landscape, the Church appears to have colluded with its own demise and as a result, the UK has grown pretty reluctant to acknowledge its rôle in society. While the media are desperate to hear Tony Blair say that he prays with George Bush or that he prays at all, ‘secularism’ has capitalised on the fact that the Church has left itself behind, along with its ability to prove its credibility in the public square.

Or is it because people believe what they read in the press and have come to the conclusion that religion belongs to the fanatics who are capable of creating chaos and disaster?

Or, finally, is it perhaps more to do with the fact that Christianity in the UK, having for centuries been the state religion, has never really had to explain itself and finds itself lacking confidence in its identity at a time in history when it needs more than ever to set out what it stands for?

Whatever the reason, and it’s probably a mixture of all the above and more, the reality as we know it could not be more different. Beneath the headlines of religious intolerance and the experience
of fear and suspicion and prejudice are the untold stories of countless individuals who, motivated by their personal faith, choose to work for the betterment of our society.

For them, faith is always personal but never private.

Like the countless politicians who have allowed their beliefs to inspire action, making a positive difference to those around them, they dedicate themselves to working for the public good.

Like the thousands of churches and other faith groups up and down the country that commit to improving the lives of society’s most vulnerable, they run hostels for the homeless, alcohol recovery programmes and youth mentoring schemes in response to the needs they see around them.

Without ‘public’ faith, there would not have been a civil rights movement in the US or the ‘Jubilee Debt Cancellation’ or the ‘Make Poverty History’ campaigns in the UK. All these movements were inspired and led by people of faith who decided that what they believed about God and humanity should impact the world around them.

Today, the impact of ‘public faith’ can be seen in the vitality of the British economy. Studies have shown that faith groups contribute enormously to local economies through providing skills training, education and local service provision – very often on a voluntary basis. What would happen if their faith remained private? The economy, together with social capital, community regeneration and civic society to name but a few of the buzz words, would undoubtedly suffer.

It’s true, for both right and wrong reasons, that Britain is in the grip of a fearful and, to some extent, knee-jerk reaction to faith. As people of faith, we long for Government and the public at large to recognise the extent to which faith is an essential part of everyday public life. But as the Chinese saying goes, when we point a finger of responsibility at someone else, three fingers point back at us. . .

It’s time for Christians to come to terms with the fact that the UK is now a multi-faith nation in which there is a plurality of religious beliefs. As much as we rightly call on Government to lever political will on our behalf, it’s surely, first and foremost, our responsibility as Christians to work out how to behave in relationships with people of other faiths and how to work together in community for the good of all.
It’s true to say that any time in history is unique. But this moment, the beginning of the third millennium, truly presents unique opportunities which will not come our way again. Never before have so many different faith communities found their home in the UK. Never before has Government made such an effort to bring faith groups to the partnership table. Never before has there been such a commitment to religious diversity or religious equality, albeit wrapped up in some of the confusion around the debate on multiculturalism.

All these conditions and many more create a great opportunity for the Church to focus on its central mission and ministry by finding relevant and appropriate ways to welcome and relate to people who don’t know about or have experience of Christianity. But like the shape of the landscape, the discourse is changing fast, and the Church must urgently address not only how to engage with it but also how to act appropriately, beyond the dialogue.

But what do church mission and ministry look like in 21st Century multi-faith Britain?

That’s what this book is all about. My prayer is that it will inspire and help you to embrace and include people of different faith identities, while strengthening confidence in your own Christian identity.

Joy Madeiros is Director of Public Policy for Faithworks, the Christian agency dedicated to helping the church engage in holistic mission.
Chapter 1

Introduction: back to the future

‘It’s easy to see without looking too far that not much in life is really sacred.’ Bob Dylan

‘We used to have 120 children in the Sunday School. We had to hire another building because the church hall wasn’t big enough. Everyone used to sit very quietly as well, Richard! I can remember to this day the first non-white person I got to know. She came to our school when I was about 9 or 10 and she’d come with her family all the way from Kenya’.

This is Anne speaking. She still lives in this area, worships at the same church, helps with the same Sunday School. The Sunday School now caters for about 30 children. Anne’s sentiments about church life as the hub of the community in Britain 50 years ago could be replicated right across the nation.

