

ISSUE 17

faith

INITIATIVE

EMBRACING DIVERSITY

**'a child is not a
vase to be filled,
but a fire to be lit'**

Franças Rabelais
C1494 - C1553: attributed

YOUNG VOICES
Faith Talking
CHILDREN OF APARTHEID
Sharing the Light
CONNECTING WITH NATURE
The Art of Lucy Aline Everitt

Sitting quietly
doing nothing



Spring comes
and the grass grows
by itself

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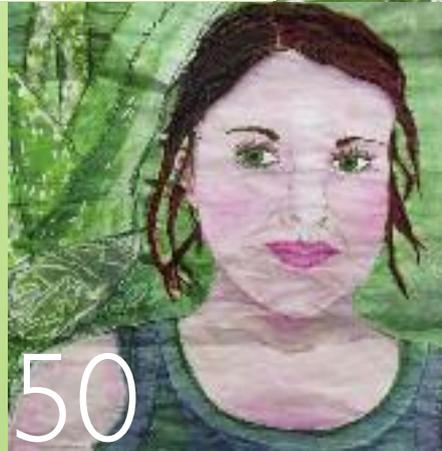
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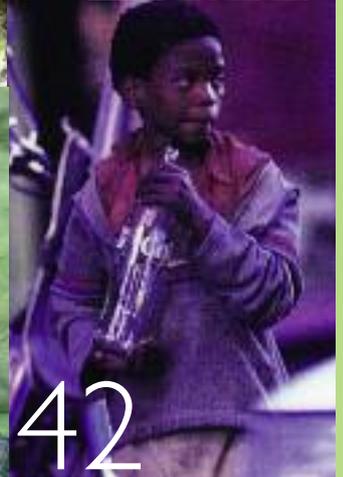
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editorial

Know ye what it is to be a child?... It is to have a spirit yet streaming from the waters of baptism; it is to believe in love, to believe in loveliness, to believe in belief.

Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822)
(letters)

cited: The Quotable Spirit: compiled & edited by Peter Lorie & Manuela Dunn Mascetti
Timeless Enterprise (UK) Ltd. 1996

As I sit here reflecting on the articles that have shaped this issue of Faith Initiative I feel especially moved and inspired by the honesty and integrity that is conveyed through our theme of 'young voices'. We are privileged to provide a positive and constructive insight into the beliefs and values that young people hold within our society, together with some of their hopes, fears and concerns for the future. At the same time I can hear an echo of my mother's lament – one I hear from so many of my age group: "I wouldn't like to be a young person today". The implication is that to be young today is to belong to some alien and hostile culture that stands in stark contrast to her romanticised golden age of childhood. At this point I wonder whether to launch into my usual response that goes something like: "Yes mum, you may remember them as great times but the reality was child labour, high infant mortality, rickets, diphtheria, tuberculosis, two horrific world wars, and no official recognition of the Rights of a Child". Then off I go, arguing in defence of the youth of today and the resolute way they meet the challenges of the world that they have inherited. These exchanges have become something of a ritual, triggered by some pessimistic, fear-mongering story featured in the media that generalises youth culture today as lacking in moral values and human decency.

Young people are constantly under attack, it seems that they are judged and convicted by and through the media on a daily basis. As a teacher I feel bound to defend them and deny the bad behaviour that is so frequently attributed to them. In my experience the vast majority of young people are kind, compassionate, outgoing and confident - forever endeavouring to make sense of themselves, others and the world that surrounds them. Not unlike the generations that have gone before them! Those that behave badly are in the minority – and a small minority at that - but sadly it is these young people that are given focus by the media and presented as the norm. We are happy to overturn this perspective by providing a platform for young people who can speak for themselves.

Our keynote writer, Barney Leith, raises awareness of the inhumanity that children suffer – without a voice - in many parts of the world, and asks us to remember the emphasis that faith traditions place on the fulfilment of the potential of the child – spiritually, morally, intellectually, emotionally and physically. On the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the slave trade Gordon Read gives focus to the vital contribution made by William Wilberforce, and explores the role of one's faith in moving forward new concepts within the secular workings of society to condemn the slavery that exists today – especially child slavery. Chris Chivers writes an open letter to his children reflecting on the more recent racial prejudices of apartheid in South Africa, the conflicts that are its legacy, the importance of remembering, and the need to look positively to the future - not least for the sake of the children.

Lorna Douglas

We gratefully acknowledge the grant received from the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund and the support from private donors, who wish to remain anonymous. Such funding makes publication and distribution of this magazine possible. We welcome and appreciate all donations and subscriptions.



www.faithinitiative.co.uk

Initiative Interfaith Trust
Registered Charity No. 1113345

Trustees: Heather Wells, Lorna Douglas,
Jonathan Lockhart

Object:

The promotion of religious harmony by:
Providing educational resources and information to promote a better awareness of the causes and consequences of inter-religious tensions and conflicts; and educating the public in the diverse nature of religious belief.

Faith Initiative Magazine
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Aim: The aim of Faith Initiative Magazine is to open windows on the beliefs and practices of world religions, in the hope that this will foster understanding and reduce religiously motivated violence.

Statement: Whilst the contents of this magazine will always be in accordance with the 'object' of Initiative Interfaith Trust there will be freedom of expression.

Invitation: We invite you to contribute articles, poems, letters, illustrations and responses so that the magazine reflects the religious communities it seeks to serve. Editorial guidance can be obtained from Heather Wells, PO Box 110, Lancaster LA2 6GN
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Issue 18 Themes:

- Symbolism of hair in identity & faith
- Pilgrimage

Front cover: Image: Extract of Radiant Dance Floor, Caroline Jariwala **Text:** cited: Oxford Dictionary of Phrase, Sayings & Quotations 2002 Pub.OUP

Design & Print - Print Graphic Ltd **T:** (01228) 593900

SPIRAL: "This is an ancient symbol that reminds us of the womb and the protective mothering nature in all of us. It takes us from the broad sweeps of the outer life to an infinitely small centre where we cease to exist."

Cited: *Mandalas: Spiritual Circles for Harmony & Fulfilment*
Laura J. Watts (2002) Pub. Hermes House,
London ISBN 184308 973 7

The spiral logo was designed by Caroline Jariwala for Initiative Interfaith Trust





Children

– the most precious gift

“Every child is potentially the light of the world - and at the same time its darkness; wherefore must the question of education be accounted as of primary importance. From his infancy, the child must be nursed at the breast of God’s love, and nurtured in the embrace of His knowledge, that he may radiate light, grow in spirituality, be filled with wisdom and learning, and take on the characteristics of the heavenly host.” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, p. 131.

Open a newspaper, look at a website, watch the TV news, and we’re almost bound to find a story about children running wild or children being abused, or children committing suicide because of the despair they face in school or at home.

