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Terrorist attacks are to do with religion says Welby, urging faith leaders to take responsibility

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, has said that the terrorist attacks are to do with religion and that to claim otherwise is "not getting us anywhere."

Speaking on BBC Radio 4's Today Programme on 5 May, the Archbishop said that throughout history, religious tradition and scripture – in all the major faiths - has been twisted and misused by people. Religious leaders have permitted, or on some occasions, encouraged this.

In contrast, religious leaders today need to take responsibility for those who commit atrocities in the name of their religion, he said.

"We have to say that if something is happening within our own faith tradition we must take responsibility for being very, very clear in countering it."

"Its global, its generational and it's ideological," he added.

When asked whether he agreed with some politicians and leaders who expound the view that the spate of terrorist attacks have nothing to do with Islam he said:

"I don't think this is getting us anywhere. We need to say that we have to take responsibility."

Failing to acknowledge the role played by Islam in these attacks was akin to failing to accept Christianity's role in the Srebrenica massacre in 1995 in Bosnia, he said.

He added there is a religious "theology" behind these terror attacks that must be countered.

"We need to counter that [theology] within our own faith tradition and say why it is not acceptable and to teach people and to educate people," he explained.

Responding to the claim that some Muslim leaders are not taking responsibility for countering extremism, Welby pointed out that due to the structure of Islam there isn't an obvious hierarchy or leader to approach. Accordingly, particular groups may express different opinions.

Welby highlighted "the extraordinary level of condemnation" expressed by Muslim leaders and groups in the UK.

The Archbishop criticised the "very high level of lack of religious literacy" from those responsible for countering these attacks. Describing them as people "who don't understand the basic doctrines of the faith they are dealing with".

He also warned that a line must be drawn between cultural conservatism and extremism.

"We have to draw tolerably wide values," he explained. "Our history and culture allow people to hold very different views but the line has to be about violence and incitement to the disparagement of other people."

But, he said society must not attack – or go against – a group on the grounds of their faith alone. It is about what they do in the name of their faith.

Asked if he was concerned about cohesion he concluded:

"There isn't a fundamental problem with cohesion, the vast extraordinary majority of Muslims and everyone else has a single view of what kind of country they want to live in."

Rose Gamble - The Tablet