

The Jihad of Jesus

It's a word that has become familiar to us in recent decades. *Jihad*.

I guess for most of us this word has a very particular resonance: a resolute determination for world conquest, Holy War – a mirror image, perhaps, of the Christian Crusades of the eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth centuries in which the target was Islam itself.

But in Islamic teaching there are two forms of Jihad. One is known as the Lesser Jihad, the little holy war, *al-jihad al asghar*, to be engaged in as and when necessary to combat oppression – though in recent decades it has been reinterpreted in very alarming ways by fanatics, rabble-rousers and extremists with chips on their shoulders.

The Greater Jihad, *al-jihad al akbar* which is obligatory upon all Muslims, is, in a word, the pursuit of holiness. And of that John Wesley would approve wholeheartedly. His preaching included these two themes: personal holiness and social holiness. He set up a community resource in London *The Foundery* which pioneered a comprehensive social service – health, education, food – to people at the bottom of the social ladder.

In early 2018, in the North of England, Christians and Muslims have been meeting to study this doctrine of *jihad*. They are attempting to find a shared understanding of its meaning. What does it mean for Muslims? What does it *not* mean for Muslims? Can Christians find in our own traditions (though perhaps differently expressed) ideals and values which resonate with *jihad*?

The title given to this enterprise in interfaith dialogue is *The Jihad of Jesus*. It is interesting to read the New Testament in this light a journey towards personal holiness and the campaign for social holiness.

I wonder how clearly we, in our personal lives, reflect these two focal concerns of the community of faith: personal and social holiness? A good reflection point this Lent (2018).