Recent articles in the media have highlighted the persistence of child slavery in the 21st century. It has been estimated that there are approximately nine million children living in conditions that make them slaves.

Anti-Slavery International defines a slave as one who is:

- forced to work - through mental or physical threat;
- owned or controlled by an ‘employer’, usually through mental or physical abuse or threatened abuse;
- dehumanised, treated as a commodity or bought and sold as ‘property’;
- physically constrained or has restrictions placed on his/her freedom of movement.

The children trafficked into the UK for the sexual gratification of adults would surely qualify, as would the children sold by destitute families to work on the farms of chocolate producers in West Africa for no pay and precious little food.

But it needn’t be like this. In fact, it **must** not be like this. The Bahá’í teachings stress, as do the teachings and practices of all the great faiths, the potentials that every child has: spiritual, moral, intellectual, emotional and physical. These potentials are like gems buried in a

mine – they have to be brought out, polished up and put to use for the benefit of the child and in service to the whole of humankind.

International human rights law gives great weight to the rights of the child. The preamble to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child recalls one of the founding principles of the UN Charter, that ‘recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal

and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world’. It also recalls that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights ‘has proclaimed that childhood is entitled to special care and assistance’. And it considers ‘that the child should be fully prepared to live an individual life in society, and brought up in the spirit of the ideals proclaimed in the Charter of the United Nations, and in particular in the spirit of

peace, dignity, tolerance, freedom, equality and solidarity’.

The Convention gives governments a wide range of duties in relation to the protection and care of children. Children have rights to freedom of expression, which, crucially, includes the right ‘to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers’. And the states that are party to the Convention must respect the right of the child to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

Children are to be protected from economic exploitation, from sexual exploitation, from hazardous work, and from work that interferes with the child’s education.

The whole of
humankind
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anywhere are
unable to
flourish.

Article 28 of the Convention sets out the rights to education: free and compulsory primary education available to all; the development of different forms of secondary education; making higher education accessible to all on the basis of capacity.

Regrettably, children are deprived of these rights in many parts of the world. The reasons for this are too complex for me to go into them here, but suffice it to say that the whole of humankind suffers when children anywhere are unable to flourish.

'Since the body of humankind is one and indivisible, each member of the human race is born into the world as a trust of the whole. This trusteeship constitutes the moral foundation of most of the other rights ... which the instruments of the United Nations are attempting similarly to define.' The Bahá'í International Community thus sets out the Bahá'í understanding of what underpins the inalienable rights we all have by virtue of being human and the responsibilities that we carry – also by virtue of being human.

The idea of trusteeship, which we can think of as a covenantal relationship that we have with each other, with the whole human race, gives us particular responsibilities towards the more vulnerable, especially children, who are our future.

Children deprived of education cannot flourish. And who is the first educator of children? The mother! So it makes sense to give a very high priority to the education of girls, since they are going to be the first educators of the next generation. That's not to say that boys should be deprived of education – far from it – but there are places in the world where it does come to a choice between sending the boys or the girls to school. Unfortunately, girls often lose out.

But helping children to grow and flourish is not the responsibility of mothers alone. Ideally both parents work together to develop their moral and spiritual qualities. And beyond the parents the whole community bears this responsibility.

Bahá'í individuals, families and communities worldwide offer moral and spiritual education to all children whose parents want them to benefit, whether they are Bahá'ís or not. This is one of the community's core activities. The classes happen in neighbourhoods and streets and villages. They are relatively informal and supplement whatever formal, school-based, education is on offer. According to the Bahá'í International Community, there are more than 10,000 such local Bahá'í children's classes currently taking place around the world, with more than 90,000 participants.

The Bahá'í writings stress the importance of children's education, emphasizing especially the need for training in virtues and spirituality. Although adapted to local conditions and needs, Bahá'í children's classes around the world focus on moral education, aiming to provide an ingredient that is often overlooked in secular education.

Bahá'ís also provide more formal education through Bahá'í-inspired and Bahá'í-run schools in many parts of the world.

Your children are not your children.

They are the sons and daughters
of Life's longing for itself.

They come through you but not from you,

And though they are with you,
yet they belong not to you.

You may give them your love but
not your thoughts.

For they have their own thoughts.

You may house their bodies
but not their souls,

For their souls dwell in the house of
tomorrow, which you cannot visit,
not even in your dreams.

You may strive to be like them,
but seek not to make them like you.

For life goes not backward
nor carries with yesterday.

You are the bows from which your
children as living arrows are sent forth.

The archer sees the mark upon the path of the
infinite, and He bends you with His might
that His arrows may go swift and far.

Let your bending in the archer's
hand be for gladness;

For even as he loves the arrow that flies,
so He loves also the bow that is stable.



Taoist Temple on Hua Shan

BEING *faithful* TO ALL LIFE

In 1986, the World Wide Fund for Nature International invited five major religions to Assisi, Italy, birthplace of St Francis, the Roman Catholic saint of ecology, to discuss and plan for greater religious involvement in the environmental movement. At Assisi each faith issued its own statement on the environment, drawing upon the specific teachings, insights and practices of each tradition. There was no attempt to create a 'common statement' for the simple reason that no-one pays the slightest attention to such well meaning but rootless documents. What motivates people are the distinctive insights that their own tradition brings to an issue. Furthermore, the event was not one organised by the faiths. Faith to faith meetings in my experience lack any serious edge or purpose to them. At Assisi, and ever since, our work with faiths on the environmental has always been a partnership between a secular body – WWF or the World Bank or the UN – and the faiths. The agenda in other words is always one decided by the secular world to which the faiths are asked to make their distinctive response. The reason for doing it this way is that unlike most gatherings of faiths, these events have led to literally hundreds of thousands of practical projects on the ground, run by the faiths themselves and inspired, assisted or partnered by secular institutions and governments.

In 1995, WWF helped launch a new organisation, the Alliance of Religions and Conservation which now works with eleven of the world's major religions (Baha'is; Buddhists; Christians; Daoists; Hindus; Jains; Jews; Muslims; Shinto; Sikhs and Zoroastrians) to develop environmental programmes and projects through their landholdings, shares, education networks, media outreaches and moral and spiritual insights. ARC's website www.arcworld.org contains many examples and resources for faith communities to take practical action on the environment. From religious building audit kits such as the Benedictine Handbook; through specific issues such as toxics or climate change to how to create new sacred sites to prevent the destruction of habitats, the world's faiths are busy playing their part in helping to raise awareness and focus action world wide.

The faiths are significant players because they are important stakeholders in the planet. They own between them over 7% of the habitable land of the planet; they contribute to, have founded or help in some way 54% of all schools world wide; they have more weekly magazines and journals than the whole of the expanded EU and their ownership of stocks and shares makes them a major economic force.

The faiths are significant players because they are important stakeholders in the planet.

