



## Pastor's Page

### **The Cross Unveiled**



Just over a week ago a Christian employee of British Airways was sent home without pay for refusing to cover up or remove a small cross which she wore on a chain around her neck. Nadia Eweida, a committed Christian, has worked for BA for seven years and has an unblemished employee record. On 20th September 2006 her manager noticed that the cross she wears on a chain around her neck was visible. In accordance with BA Uniform Wearer Standards she was asked to either remove the cross or cover it with her cravat. When Miss Eweida refused she was given the choice of being sent home suspended on full pay or taking unpaid leave. Miss Eweida claims that BA's uniform policy is discriminatory against Christians. The policy states that all jewellery and religious symbols can be worn, but concealed. However it makes exceptions for the Muslim *hijab* and Sikh turbans and bangles, which it says are an essential part of the respective religious beliefs, and impractical to conceal. British Airways ruled that the wearing or displaying of the cross is not an essential part of Christianity. However this definition is not applied consistently across other faiths. The wearing of the *hijab* is an area of contention amongst Muslims who disagree on whether it is obligatory to wear it. A verse in the Qur'an which talks about women covering up is interpreted by some Muslim women as a command to wear the *hijab*, though the garment itself is not specifically mentioned. In the Christian faith the cross is a symbol of the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ, and his resurrection, to take away the sins of the world, that is, a symbol of the most central doctrines of Christianity. Many Christians wear the cross in order to publicly declare their faith. During the grievance hearing Miss Eweida quoted "Jesus said if you deny me on earth I will deny you before my Father in heaven". Miss Eweida is of Anglo-Egyptian roots, and in her culture the cross is deeply important. Many Egyptian Christians will tattoo the cross on to their wrists, even though this will bring them increased persecution, as it defines them as a Christian. To Miss Eweida displaying her cross is as essentially part of her faith as the *hijab* and turban are to Muslims and Sikhs.

However this week the Muslim faith came under attack as Aishah Azmi a Muslim teaching assistant was suspended from Headfield Church of England Junior School, in Dewsbury, West Yorkshire for wearing a full-face veil, She consequently lost her employment tribunal case for discrimination and harassment, but was awarded damages for victimisation by her local council.

The Muslim veil the *hijab* (meaning literally "covering up" in Arabic) is about modesty. I heard a young Muslim woman speaking about this on the radio on Friday. She said that she wore the veil (*hijab*) out of respect for her religion and also so that men wouldn't lust after her (she is married) These motives both seem very good and the bible too teaches the importance of modest dress. However Jesus said that "out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander" Islam seems to offer no solution to the problem of sin in men's hearts. The Christian cross on the other hand reminds us of God's solution in Jesus to this our greatest need – the need for forgiveness. Let us continue to pray for the freedom to express our faith, and the grace to share with those of other faiths and no faith the wonderful meaning of the cross.

22<sup>nd</sup> October 2006