



Among the Award winners was Jon Snow who took the Ibn Battuta award for excellence in media. Jon Snow is the main anchor for Channel 4 News. In addition to his role as presenter, he has travelled extensively in the Muslim world taking an in-depth look at events and developments. He recently published his autobiography, Shooting History.

nominated by the Prime Minister, and the lengthy oath which I had to administer prescribed the loyalty of the Bishop to Her Majesty the Queen, and no-one else. Each day the British Parliament opens with (off-camera) Prayers for a Parliament. They are more ecumenical than they used to be, but the Speaker's Chaplain who reads the prayers is an Anglican. So are the prayers.

It's a similar story across Europe. In Italy, for example, the teaching of the Roman Catholic religion is assured in the public schools of every order and grade except for Universities. Denmark and Greece both have established churches – the former Evangelical Lutheran, the latter Orthodox. Even in France, where the division of church from State is most thorough, the public purse helps pay for the upkeep of some religious buildings, most Christian and Jewish, built before 1905. And, of course, many of our basic principles of common law here in the UK and the civil systems of jurisprudence throughout Europe have been strongly influenced by the Christian ethics and traditions of the vast majority of the population. It would be extraordinary if this were not so.

My point is this: the story of Europe is not a simple, linear one of secular values steadily pushing out and eroding religious ones. Rather the European experience is one of an accommodation between faith and modernity.

And it is the future of Europe too. I was delighted last year to play a part in the historic decision for the European Union to open accession negotiations with Turkey – a country which has a large Muslim population and which is a thriving, dynamic democracy.

For it to work, governments have to provide a space in which the rights and diversity of people of all faiths are protected and, at the same time, set a clear framework – through its domestic laws – of acceptable behaviour for all its citizens regardless of creed. The recent controversy

over the cartoons showing the image of the prophet illustrated this well. I said at the time that the cartoons were reprinted in Europe – though not here in the United Kingdom – that doing so was needlessly insensitive and disrespectful. The right to freedom of expression is a broad one and something which this country has long held dear. It was the focus of our human rights work during our recent Presidency of the European Union. But the existence of such a right does not mean that it is right – morally right, politically right, socially right – to exercise that freedom without regard to the feelings of others.

A large number of Muslims in this country were – understandably – upset by those cartoons being reprinted across Europe and at their deeply held beliefs being insulted. They expressed their hurt and outrage but did so in a way which epitomised the learned, peaceful religion of Islam. In doing so they were not being 'unreasonable' or 'un-European'. They were not threatening anyone's values. A handful of Muslims reacted in a distasteful and unacceptable way. Their actions were roundly condemned, including by the vast majority of British Muslims. The Muslim Council of Britain called for anyone who was found to have broken the law to be prosecuted. And earlier this month the police made five arrests. Leading international Muslim also rightly condemned incidents of violence overseas in reaction to the cartoons. The distinction we are all making, then, is not between religious and secular or between Muslim and European. The distinction is between law-abiding citizen and criminal.

That row over the cartoons was illuminating in another way too. It showed again the extent to which a small minority of people with fringe views can dominate the media – setting themselves up to speak for a much larger constituency than they in fact represent. I was struck – as I know many in this room were – by just how much more coverage was given to a couple of hundred noisy demonstrators outside the Danish Embassy as compared to the thousands who gathered for a dignified rally in Trafalgar square a few days later.

Or here is another example. Ask most people in Britain who do not regularly attend an act of worship to name a Christian cleric, and they would probably say the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams. It is a fair answer – members of other Christian denominations are, at the very least, unlikely to take offence at such an association. But ask those same people to name a Muslim cleric and you will probably hear the name Abu Hamza – a man who in no way represents the vast majority of Muslims in this country and whose views are indeed abhorrent to them.