Times have changed. That same area is now approximately 70% Muslim, most originating from the Mirpur region of Pakistan. Anne’s friend from Kenya would no longer be the isolated novelty she then was. Alongside the predominant Muslim community are Somali Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, Chinese and asylum seekers from the Middle East and Africa. This is now my neighbourhood, too, and I, with Anne, enjoy the local Asian greengrocers, kebab houses, Bhangra music and sweet stores. Things ain’t what they used to be, and change seems to be the only constant. As I write this, the local Asian newsagents have just put up a sign in Polish, advertising foodstuffs catering to the freshest wave of language and culture mixing in our neighbourhood.

What do all these changes mean for the life and mission of the British church? We seem reasonably comfortable thinking of the current national dish as Chicken Tikka Masala. But have we done
anything to alter the ingredients of our witness as Christian communities? Even posing this question might provoke the odd shudder of nervousness. We live at a juncture in history fraught with tension. We are, admittedly, a bit mindful of the cultural imperialism of much of the Victorian-era missionary endeavour. There is a residual guilt-trip that baulks us as Christians looking across at neighbours of other faiths. The events of 9/11 and 7/7 have brought to the fore our deepest fears, and we could be excused for being paralysed by inaction.

Here’s a recent snapshot of the faith make-up of Britain, taken from a BBC ICM Survey conducted in 2005:

- Christian = 67%
- Muslim = 3%
- Jewish = 1%
- Hindu = 1%
- Sikh = <1%
- Other = 4%
- No Faith = 22%
- Refused = 1%
- Don’t know = <1%

Admittedly, such surveys never present the full picture, and one person’s faith might be just another’s shorthand for the ‘Religion’ section in a hospital form. In the 2001 British Census, ‘Jedi Knight’ was given its own category in the list of religions, as so many people had written this entry in their census returns. Well, may the force be with them! But the BBC ICM Survey also asked about attendance at worship services. The picture this paints seems to be a little closer to the reality of the scene. Of the 67% of the population who would call themselves ‘Christian’, only 17% attend a service of worship at least once a week. That suggests that about 11% of the British population are attending some kind of Christian worship each week. Looking at the worship patterns of those who called themselves Muslims, over 58% are attending a service at a mosque each week. Over 47% of Sikhs are attending a service of worship at a gurdwara or temple each week. Many of our other faith neighbours declare their faith and support it with a very tangible commitment in communal acts of worship.

However we cut the cake, the visibility of the Christian faith is
far from what it used to be in Britain 50 or even 20 years ago. Alongside the obvious cultural and racial differences of the nation is a whole plethora of faiths which bring with them values, perspectives, histories and texts which have to be reckoned with in what we call Britain today.

How on earth do Christian communities appropriately reach out to those of other faiths in such a time as this? This book presumes the very fact that we ought to be reaching out. The challenge is to walk on a journey of interaction with others which somehow enables us to be true to our faith yet appropriately shaped by our experiences and the people we meet. The Christian faith is such that it needs to be embodied in a time and a place: as one theologian put it, for each generation, the good news needs to be ‘forwarded to a new address’. The landscape of Britain in the 21st century therefore requires us to be aware of the mixed baggage of mission history, world politics and multiculturalism in all its guises, as we look in particular to our relationship with those of other faiths.

The New Testament was forged in the furnace of cultural change and interfaith mixing. Many scholars would argue that most of the Old Testament was similarly written, at a time when Jews were rubbing shoulders with others as a minority faith in exile. There are lessons to be learnt from our Scriptures and indeed, I would argue, there is something of the essence in our story which involves an interaction with other faiths. The sweep of the biblical narrative is not a smooth one. We might evoke Abraham, called out of Ur to a new land, Jeremiah at the foot of a cesspit in Jerusalem encircled by the armies of Babylon, or Paul under house arrest, writing and teaching a subversive message about a different kind of king and a different kind of kingdom in the very heart of the Roman Empire. All these characters, and more, grappled to hear and enact God’s Word in the midst of diversity. Each time, God’s Word was not predictable; there were patterns, certainly, but the very vocation of these people of faith often pushed them to places of discomfort. Furthermore, it often led to their rejection by those that should have known better.

We see this supremely in the life of Jesus: the ultimate cross-cultural missionary, God taking on the body and soul of a Jew, caught in the massive affront of a pagan occupation. What did it mean to be a faithful Jew at such a time as this? The answers were unpredictable, brought their own rejection and marginalising, and led to death on the cross. But as with all these men and women of
faith, in the place of their vulnerability, at the point of God’s goodness taking shape in a time and place, new life came.