Take this issue of stocks and shares. There is generally an embarrassment within the faiths about the fact that every single one of them runs on money generated by capitalism and investments. The old Christian tension between God and Mammon is a divide common to the faith worlds. A solution of this ancient divide is the rise of ethical investment, aimed at improving

social and environmental management.

World wide, the rise of the ethical investment movement has been one of the most astonishing social changes of the late 90's and early 21st century. The quest for investment into companies and industries which are ethical in their employment; environmentally sustainable, and profitable, has become a major factor in contemporary economics. Ethical banks, investment groups, companies and products are now one of the fastest growing sectors of the economic world. Ethical foods and products are to be found in every major supermarket in the West and increasingly in many other areas of the world. The role of the faiths in this has been an interesting one. Many of the fair-trade groups have their origins in Christian or Muslim faith groups and the quest for non-interest banking has its foundations in Islam. It has been the growth of ethical, Islamic banking which has perhaps been the most dramatic aspect of the faith's involvement with ethical banking and investment.

Traditional Islamic economics was dominated by an injunction in the Qur'an not to charge interest on loans of money. Through interaction with Western banking systems, however, interest charges have found their way into Islamic life. Within almost all Islamic states and amongst many Muslim groups there has grown a campaign to create a non-interest based financial system.

This has been remarkably successful and most Islamic countries now have full Shari'ah law based Islamic banking, and many non-Muslim countries too. Indeed, so powerful has this movement become, almost all mainstream secular banks now offer Islamic banking as part of their range of service. This movement only began in earnest in 1974.

In part inspired by this and in part concerned about injustice in trade and economics, and the environmental costs of bad management and exploitative practices, Christian and Jewish groups have for many years sought to influence big business through their role as shareholders. Until the beginning of the 21st century this largely took the form of withdrawing or threatening to withdraw funds from companies whose environmental and social policies were considered bad. Increasingly this negative path has been joined by a positive path – positively seeking out companies which practice good social justice policies and are environmentally minded and investing in them. Around the world, a number of organisations now exist to assist faith investors to invest ethically, ranging from specific country based groups such as the Interfaith Center for Corporate Investment in the USA with over 250 religious groups involved and a total asset base of over \$110 billion, to the International Interfaith Investment Group (3iG) which brings together many different religions in a number of countries and advises them on ethical investment policy.

For many faiths, concern for the environment is a matter of making active, something which has been passive. For example, many faiths have sacred places where tradition and convention have meant that not hunting, trapping, logging or developing the site has been the norm. Increasingly we are helping the faiths to make such passive conservation active.

In many cultures, natural beauty has been celebrated as being in some special sense divine. Hinduism, Daoism and traditional beliefs, for instance, consider all of nature to be in some way sacred. Certain sites are especially revered. Specific deities or stories may come to be associated with them, but usually their holiness stems from their sheer awe-inspiring presence. Mountains are the most common natural feature to be revered as holy. Often rising dramatically from the plains, as do Mount Ararat and Mount Sinai, it is easy to see why they have been special places since ancient times. Remoteness and the hardship experienced by those who try to live on them are also a part of their appeal. This is especially true of the major holy mountains of China. Chinese poets, painters and mystics have always found mountains to have particular significance. The Chinese character

for a sage or immortal combines the characters for a person and a mountain.

Belief in sacred natural places helps to preserve our natural environment as a whole. Farming and killing are not usually allowed around holy places and, in these areas, wildlife and their habitat is especially protected. In recent years this has become widely acknowledged, so much so that a study of the link was undertaken jointly by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC). This showed a range of national parks and wilderness protected areas which were also sacred and where the sacred had been instrumental in their survival long enough to be declared national parks. As the major faiths recognize the importance of the environment, and the environmental movement recognises the role of religions, holy natural sites are taking on a new significance. WWF and ARC are actively engaged in moves to have the term 'sacred site' officially recognised as a term of international environmental protection and significance, thus helping to preserve both the environment and religious sites.

Although the problems of the environment were first highlighted by secular environmental groups, religious involvement in the environment is undertaken from religious principles and beliefs, and not just in response to secular agendas. They may at first have been seen as 'soft' issues, but the religions are realizing that the well-being of the environment is closely connected to fundamental economic and social issues. The environmental crisis has caused a major rethinking within all faiths. The faiths are showing that they can work side by side on the environment, in a way that is unique in history - even in areas of traditional hostility such as Lebanon and the Philippines.

However, the faiths are not the oldest surviving human institutions in the world for nothing. They know that while you can tell people that things are bad and they must repent and do better, for much of the year, you must also celebrate, party and have fun. The idea of celebration is anathema to many in the environmental movement – what is there to celebrate they ask. But without a sense of joy for all that we have, why bother to try and save it? The faiths know about fasting – Lent and Ramadan and Vassa for example. But they also know about partying – Easter, Eid Ul Fitr and Kathina are the joyful ends of the fasting periods in Christianity, Islam and Buddhism.

Unless something is worth giving thanks for, is it worth saving? The answer from the faiths is no. Which is why a sense of joy as well as a sense of responsibility is what makes the religious contribution to the environment so important.

THE SLAVE TRADE

–APOLOGIES, REPARATIONS OR CELEBRATIONS?

No nation in Europe has plunged so deeply into this guilt as Great Britain

William Pitt, 1792

In a recent poll of teenagers 56% of boys and 58% of girls did not know enough about William Wilberforce to know why he should be admired! This is the man which Sir Roy Strong, in *The Story of Britain*, (1996), singles out as ‘embodying the change which overcame the established classes between 1790 and 1820.’ In 1785, as a young MP, he had an encounter with God and by the next year he felt called to two great causes, the suppression of the slave trade and the ‘reformation of manners’. In the face of opposition not only from vested interests but also from eminent men like Admiral Lord Nelson he soldiered on, rallying support against the slave trade particularly as a disgrace to a country professing Christianity. He believed that faith should very much affect both public and private life.

The 200th anniversary of the Abolition Bill, passed on 25 March 1807, should be celebrated not just for itself but as a milestone in the effect of one man’s faith which took 20 years before a result! This should spur all of us to bring about the abolition of every form of slavery still extant in today’s world, affecting over 20m. people including many children.

In Parliament today Baroness Cox seems often a lone voice in her condemnation of slavery in places such as Sudan. Her book, *This Immoral Trade*, is an eye-opener on the situation world-wide today. The work of Anti-Slavery International, founded 1839, still desperately needs support. The *Times*, 9 March, this year, reported that in the state of Mauritania, where slavery was allegedly abolished in 1981, SOS Esclaves, an organisation founded to help people escape from slavery, has evidence that hundreds of thousands of slaves still exist. *Daily Telegraph Weekend Magazine* 24 March contains a horrifying report on conditions in the toy manufacturing sweatshops of China, where young women from remote provinces are drawn into the factories with promises of good pay but kept in bestial barracks, as bad as prisons, working outrageous hours, in toxic conditions and dying on the job. Like the drowned Morecambe Bay cocklers, they are at the mercy of gang masters often of their own race: truly man’s inhumanity to

man knows no bounds.

