

Thank you.

I've been asked to provide a reflective keynote, which I'm taking to mean some reflection and some keynotes – the keynotes being to provide some food for thought for the discussions this afternoon.

I feel privileged to do this – and also responsible, because very much want to draw attention to the questions and issues arising from this morning, as they've struck me, and I hope they'll help you in your discussions this afternoon.

I think we find ourselves in a very odd situation in which things that always happened continue to happen – Catriona's reminder that faith communities were here long before government, and presumably will still be here long after they've gone - things that had been newly supported to happen stopped – and Steve and Heather's observation of the collapse of infrastructure is important here - but language continued as though nothing much had happened.

So the disappearance of infrastructure forms one part of my reflections.

The other part is about how faith based social actors have responded, and how they might respond.

So to start with the report, I welcome this very warmly, particularly because it is steeped in the political contexts right from the outset – neighbourhood renewal and regeneration

first, along with Prevent, then the turn to welfare reform and austerity – also with Prevent!

These policy themes chime with me – I identified three drivers of public faith in 2009 – welfare, cohesion, and extremism, and I said then that there is a tension at their heart which makes of faith communities both heroes and villains. I was asked by a Labour Peer in questions once why that mattered. My reply was that these are often the same people receiving contrary messages, which seemed to surprise her.

I also welcome the focus in this report on community development – with an emphasis on giving voice to faith communities themselves. The report focuses on some important and familiar themes – capacity and instrumentalisation – as we’ve heard this morning. I also very much enjoyed Heather’s suggestion that sometimes it’s also about improvisation. And I think that’s ok, so long as you’re riffing on a theme you’ve already thought through well. It’s also crucial to be sure you can tell the difference between improvisation and opportunism.

And thirdly I welcome the emphasis on a context which is religiously plural, though calling it multifaith, as the report does, has problems, I think.

So I’m going to pick up on each of these themes in the remainder of my reflections – reflecting on the role of community development, then multifaith, instrumentalisation, and finally extremism, though in a slightly nuanced way.

First, on **the role of community development** – the difficult political and fiscal context plays out of course in a difficult context for community development, which has often been observed to be one of the casualties of austerity at many points

since the 1950s. Steve mentioned the closure of CDF, CDX, Community Matters and so on, and I think that changes the atmosphere, and atmosphere matters. It's hard when things feel like they're in decline or not valued. It also reduces capacity for the things I think are crucial if government is to get out of faith communities what it seeks from them – that is resources and networks, and a sustaining environment in which they can thrive. And I've been hugely heartened to hear stories of incredible resilience, rooted in relationships, this morning. Julie and Nick both spoke about the importance of trust and friendship, and Catriona even mentioned love – not a concept much discussed in public policy circles.

I was remembering that I spoke at an event in Westminster in 2010, shortly after the election of the Con-Lib coalition, on the topic of Big Society and I said then that I thought this was a poor smokescreen for a fundamental realignment to do nothing less than end the welfare settlement, if not the welfare state. So I want to reflect on how community development is different to Big Society because it embraces the political - empowerment, social justice and participation, which got no mention in Big Society where it was just assumed that there would be volunteers and that volunteering would produce social justice. Actually, volunteers are not equally distributed, anymore than other forms of wealth. If anything, they are inversely present to financial wealth – the more poverty, the harder it is to volunteer, because poverty is time-consuming.

And I was struck by Heather's observation that their research participants thought the recession had sorted out those who are really committed. I've been surprised by how positive some of the response to austerity has been over the last few years, and I guess there is another side to this, which I want to encourage reflection on too: there must be lots of anger. So the question is where is that anger? Where has it gone? How's it

being used? It's important that we don't end up whistling in the dark.

So community development is more important than ever because it is politically committed to social justice – and it's so good to see FbRN still flying the flag – and there are crucial questions about community development's continuing feasibility in contexts where funding has to be secured through other models – namely social enterprise and philanthropy. Thinking through how these models relate to – or undermine – each other seems pressing. And offer this out as a possible theme for discussions too.

Second, **the role of multifaith**. As Steve said, there has been the almost total disappearance of the multifaith infrastructure which sprang up under the New Labour governments. Face to Face was a high water mark and it was striking how quickly after 2010 the RDAs and therefore the regional Faith Forums closed. Likewise the FCCC and the FCCBF – the later being replaced by Near Neighbours, a much smaller pot of funding, administered via the Church of England, which I observed at the time has the appearance of church and state attempting a revalorisation of the Church of England as the national church. I don't think this can be good for what we used to call multifaith relations, though I'm aware that is contested.

The report's emphasis on plurality is of course highly realistic, but I do have reservations about the term multifaith. I think it needs quite a lot of work in order to mean something substantially more than a handy metaphor, and I set out why in an article in *Social Policy and Society* in 2012.

I said there that are three problems. First, it is assumed to be good for cohesion. But actually there is no widespread, established method for achieving this. Or perhaps there is, in

which case it would be good to bring that forward. The panels' stress this morning on friendship is obviously very powerful, and I'm struck by how invisible to policy makers those friendships are. Maybe there's already much more cohesion than people think? Perhaps there's as much as there's going to be?

As well as that, participants self select and are the people who would already join the conversation, not the people who won't – who are really who you want to engage if your goal is cohesion.

Julie quoted the Archbishop of Canterbury's caution that we don't insist so hard on peace-building that we end up killing each other to achieve it. And that reminds me of Lord Bhikhu Parekh's caution that knowing each other better doesn't necessarily result in loving each other better. In fact it sometimes helps to kill each other better.