It is with this hope that I seek to address our relationship to those of other faiths today: a hope that new life can come. In theological parlance, we would call it ‘resurrection’. The theological parlance is more than mere talk of life beyond the grave for the faithful; it speaks of God’s possibilities here and now where we often just see darkness and despair. The interface between Christians and other faiths is an arena which, for many, is indeed worthy of despair. For the non-religious observing from the stands, there is a quite understandable feeling of ‘a plague on both your houses’ after perceived atrocities in the name of religion. Not long after the July 7th bombings in London, I came across this piece:

In the light of recent events, it’s really quite frightening to realise the mindset of some of the people who think they have a right to live in a country like Britain.

People who follow a religion that has repeatedly been taken as the basis for hatred and violence towards any that oppose their worldview. People who count as holy, a book that seems to applaud mass murder. The destruction not merely of their military opponents, but innocent civilian women and children.

People who persist in following their religion despite its shameful history. A history that includes innumerable acts of terrorism and racial hatred. A history of oppressing women, keeping them subservient and dictating how they may dress. A religion that has a track record of nations that have been brutally governed by rulers who took it upon themselves to be the voice of their God and to impose ridiculously detailed legislation as to what was permissible in everyday life. A religion that seems to have so often fostered paranoia.

Should we really put up any longer with allowing these people to live amongst us? To share the benefits of our liberal society even though their ultimate allegiance is not to our government but to their invisible worldwide nation?

This surely is a recipe for disaster. The government must act quickly and decisively to deport all Christians.¹

¹ Quoted by kind permission of the author, Rev Richard White
We think we have the author taped and his prejudices underlined, but the force of the punch-line reveals our own prejudice. As Christians, we so often fail to see our errors and the monstrous acts of violence committed in the name of and in pursuit of the Christian faith. While working in North Africa, I was frequently shocked at how often the Crusades came into the conversation. The legacy of church-sponsored invasion to recapture holy sites nearly seven hundred years before was a continuing reality. And when the President of the United States invokes the word ‘crusade’ in a war against terrorism, the shudders amongst Muslim nations and in Muslim communities in Britain are palpable. Even a cursory glance at our own history must give us pause for thought before making sweeping judgements about another faith.

Let us return to the micro-level of local church; to districts such as Anne’s with a majority Muslim community. To workplaces in our cities where we rub shoulders with those of other faiths and to our universities, packed with diversity. The background noise is alarming yet we are called to be witnesses to the world, to offer hope and a distinctiveness centred on Christ. What should contemporary church life in its engagement with those of other faiths look like while the background noise of the so-called ‘clash of civilisations’ assaults all our senses?

I write this with a great deal of presumption: to offer a way forward that seeks to be true to the uniqueness of the Christian faith and holding to the particularity of Christ. Yet this truthfulness to Christ requires our ability to be necessarily shaped by our own context and humbly to see the good in ‘the other’. There seems to be a simplistic drift in much of the Christian literature and pronouncements on Christian-other faith relations towards either a benign but bland smoothing over of all our differences or a zealous but arrogant activism. I trust that what I share will be helpful in outlining a thoroughly Christian position which leaves us all in some discomfort while exhilarated by new hope and fresh possibilities.

Other publications should be sought for an overview of the beliefs of other faiths. And I hope that after reading this, you will run to your bookshops and libraries trawling for information on the religions you encounter. It is not the role of this book to introduce the elements of world religions to Christians. Each chapter, as appropriate, will signpost sources for further reading on specific faiths. But my conviction is that we need a better understanding of
our own faith before we jump towards a necessary understanding of other religions. I envisage this effort to be a resource for Christians living and working alongside other faiths so that they themselves become confident in building upon biblical foundations to be neighbours, witnesses, friends and partners. I will endeavour to make sense of some of the background noise and to give pointers and suggestions to the kinds of ministry Christian communities could be having at this time.

This journey requires us to look at the whole nature of ‘religions’, to take a fresh view of what we mean by the ‘gospel’: literally, our ‘good news’. In a book encouraging application, then, there are key arenas such as evangelism, community service, youth work and politics which demand attention. Each chapter will offer space for biblical reflection, worship, prayer and action. This structure is not offered merely to enable the book to be studied in a group format or to provide some novelty. It is to underline, whether individually or in a group, that the application of our faith to the real-world issues of witness in a multi-faith context demands the rigour of Christian worship. As we pray in our world, as we reflect on our key text, commit ourselves to our Creator and go forth in Spirit-empowered deeds, then we keep to our calling, however vulnerable and risky the path may seem.