So we have little reason to celebrate, but less because of a legacy of guilt, I personally feel, than because of the enormity of the task yet undone. Pitt, Wilberforce, Fox and many others in Parliament expressed great contrition for the outrage against humanity which they felt slave trading to be and indeed against the very status of slavery in principle. The European powers are also often criticised for exploiting Africa but Liverpool ship-owners and traders such as Macgregor Laird, founder of the African Steamship Company, Sir Alfred Jones of the Elder Dempster Lines and John Holt all saw their enterprises as attempts to benefit the African economy and compensate for the

impoverishment that the slave trade caused. Wilberforce and his evangelical friends saw in the missionary work they founded through the Church Mission Society in 1799 not only what they felt as a fulfilment of a humane duty, to spread the truth about God as they believed it, but also to provide education and medical care. The complaints made about the robbery of African culture by Europeans we Anglo-Saxons can equally make against the early Christian missionaries to our own islands, robbing us of our pre-Christian pagan

heritage. Indeed the proponents of ‘Wicca’ make this very allegation. The fact, however, is that Africans have made the Christian faith very much a part of their own culture just as we have. The contribution of black-led churches in London, for instance, and black gospel music world-wide are a positive asset to the Christian cause.

So we have little reason to celebrate because of the enormity of the task yet undone.

“Am I not a man
and a brother?”
Wedgwood anti-slavery
medallion. 1787



So on the basis of our Christian duty to 'love our neighbour as ourselves' we have an obligation to help our black African friends in every way we can, whatever our view of our involvement in historic 'guilt by association'.

We are still left, nonetheless, with the stain on the name of Christianity and of Christ because so-called and even genuine Christians either owned slaves or traded in slaves. How could this be?

The fact is that man has a fantastic ability to miss the point of his beliefs. Thomas Jefferson in the Declaration of Independence declared it self evident that all men were free and equal. Patrick Henry in Virginia screamed "Give me liberty or give me death" surrounded by slave plantations! Many slaves of American patriots escaped to the British side in the War of Independence. No wonder Dr. Samuel Johnson observed that 'The loudest yelps for freedom come from the drivers of slaves.'

The Biblical writers are sometimes criticised for not condemning slavery outright. However, Paul in 1st Timothy (Bible NIV), cites 'slave trading' as on a par with murder and adultery. In Revelation 18 trading in the 'bodies and souls of men' is the last and most vile mercantile activity, justifying divine judgment. But Christians were at that stage not in a position of power and therefore focussed rather on the improvement of slave conditions and on overcoming the handicap of slave status. Jesus himself 'took the very nature of a slave' according to Philippians 2, so that the good news of Christianity was very much a message for the slave and the oppressed, and had within it the seeds of social reformation. Like the Stoics of the same era, the emphasis was on liberation of the spirit but, as Paul strongly hinted to his convert, Philemon, legal liberation was certainly encouraged and practised.

The Renaissance thinkers of the 15th century - when African slavery was first introduced to Europe by the Portuguese - were very much in thrall to the thinking of the Greeks and Romans whose society was based on slavery. 'Humanity is divided into two, masters and slaves...some have the right to command, some are born to obey', said Aristotle the leading Greek philosopher, along with Plato, who thought much the same. There were dissentients, such as the playwright, Euripides, but the received opinion was, as James Boswell put it 2,100 years later, along with many others:

Her correspondence is full of references to ladies she persuaded to give up sugar, the chief slave-grown crop, just as today we opt for fair trade products.

'To abolish a status which in all ages GOD has sanctioned, and man has continued would not only be robbery to an innumerable class of fellow-subjects; but it would be extreme cruelty to the Africa Savages, a portion of whom it saves from massacre, or

intolerable bondage in their own country, and introduces into a much happier state of life; especially now when their passage to the West Indies and their treatment there is humanely regulated.'

In this he was heartily challenged by Dr Johnson, who shamelessly toasted 'the next West Indian slave revolt.' Just as today, many preferred to believe that all was well and it required the unremitting zeal of Thomas Clarkson, as an 18th century 'investigative journalist', compiling a dossier of statements, collecting signatures, even making a model of

the slave ship *Brookes* for exhibition in Parliament to persuade people otherwise..

So why the focus on Wilberforce? Of course he was part of a big team. To support him, Clarkson and many others including the black writer, Equiano, were responsible for lobbying on a massive scale. More people, both men and women, more in fact than at that time had the vote, put their signatures to petitions against the slave trade. The popular female writer, Hannah More, particularly, gave her talents to the cause. Her correspondence is full of references to ladies she persuaded to give up sugar, the chief slave-grown crop, just as today we opt for fair trade products.

Wilberforce single-mindedly dedicated himself to the abolition cause in Parliament. For 20 years he raised it annually till the victory of 25th March 1807. It was the forerunner of all the subsequent campaigns for factory and other humane reforms. It was a triumph of the principle that our faith, with its unequivocal emphasis on loving our neighbour and doing to others as you would that men should do unto you, should very much 'invade' to adapt Lord Melbourne's phrase, the sphere of both public and private life.

As Justin Thacker put it in his letter to *The Telegraph* recently: If Wilberforce had had the wisdom of Grayling (atheist philosopher proposing the motion 'We'd be better off without religion') instead of the gospel of Christ to guide him, then he would have kept his faith... in the private sphere and the slave trade and slavery would have continued until ended, most probably, by war or violent revolution.

faith talking
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 FAITH TALKING
 faith talking

young voices

Children are the most precious treasure a community can possess, for in them are the promise and guarantee of the future. They bear the seeds of the character of future society which is largely shaped by what the adults constituting the community do or fail to do with respect to children. They are a trust no community can neglect with impunity. An all-embracing love of children, the manner of treating them, the quality of the attention shown them, the spirit of adult behaviour toward them - these are all among the vital aspects of the requisite attitude. Love demands discipline, the courage to accustom children to hardship, not to indulge their whims or leave them entirely to their own devices. An atmosphere needs to be maintained in which children feel that they belong to the community and share in its purpose.

England is my birth country. I have many English friends who I like being around and neighbours that are very nice. I must say England is a very nice and developed country to be living in, and I am very happy to be living here!

As a teenage Muslim girl living in England, I feel there are many bad sides to this and few good sides. Because I have lived my life in England with a different culture and religion to everyone else around me, this makes me feel very very different. When it comes to the month of Ramadan all Muslims fast for a whole month. Having to celebrate Ramadan and Eid in a country that is not like your culture, is not very enjoyable at all seeing as me and my family are the only ones celebrating. Well, we do have friends from London, Manchester etc round to celebrate too, but its not the same as having our relatives celebrating with us. I have a neighbour that is a very nice English lady that we invite over for our special occasions, she hasn't the same religion as me or anything but she really does enjoy spending time with us.

