

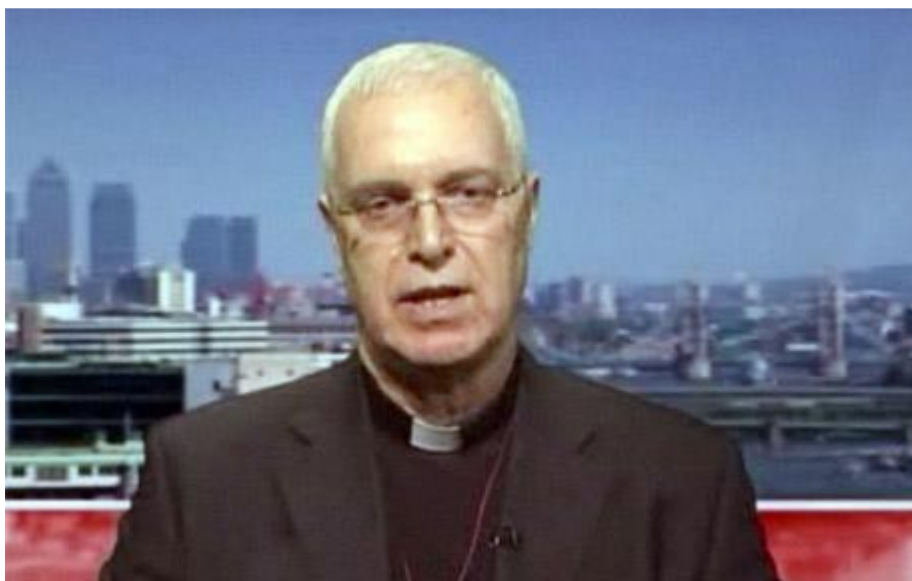
## Armed Forces Bishop apologises for Taliban comments

The new Bishop for the Armed Forces said he was "deeply grieved" to have caused offence by suggesting the Taliban could be admired for their religious conviction and loyalty.

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The Rt Rev Stephen Venner acknowledged that his comments in a [Daily Telegraph interview](#) appeared "incredibly insensitive" and stressed his support for British troops in Afghanistan.

In the interview the bishop warned against demonising the Taliban and argued that the attitude towards insurgents in the conflict-ravaged country had been "too simplistic".



The Rt Reverend Stephen Venner

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He told The Daily Telegraph: "There's a large number of things that the Taliban say and stand for which none of us in the West could approve, but simply to say therefore that everything they do is bad is not helping the situation.

"The Taliban can perhaps be admired for their conviction to their faith and their sense of loyalty to each other."

One MP accused him of offering "comfort and succour to our enemies" with his remarks.

Bob Russell, Liberal Democrat member for the garrison town of Colchester in Essex, said: "Why did he not talk about the loyalty of our troops?"

"The bishop would have been well advised to concentrate on boosting the morale of our armed forces rather than boosting the morale of our enemy."

Bishop Venner later apologised for his comment, saying it was "one small phrase in quite a long interview" intended to suggest that not all members of the Taliban were "equally evil".

He told the BBC: "If that has caused offence, I am deeply grieved by it because that's the very last thing that I would want to do."

The bishop also issued a statement condemning the Taliban's tactics and expressing his backing for UK forces.

He said: "The way that the Taliban are waging war in Afghanistan is evil, both in their use of indiscriminate killing and their terrorising of the civilian population. No religion could condone their actions.

"I give my full support to the British and allied troops who are engaged in the country, seeking to work with the Afghan government to bring stability, democracy and an enduring peace.

"I acknowledge that long-lasting peace will not be achieved without both defeating the Taliban militants and, over time, by encouraging them to forsake the path of war and to be involved in the future of Afghanistan.

"Senior military and civilian leaders have expressed similar views and I support their position.

"We have also to distinguish between the militant Taliban and those of their number who are fighting because they have been coerced into doing so and who fear for their lives if they do not. Clearly, it is only those who reject military action with whom we could talk."

Bishop Venner was recently commissioned in his new role by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams.

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