Following the theme of ‘Distinctly Welcoming’, there will be space to reflect on a Bible passage (‘A La Carte’ 🍽️), to respond in prayer and worship (‘Soundtrack’ 🎧) and to commit to action (‘Takeaway’ 🚶‍♂️). This system attempts to model the core commitment of this book: that our engagement with culture demands of us a corresponding engagement with the Bible and a responsiveness in worship and prayer. As our Christian story becomes rooted in a context and a lived reality, we then allow ourselves to be shaped into authentic practitioners of God’s life in the world. There will also be suggestions for follow-up resources: detailed books (‘Banquet’ 🍽️), easier introductions (‘Healthy Appetisers’ 🍷) and web resources (‘Virtual Food’ 🍽️).

Some time ago, I facilitated a meeting between a group of trainee missionaries and a gathering of mosque imams. The imams were well known to local Christian leaders and there had been a history of exchanges and dialogues between the two groups for some years. However, this was the first time that we had introduced Christian missionaries to them. These missionaries, coincidentally,
were all going to work in Muslim countries. I asked them to share the reasons for such career decisions. All of them were professionals, giving up comfortable positions in Britain, and all shared stories of genuine Christian conviction and service to the poor and marginalised of other nations. It was a momentous meeting because the Muslim leaders were hearing stories of deep faith from younger British Christians. Such stories are often quite alien to our Muslim neighbours, more familiar with the licence and immorality of the nominally Christian West.

I then threw the conversation over to the imams: ‘So, then, what would you like to say to these Christian missionaries as they settle in Muslim countries?’ The eldest imam, straining at the leash, pointed a bony finger at each of them and said, ‘I would like to ask why you are going abroad, because this country is godless and needs people like you.’ We had risked an open conversation where we would be being utterly true to ourselves as Christians, in the context of trusting relationship. Muslim leaders had heard surprising and rare stories of godly faithfulness from young Christians. We, in turn, had heard a challenge and a reminder about the godlessness at the heart of our own society. This small exchange exemplifies something to which we should be aspiring: mutual story-telling, a willingness to be challenged and a truthfulness about who we are.

There is risk in this because genuine relationships are not predictable. But it is genuine relationships which are currently desperately needed between Christians and those of other faiths. Relationships cannot be programmed and replicated, still less packaged in a paint-by-numbers guide. Relationships of any maturity look unblinkingly at the conflicts, take account of histories but choose to work through them. It is for this reason that I tentatively regard this book as a resource: a resource to give shape to productive encounters.

Coming full circle, I write in the confidence that our core text, the Bible, gives us more than clues, should we choose to grapple with it in all its provocativeness. When Bob Dylan was penning the lyrics quoted at the start of this introduction, he was bemoaning the commodity which faith had become. We would do well to beware the labels of religion and to begin this journey seeking as our benchmark a likeness to Christ. As we recognise Jesus as the very imprint of God, we are able to see Jesus not as the founder of one of any number of religions, but the enabler and summation of God’s life
Distinctly Welcoming

on earth. God refuses to be boxed in, confined and defined by us. As soon as we box God in, we end up worshipping an idol of our own making. The repercussions of Jesus’ own life are testimony to our tendency to domesticate our Saviour. He was domesticated and confined to the severe limits of a cross, but wonderfully, he broke free from those confines and continues to do so today.

As we look across our various divides to our neighbours in multi-faith Britain, we must come in diffidence, that the profane be made sacred again. This journey is not just one on which a world in captivity to religious division needs to embark; it is a journey vital to the very integrity of our Christian faith.