One very bad thing is that at times I do really miss family and people with the same religion and culture as me not to be able to share things together.

I personally don't feel any racism against me in this country, but at times it does annoy me how people talk about Muslims in a bad way. When this happens I just have to ignore it and pretend I never heard anything.

Aiya Jibali
Age: 15



I am a teenage girl living in Scotland where I attend a Catholic high school. Although I regard myself as a Christian there has been times when I have felt that there is no point in believing in Christianity because I am at a stage in my life where I am questioning my faith. I do not practise my faith formally most of the time i.e. going to church every Sunday. Sometimes I feel guilty for not doing this but feel I have strong Christian values that guide my life. There are some days when I regret not going to church and think that some Sunday morning I'm going to go but there is always something stopping me, I don't know what it is? It could be that other teenagers might think that I am not cool for going, but on the other hand, a lot of the people I know probably wouldn't care either way.

I have never felt pressure to practise my faith it could be because my father isn't a practising Christian although my mother is. Growing up as Christian has some good points like making your first Communion and Confirmation that help you to focus your faith at that stage in your life. There are also other stages in your life to look forward too and help shape your faith, like the day you make the commitment to get married in a church, this time looking a lot older than you were on your first Holy Communion day-but still as beautiful.

I do believe that there is someone looking after us in life, but I do not always think of that person being Jesus or God. I think of that person being maybe a relative that has maybe passed away or a guardian angel.

There are often things in my faith I question especially when I am in a subject in school like Religious Education. I know there will be people who will have different views to me but sometimes I feel like my religion is brainwashing me into believing about something in my opinion that might not even be true. I like to read magazines as most teenage girls do but never find many views about my religion and when I do they are often negative. Magazines today are evolved around having the right look and how to be a size zero which isn't what life is about. As a Christian I feel I am expected to practise my faith but I think there are different ways in which to practice your faith, I think if you have some kind of a belief then you don't need to go to church every week and go to confession all the time like a strict Christian would. I like the fact that I belong to an organised religion as I do not know what it is not to belong. As I continue to get older I hope to be more involved in my faith and develop more of a deeper understanding of my religion.

Being a British born Hindu I have always been conscious of my faith and have actively attended festivals at the Gujarat Hindu Society, Preston. My parents are of Indian heritage and they brought me up, and my two older brothers, as moderate Hindus in a British society. Growing up I was introduced to my mother-tongue Gujarati from an early age, which enabled me to communicate clearly with my grandparents whose first language was Gujarati, not English.

Following the Hindu tradition for me is a way of life, although my religion does not control my life, it is very much a part of who and what I am – it helps to shape my identity. For example it influences the kind of food I eat, Hindus do not eat beef as the cow is considered sacred. It also influences the relationships I have formed through university and working life. As a Hindu, I attended a Catholic school and pupils would attend Mass every week. I would also attend and this gave me the chance to learn about another religion. It also gave me the opportunity to make new friends who had beliefs that were different to mine, and this was often a conversation starter when I was younger. As I have got older I have established friendships with many Hindus and non-Hindus. Through the teachings of Hinduism I have learned to treat

every person as an individual, not to judge by appearances or religion, as everyone is equal no matter what their beliefs or practices may be.

Being raised around the temple, and therefore in constant contact with other Hindus, has allowed me to experience Hinduism at first hand - as if I were in a temple in India. I was surrounded by people who are dedicated to their religion and from whom I have learnt many life lessons.

Being a moderate Hindu, I will often pay a visit to the temple when I have some spare time. Going to the temple allows me to reflect on my day – it offers a quiet place for me to pray, as well as to meditate. Meditation is an important part of my Hindu culture, the chanting of the mantra 'Aum' or 'Om' meaning peace, is used as a way to relax and to clear the mind.

As a young British Hindu my religion is very important to me, and to many of my Hindu friends. We continue to learn and grow through the teachings of our religion and, as we grow older, we hope one day to raise our own children with the same religious views and traditions.

Priya Tailor - Age 21



Priya and friends

Salaam: I'm a Muslim living in a non-Muslim country. This factor has not affected my views and my belief in Islam. I live in an environment where the teachings of Islam are given preference and that is why I always refer to the teachings of our beloved Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). Islam has taught me a lot, people from other religions may assume that Islam is a complicated religion but to me Islam is the correct way of life. The teachings of the Holy Qur'an are suitable for every human being, it teaches the accurate ways to live your life with peace and harmony.

To me my faith means peace and submission. Islam teaches that one can only find peace by submitting to Almighty Allah in heart, soul and deed.

Praying five times a day has made me realize the importance of it. Whenever I need help and strength, I always pray to Allah and ask for his help. Allah has always helped me in everything and given me everything I asked for. All this makes my belief in Allah even stronger because Him listening to my prayers and granting me with all the things I desire justifies the existence and the mercy of Allah.

My submission to Allah and being a part of a Muslim society makes me very proud and encourages me to spread the word of Allah.



Maheen and Sarah

drawing by Maheen Chaudry

An extract – exploring religious inclusivism - from a paper evaluating the contribution of interfaith dialogue to community cohesion.

Religious inclusivists are, as the term implies, people of faith who are willing to engage in dialogue with members of other religious groups. Most religious inclusivists regard themselves as moderate in their religious behaviour, although the nature of their beliefs and the intensity of their convictions vary. The young Religious Inclusivists interviewed for my research lived in different parts of Burnley and Blackburn (hence, there was little variation between socio-economic groups) and belonged, for the most part, to mainstream faith communities. Among the Christian denominations, inclusivistic attitudes were widespread among Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Methodists, Baptists and non-conformists. The Muslim respondents expressed an even greater homogeneity of faith attitudes and willingness to work with other faith groups (a reflection clearly of the fact that Islam is a less diverse system of belief than Christianity), despite their greater adherence to religious rules. As one might expect, the Muslim communities of Blackburn and Burnley tended to regard conservative Christians as their closest allies, recognising similarities not so much in religious doctrines, but in ethical and moral principles. The following comments from four of the interviewees (two Muslim and two Christian) convey the perceptions that the two main faith communities held of each other and of their mutual willingness to engage in dialogue:

It's nice to chat with Muslims about their faith. There are things that as a Christian I would object to about other faiths, but I also think that Christians could learn a lot from other people. It was fascinating for me to hear about some of the things that Muslims do during Ramadan and I think there are an awful lot of things we could all learn...I think that a lot of Christians eschew discipline and most Christians tend to see discipline as a negative thing. Christians seem to want a dedicated, but not a habitual relationship with God; but the Muslim concept of praying five times a day is something that Christians could get a lot out of. The majority of people don't find prayer easy and I think that if there's something to encourage you, that's no bad thing...I would say that the Bible is the truth, but that doesn't mean that we should shun other faiths. I think that we should embrace other faiths. As Christians, we should live in a way that is relevant to the world rather than be isolated from it. I think that I would struggle to pray with other faiths and worship with other faiths, but other than that, I think we have a lot to gain from each other both socially, and in some respects, religiously.