I also love Julie's suggestion that the Archbishop is everybody's Archbishop, and I've heard that suggestion made by the Church of England itself – that it holds the space open for everyone else. This is seductive but the question is how Christian-shaped that space feels to those every-bodies else. Is it a comfortable space and does it feel welcoming? I hope so.

The second issue is the assumption that services themselves should be multifaith. I understand the urge to inclusiveness but my research has found that sometimes single faith services are the only ones that some groups will access. So what to do – not meet need on the basis of the principle of openness to all? Does the principle trump the practice? Often under New Labour, it did.

It is also the case that it is extremely difficult to achieve multifaith services in much more than name because of the difficulties of agreeing different governance, quality systems, contracting and tendering mechanisms, let alone agreeing on the values and goals, which can often be the simpler bit.

So I suppose the question is, does this matter? Does multifaith have to be genuinely reflected in administrative arrangements and throughout a shared values base? I'm not sure, but I think you need an answer to this that is well thought through, especially if policy makers continue to think that everything must be for everyone.

The third issue is **the role of instrumentalisation**. On the one hand, a shrinking number of government contracts could be seen as diminishing this issue anyway. On the other, the remaining ones have all the more prominence, and the funders who fill the gaps – philanthropists and social entrepreneurs – can bring just as much, if not more skew.

Another issue is that the faith-based sector – if we're using that language – of course long predates government and other contracts, and presumably will long outlive them! So it strikes me as better placed than most, probably, to resist the instrumental imperative.

But I wonder if resistance is just one level. Challenge strikes me as another – what some in this area call prophecy. Catriona reminded us of Faith in the City, and I'd reflect that these are confusing times in relation to challenge. We've got massively growing need and a growth in the visibility of faith groups meeting those needs too – as exemplified by food banks, for example, and by the provision of food as hospitality too, which Bharti and Navleen spoke about as spaces of care and relationship, as well as the meeting of basic needs. But on the

other hand, we have a shrinkage in the funding and infrastructure for it. How to alleviate need *and* challenge their causes? And Catriona spoke about the power of faith based networks to disrupt political narratives, alongside what she thinks is less of that narrative-forming and voicing going on – less meta-analysis and critique. And I agree that's been happening.

I suspect the reduction in government funding is two things at once – both a release from being instrumentalised by it. But there is no escaping the fact that it is also a loss, in terms of funding, voice and infrastructure.

This is really important because an important aspect I hear voiced a lot now is the view that the role of the Church of England is critical because of its national network of parishes – staff, building, networks and resources on every corner.

And I worry about this because my observation is of a lot of buildings and pension obligations, alongside diminishing numbers of clergy but also, as the research shows us, diminishing numbers in the pews too – mostly now old ladies who are dying and not being replaced. So where is this network and this army of volunteers? A more realistic assessment of the real religious landscape would result in better public policy in terms of faith based social action, I think and this has some way to go. And on that note, while I do observe a plurality of faith *traditions* here today, I'm wondering about the non-religious – humanism, or the Sunday Assembly, for example, where lots that we've been talking about also takes place – and also the informal forms of religion and belief the data are pointing so much towards. The question this raises is are they 'real' or 'proper' religion and belief? And if they are, what do they have to contribute and how can they join the conversation?

The fourth and final issue I think is a **growth in the visibility of faith in the public sphere**, which is accompanied by a growth in **anxiety** about it. Many people are I think hostile or indifferent to religion and belief in general and when they see it doing things in public, this translates in to suspicion – what are they doing? What are they after?

And this is coupled with anxiety and hostility towards people in need – constructed as benefits scroungers – and migrants – constructed as Muslims.

I remember what Hannah Arendt says on this theme. She writes “for the first time in history, all peoples on earth have a common present...every country has become the almost immediate neighbour of every other country, and every man feels the shock of events which take place at the other end of the globe”. This “unity of the world” could result in “a tremendous increase in mutual hatred and a somewhat mutual irritability of everybody against everybody else”.

The jury’s out – just – I think. But the EU referendum, and Donald Trump’s wall across Mexico could call it one way or the other. What strikes me as a time for bridge building is striking others as a moment for building walls instead. It seems to me that interfaith and multifaith social action have a role in articulating against this wall building. Just DOING the social action is incredibly important, but ARTICULATING it is key too I think, in times like these.

Heather spoke about the problem of leaving God at the door – something the report finds faith communities are uneasy about. This presents a huge challenge to the public sphere, which thinks of itself as secular – by which it usually means neutral – while in fact it is neither. I’d prefer a public sphere in which faith based social action describes itself and offers its

services in its own terms and language – ‘I do this for Jesus’ – because that way it can be transparent and accountable.

And this brings us back I think to community development. The culture currently in general – outside of community development - is one of competition for scarce funds to meet increasing needs. Community development’s insistence on collaboration could be construed as a call not just to act together, but to speak together. I’m not suggesting one critique or one voice. I celebrate the plurality of views in the conversation. But concerted spaces to think together differently – spaces like this – have more to offer than even they themselves might realise. Catriona spoke about partnerships of equals, rather than faith communities providing to a contract, and she thinks – and I agree – that this has great potential for growing trust. I would observe that this will require a good deal more religious literacy on the part of those partners.

So I offer these as just my reflections, and I sincerely hope they will be helpful to you in your conversations this afternoon, and I wish you well.