A LA CARTE – Matthew 5–7

Take time to read the whole of what is known as the Sermon on the Mount. You may want to read this sermon of Jesus a number of times over a few weeks. Enter into the story itself; read it as an imaginative contemplation. Picture yourself there, as one of the characters. You might be a disciple of Jesus, an ordinary Jew hearing this new preacher, a Roman soldier standing by watching for any trouble and listening out for subversive messages. You could be a religious leader, nervous about the direction of the ministry of this teacher from Nazareth and concerned to keep Jews along strict lines of observance which keep the history and faith of the nation alive. You may be a Zealot, a rebel waiting for the right time to use a leader who would galvanise the people in rebellion against the Romans. The ‘background noise’ of Jesus’ sermon is the troubled nation of Israel, its history of blessing from Yahweh with all its promise, and now its humiliated status under the Roman Empire. ‘Where is our God now?’ would be a familiar cry of the faithful Jew. The choices seem stark: rebellion, compromise or exclusivism. Take time to sum up the likely smells and sights of the scene, identify your own concerns as one of the bystanders and reflect on your feelings as you hear this radical teacher. Note that the ‘persecuted’, those asked for their cloaks, those struck on the right cheek or instructed to carry a load for a mile, would be very familiar scenarios for Jews under Roman occupation. And note the subtle subversion of Jesus’ advice to offer up the left cheek, thus standing as an equal to the Roman. Or to go the extra mile in contravention of a Roman soldier’s regulations, and letting the suitor have the cloak (or, literally, undergarment) to the shame of those responsible.

1. What were your feelings as you read this sermon through the eyes of one of the bystanders?
2. What surprised you about your reactions?
3. What did this reveal to you about the character and ministry of Jesus?
4. How might this sermon and your reactions to it be helpful in looking at Christians’ relations with those of other faiths?

SOUNDTRACK
Write a poem or draw a picture relating to the scene from the Sermon on the Mount on which you meditated. The picture can be expressive: just colours and shapes. If you find poetry or art too difficult, write a ‘letter to God’. Express the feelings you experienced from this scene in some way. Give them to God with thanks, both the insights and comfort, and the shocks and discomfort. Commit to allowing Jesus, in all his dangerousness, to be Lord.

Gracious Father, we come to you seeking to be part of your story. We know that your story is replete with love, abounds in peace and glitters with joy. But we also know that entering into your story means entering into your pain. We are sorry for boxing you in so that, in our efforts to follow you, we have written our own conclusions. Be among us, Lord, prise our hands open that we may allow you to write our endings and in those endings discover new beginnings. To the glory of Jesus, who broke the Sabbath traditions, touched the unclean and delighted in the faith of the foreigner. Amen.

TAKEAWAY
Research another faith, ideally the one you are most likely to encounter, perhaps through a neighbour or work colleague, but make sure you incorporate relationships in this quest. Seek authoritative sources from that other faith to find out about the beliefs of this religion. Check websites, ask friends or neighbours and visit bookshops. If you live in a city with a large Muslim population, for example, visit a Muslim bookshop and ask about Muslims’ beliefs and see what subjects are interesting them. Decide to be open and curious about the beliefs of others, and begin a process of assessing areas of commonality and difference.

BANQUET
V Ramachandra Faiths in Conflict? Christian Integrity in a Multicultural World (IVP, 1999)
Distinctly Welcoming

HEALTHY APPETISERS

Ida Glaser and Shaylesh Raja *Sharing the Salt*, a gentle introduction and encouragement to engagement with people of different faiths, published by Scripture Union, ISBN 1 85999 307 9, copies still available from Kitab Oriental Books, Satis@kitab.org.uk


*Cross and Khalsa* (on Sikhism) available from Faith to Faith, www.faithtofaith.org.uk

*Cross and Lotus* (on Buddhism) available from Faith to Faith, www.faithtofaith.org.uk

*Cross and New Age Spirituality* (on New Age thinking) available from Faith to Faith, www.faithtofaith.org.uk

*Christ and the Tao* (on Chinese religions) available from Faith to Faith, www.faithtofaith.org.uk

*Friendship First – the Manual* (on Islam) available from www.advancebookshop.co.uk

VIRTUAL FOOD

*Faith to Faith*, www.faithtofaith.org.uk

*Church Mission Society*, www.cms-uk.org

*BBC Religions* – http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/ for easy access to a whole range of information on different religions including stories of faith from respective adherents.
Do you or your church lack confidence in reaching out to those of different religious backgrounds?

Here is a clear, practical guide to the core issues and challenges facing churches in their engagement with those of other faiths.

- Earthen in real life – lots of stories
- Accessible style – readable and interesting
- Biblically rooted – creative reflections from Scripture
- Professionally credible – examples of good practice
- Practical suggestions – how to take things further

‘If you live in the 19th Century you probably won’t need to read this book. If you live in the 21st, you must’. Gerard Kelly

Richard Sudworth is a CMS mission partner and a consultant with the organisation ‘Faith to Faith’. Having previously worked in North Africa, he is now based in a Muslim-majority area of Birmingham.

www.scriptureunion.org.uk