(male Christian aged 24 years)

THE BURNLEY PROJECT

Faith attitudes among young people in Burnley & Blackburn

I think that there are moral values that stem from people's faith and when this comes across, it's fantastic. I have seen a charitable spirit from the Christian community when the Tsunami happened...they were out in the town centre collecting with their buckets...always willing to give and I think that this is shared across the board with people of other faiths and even no faith as well...and I think that if people of different faiths come together, they can be a united force, because there's a push towards secularism in our society and a shift away from faith.

(female Muslim aged 24 years)

Our religion does not block out other religions. In this society, the main religion is Christianity and we don't disrespect this in any way. Some of the things that are taught within Christianity, we believe in and can relate to...some of the things we relate to and accept, just like Christianity accepts some of the things that Islam has to offer and some things we might agree to...so my religion isn't just Islam, it's Christianity, Judaism and Islam. There are things in Christianity and Judaism that are exactly the same as Islam...people talk too much about differences rather than similarities.

(male Muslim aged 21 years)

I think that other faiths have a massive amount to offer. I really believe that different faiths can live together and share life together and share different concepts of their faith together and yet still hold strong in their own faiths. Muslims have offered me so much that has helped my own faith and I think it's very healthy to be with people who are different...Muslims have lots of things that can contribute to my faith. One thing is their commitment to prayer...I'm astonished constantly that they manage to pray five times a day and I think that Christians have got so much to learn from that. The Christian church and the Muslim community are working closely together in Burnley and I have seen amazing things happen. In lots of ways, I don't think we're segregated at all apart from different worship centres and so on where we have to be divided; but I think it's a race thing that divides people, not religion.

(female Christian aged 23 years)

Although there is little reference to doctrinal issues in these transcriptions, it is clear that the interviewees had respect for their religious counterparts and were eager to learn from other faith groups in and around the town. The first respondent realistically acknowledges the difficulties involved in partaking in joint worship, but is nonetheless earnest in his view that positive faith relations can only be beneficial. The second respondent suggests that charitable acts such as fund raising provide one of the best opportunities for people of faith to work together and that this can bring about spiritual unity without having to enter into dialogical exchange. Practical initiatives would, of course, enable faith and non-faith groups alike to engage in social interaction. The most common suggestions included participating in acts of charity and playing an active role in community events that welcomed the contribution of faith groups. The following excerpt from an interview with a young Christian woman who was employed as a youth officer provides a good example of how such opportunities can occur:

It's about having the chance to spend time with people who do not have a faith, but it needs to happen in the right setting. I went to an event recently at the Burnley Youth Theatre. It was an event that was about bringing people from different ethnic groups in Burnley together and I think this should happen a lot more. The people who took part spent the day together and they learnt a lot about community and cohesion and exploring those ideas. There were Christians and Muslims who also took part and they talked about their faith and how this helped them to make Burnley better. The whole day went really well and I think this needs to happen much more.

(female Christian aged 22 years)

Social class has always been one of the main sources of segregation in every human society. The extent of social segregation, and its complexity in Burnley, was expressed by several interviewees from the two main ethnic groups:

I think that regeneration is a good thing but it's also a bad thing because people are shifting to other areas of the town. When they knock the houses down in White areas, White people won't move into an Asian area; they'll move into another White area. At the moment, Asian people are having their houses knocked down in the Daneshouse area and so what's happening is that they're starting to move into the more mixed area not too far away. But the people in that area are now starting to feel uncomfortable and they're moving away; so people are always shifting away because they're just not used to having different ethnic groups living near them.

(White male resident aged 19 years)

I think Burnley is segregated in millions of different ways; but I don't just see it as a Burnley problem, I see it as a worldwide problem. People don't look at how they can relate to each other; they look at differences. I think that Burnley has territorial problems, religious problems and also class problems. Some people feel that they are getting less money from the council and the BNP tell people this...then there's racism which is another problem. Some people don't go into Asian areas because they think they'll get beaten up because they're White; and Asians won't go into a White community because they think they'll be beaten up by White people. I think that the riots have caused more and more segregation and there are areas that didn't have a problem with racism before, but they do now because of the riots.

(Asian male resident aged 22 years)

When our parents moved to this country, they came here to work and with the idea of going back one day; but things have changed now because the second generation see Britain as their home and Pakistan as a visiting place; so we can't live there because we don't know how to live there. You see, our parents withdrew themselves from society when they moved here. They went to work and then came home and didn't really move out of the areas that they'd settled into and I think that caused a lot of problems. Even now, you get older people from our own communities who won't talk to White people. They'll talk to nurses and doctors and people like that because they have to, but they don't find it easy to make conversation; whereas if I see a White person I'll say "Hiya" and I think this is where it's getting better.

(Asian male resident aged 24 years)

I think it was much more difficult for our parents when they migrated to Burnley in the 1960s because they didn't know the language and this cause fear on both sides; and because they couldn't speak the language, they couldn't mix and so neither party really wanted to mix and I think that this would happen anywhere. But it's certainly getting easier now. It's like asylum seekers who come into this country; they see us as another minority group that are already established and they can relate to us and they're picking up on how to get on with people because they can see that we're doing it. But our parents had no example to follow.

(Asian female resident aged 26 years)

These four residents seem acutely aware of the segregation that exists in Burnley and all comment on its various manifestations. The key question is how social harmony can best be achieved. It is here that the religious inclusivists can offer some of the most positive ways forward.



ALL IN GOOD

Spirit

I am a British Muslim born in Poona, India, where, irrespective of race, religion or colour, all friends and acquaintances of the family are addressed as aunts or uncles. In the early 1960's, as a young student, I came to University College, London. My first memorable experience was of hearing many different languages being spoken, especially on buses, and yet this was the period in England when little cards in shop windows announced availability of accommodation with the rubric 'sorry no colour'! My peer group proved to be wrong in their assessment that "such cards were not meant for Indians" as I found to my cost. I decided to do something about this state of affairs and placed my own card in a shop window stating **'a dark student at a prestigious University seeks accommodation, but only with an educated and enlightened English family'**. Three days later a concert pianist phoned me and offered his newly decorated basement flat for 4 guineas (£4.40p) a week. A particularly interesting thing about this was that the musician husband was Jewish and his wife, a teacher of music, Christian. They were a warm and generous couple who became adopted auntie and uncle to a Muslim student. After I married my fiancée my new found auntie and uncle visited us, and our friends, at our flat, taking part in heated debates on hot topics of the time, such as colonialism and the actions of President Nasser – all in good spirit. Despite the sense of discrimination and exclusion promoted by the cards, the positive experience of this relationship prevented any kind of persecution complex from creeping in. Like many students I was very proud of my country of birth, and of her leaders who had struggled for independence, and so was taken aback when our Professor of International Law made what I felt were derogatory remarks about Pundit Nehru. I was shocked! I stood up, collected my books, and made straight for the exit door. When asked where I was going, I remarked with great restraint: "I have not come 5000 miles to listen to all this..." (I refrained from saying "rubbish") and I left the class, a very disillusioned and disappointed student. I had great hopes of moving forward with subjects like International Law and International Relations, but this incident made me realise that although these subjects were marvellous in their own right they were quite capable of being misused on the chessboard of power politics. In 1968 I was made a lecturer of law at the University of London

- perhaps the first Asian/ Muslim woman in an all-white, virtually male dominated Faculty of Law. I started teaching Public Law to undergraduates and a whole package of Criminal Justice to postgraduates. The package included 'causes of crime' to the sentencing process, also 'white collar crime' and 'juvenile justice'. Simultaneously, as an Asian woman I was expected to change my 'hat' the minute I walked into my home. My priorities had to shift and follow a well established order in which my husband came first, then children – in my case two very young daughters - then the home and then my in-laws. My in-laws could decide to drop in from anywhere in the world, often without prior notice and usually during summer months when I would be busy marking, preparing guidance notes, or trying to complete some research projects. On arrival they would take precedence over everything, including the children and the home. There were no short cuts to this order. I was fortunate in that some help did come along in the shape of my mother, and for this I was very grateful, but it was not an easy time.

I also felt that it was my moral duty to support a local women's organisation. Having spoken at several women's conferences and meetings, and talked to the younger generation it became clear to me that women, however uneducated in the western sense, were mothers of the future generation, and so should be given the opportunity to voice their own opinions and their concerns: the Prophet Mohammed's [may peace be upon him] hadith does not say only men should 'acquire knowledge' and I felt it important to promote this Islamic teaching in every sense. I endeavoured therefore to enable the women to reflect, to learn, to debate - to have an open mind and not passively accept preconceived ideas as truth and beyond questioning.

I have been fortunate to travel to and lecture in Universities in countries such as Amsterdam, France, Germany, Greece, Poland and China. The Chinese visit to three provinces was organised by a professor colleague. Nine of us were in the party and each one agreed to present a paper to the university. Having served on a UK Parole Board I opted to speak on the Parole System in UK. I was also extremely keen to see the Chinese prison regime in all three provinces of Beijing, Shanghai and Xian. All of these visits were without prior announcement and I was greatly impressed at what we found.

There was little doubt that every prison had a firing squad outside, but each prisoner was given three chances to reform. At the same time each and every prisoner was given the opportunity of shining in whatever positive activities they chose for life outside prison. From operatic singing to learning to play musical instruments; making electrical goods and all kinds of electrical gadgets; cane furniture to basket making, and sewing of socks. In other words plenty of good and relevant opportunity was provided.

Prisoners were able to deposit their earnings from the work they did in the prison Bank, but were also required to send part of it home, and their commune were under obligation to take them back on release. This was the common pattern. We were expecting to witness so-called Chinese cruelty but we did not see cruelty as such. We do know however that the firing squad would go into action if the three opportunities offered to the prisoner to reform were not taken up, this would be after a court ruling on the case [on request we were allowed to be present at one such ruling]. We were told that the average age of prisoners was 30 and under, and that the majority of them were found guilty of an ideological crime. Accordingly their education included learning about the ancients; the history of China; the different groups and minorities within its boundaries and their contributions to its culture and so on. The Chinese approach to their custodial regime has had the greatest impact on my thinking with regard to the successes and failures of our own prison system.

From the time I arrived in Britain, and especially since the Iranian revolution of 1979, I have been concerned about our young people - and what I perceive to be the traumatised psyche of young Muslims, which does not seem to abate. I am also surprised at the rise in the most unusual criminality and the rising prison population, this despite the introduction of several types of non-custodial sentences. With this concern of youth in mind I often reflect, when in the early 1960s, whilst still a student, I worked as a 'supply' teacher in different schools. This gave me a wonderful opportunity to learn about the education system and also about the variation in schools from area to area, the different needs of the pupils, and the quality of response to

I have been concerned about our young people - and what I perceive to be the traumatised psyche of young Muslims, which does not seem to abate.

learning. It was the most rewarding period of my life, generating an interest in the welfare of young people that has always stayed with me. More recently, with a colleague from the Department of Statistics I carried out a project that examined the 'Response of Asian children to law and order' and I took the concept further when appointed a visiting scholar at the Institute of Criminology, Cambridge. A colleague and I set up a pilot study on behaviour modification of school children, interviewing some 500 children from 5 different schools with the aim of finding out - at the earliest possible stage - why children truant, why, so to speak, they fall off the rails.

In 2006, working with a friend, we applied for and received a Government grant for a project to gather the views of Young British Muslim Women [18-30] on the premise: "Islam my religion and Britain my country". The aim of the project is to understand what it is that the young women are looking forward to, both in their religion - Islam - and in their country - Britain: and of particular interest to me - their views on the spiritual side of Islam - an aspect of religion that I feel is often missing in any discussion or debate, including interfaith dialogue. In relation to this project I put very searching questions, to do with the central message of Islam rather than politics, to the Director-General of one of the largest Islamic Cultural Centres, and he answered these as patiently and as fully as he could. He is keen that this interview material be produced in booklet form and made available at grass roots level. The CD on YBMW has been prepared will be distributed to participants and other interested parties.

Whilst reflecting on my past experiences, I am conscious that it is what I do today that is important for the future. I feel strongly that we cannot live in the past, however glorious, extensive or even tragic that past may have been. Despite trauma suffered, despite the negative pictures of Islam, I know that it is my responsibility to paint my own picture and the picture of Islam, by my own elevated thoughts, kind words and not just good deeds but elevated deeds. I get a clear message from the Qur'an on this: **"Those are dear to Me who are best of conduct"**.

In the final analysis, I know that I am directly responsible to my Creator as a human being, irrespective of my colour, religion, cast or gender. "You have come from Me and your return is back to Me" says Al- Qur'aan, so there is a Divine spark in all of us and it is up to me as to how I wish to return to my Creator, polluted with all the negative components like jealousy, hate, anger, revenge etc. or with the Divine Spark glittering brightly with elevated thoughts, words and deeds.

It is easy to be born a Muslim but difficult to become a Muslim.

For further information please contact dr.saeed@ucl.mail.net



A Journey INTO HEALING



SATURDAY EVENING, 10.30 PM, EAST LONDON.....
After a good meal, with some dear friends I decided to walk home. I was only minutes into my journey when I was confronted by a gang of Afro-Caribbean ‘hoodies.’ I tried to defuse the situation by saying: “ Hi, you OK? ” when one of them came up from behind and hit me over the head with an iron bar. I collapsed to the ground dazed and confused, but like a boxer in the ring on auto - pilot, I very quickly stood up and they disbanded. It all came as something of a shock. I made it home eventually, with the help of the police, and nursed my wounds. Over the next few days I realized I had sustained hearing loss on one side. I now live with the realization that I could have been killed. I have always walked the streets of my neighbourhood with impunity but now I know the risks involved. Life is a precious gift and I just feel so grateful that I’m still alive.

WHY VIOLENCE, WHY ME?

Through my work with young offenders I have come to realize there are many complex sociological and psychological reasons why unprovoked attacks of this nature are carried out. A diverse range of contributing factors that can set in motion one single act of violence, which even the perpetrator doesn’t fully understand, leaving everyone bewildered, confused and very angry. Certainly there are core social / psychological issues that surface repeatedly in offenders’ lives, but it is too easy to reach out for simplistic explanations in our search for understanding. It’s all too easy to rationalize an offence as if we had perfect perception and insight. We are all a complex mix of contradictory forces that feed into ever changing circumstances, so it is never quite clear how we will respond in any given situation. Certainly much criminal behaviour is habitual, set in recidivist’s patterns that become difficult to break, but we must never fall into the trap of thinking there is an ‘ inevitability’ about this. Why someone resorts to a reckless, violent crime whilst others pull back I really don’t know. Why some cross unacceptable boundaries whilst other recognize and respect these markers I don’t know. Why I was attacked in the street by a stranger I don’t know, but one thing I’m certain of - it wasn’t personal. After this incident I had repeated headaches, jaw aches and

difficulties with sleeping. I felt very vulnerable. My mind kept going over the event and I became increasingly outraged and resentful for what had happened. The emotional need to stay attached to this anger however seemed to block my body’s healing process. My mind was racing away thinking of retribution and punishment for the culprit, and my body was sadly left behind – ignored. Soon I reached a point when I could go no further, I had to let go of my emotional attachments and allow healing into my life.....

BUDDHISM:
ANCIENT TEACHINGS FOR A MODERN WORLD

“ To be angry is to let other people’s mistakes punish you. To forgive other people is to be good to yourself.”

Master Cheng Yen

Buddhism, similar to other world religions, asks us to put aside our feelings of anger and hate, resentment and rage in order to seek out the higher ground of forgiveness. It suggests that if we go forward into this spiritual space we are released from a host of negative feelings that have the potential to damage our physical and mental health. But it does take time; we cannot prematurely try to reach out to forgiveness when it has not ripened enough to do any good. We must give it space in order to mature slowly then it can really do its work effectively in leading us away from our pain. During this period we may very well take up different positions - from a begrudging sense of partial acceptance to a full, unequivocal healing and this is understandable. We must remember that forgiveness is not a fixed, absolute ‘ state ‘ but rather a ‘ process ‘ that has to be continuously worked at and in any given moment of forgetfulness we may very well slip back into negative states of mind. But providing we work sincerely and genuinely on our quest, we will make headway.

The full magic of forgiveness gains its power from compassionate understanding – empathy that does not judge or measure superficially but tries to seek out a deeper reality of cause and effect. Gandhi thought that forgiveness was the preserve of the strong, the courageous, who could go beyond their own sense of personal damage and reach out to others in an act of unification. He saw forgiveness as a call to love that surrounds us; that nourishes us. For without love, without full immersion in its healing waters, we are diminished, we become less than we could be.

In all the major religions the ability to forgive is considered one of the greatest challenges we can face, and one of the richest of treasures we can secure. This is because of the opportunity it offers for us to embrace something quite sacred, beyond our individual concerns, beyond our strong sense of self, and who knows where this journey of forgiveness could lead?

REDEMPTION: MILAREPA'S STORY (1052 – 1135)

As a young man Milarepa sought revenge on his relatives who had conspired to cheat his mother out of her inheritance after the death of his father. We are told that through the use of sorcery and black magic, which Milarepa's mother encouraged him to take up, he had caused their death. We are also told that he committed other misdeeds, for instance the complete destruction of food crops by inducing violent storms. Soon after these events Milarepa started to have disturbing thoughts about the nature of his actions. He came to feel a deep-seated remorse for what he had done. Later he gained insight on the Dharma (Buddhist teachings) and sought repentance for his transgressions. Under the spiritual guidance of Marpa the Translator he was instructed to build a number of towers on a remote mountain. When his work was finished he was then told to pull them down again. Milarepa obeyed the instructions of his guru without question, and through the process of his training quelled his hitherto fierce pride that had kept him locked in a cycle of reaction. Marpa eventually recognized the light of his disciple's spiritual transformation and initiated him into the teachings of the Whispered Transmission School. The story of Milarepa tells us that after his Mother's death, he meditated for twelve solitary years in a cave to eventually achieve spiritual breakthrough - supreme enlightenment. Thereafter Milarepa took up the life of a mendicant yogi, living a life of absolute poverty and austerity in the caves of Tibet, seeking out what was in his heart – the desire to teach and share the Dharma with anyone who was prepared to listen. Often this took the form of singing songs, rather than reciting prose sermons, and today the beauty of these songs are still preserved for us to study and admire for their wisdom and insights.

This brutal, ruthless man - who eventually left behind his violent ways to tread the Buddhist path - is now revered as a arahant (saint) having taken his place amongst the great and noble in the Buddhist canon.

“ Accustomed long to contemplating love and compassion I have forgotten the difference between myself and others.”

Milarepa

CONCLUSION

We all make mistakes in life, we all get things wrong and when we do what greater pleasure can we receive than an acceptance; a reassuring acknowledgement that others can look beyond our misdeeds and see something better in us. The biblical imperative of “Hate the sin but love the sinner” suggests that the only thing that really separates any of us is our behaviour. Jesus is often portrayed as loving sinners as much as his disciples, perhaps even more so because they were seen as a challenge to his ministry - ‘unclaimed souls’ that had to be rescued. The Buddha, in a similar vein, always tried to reveal the innate Buddha-nature of everyone, irrespective of the misdeeds they had carried out. He always tried to look through their anger and pain, their resentment and grief in order to discover the light of their bodhisattva potential.

Milarepa was seriously troubled by his unskillful actions and this pushed him into finding salvation. The spiritual journey of redemption he undertook was long and arduous but he persevered throughout to achieve liberation and if Milarepa (given the severity of his actions) could achieve this then perhaps the ‘ hoodie, ‘ who hit me over the head can as well – I sincerely hope so.....

**“ Just yesterday, the soul of a demon.
This morning, the face of a bodhisattva.
A demon. A bodhisattva...
There is no difference.”**

Shigo

**PEACE, JOY AND
CONTENTMENT TO ALL
SENTIENT BEINGS**

TOLERANCE, INTEGRATION KOSHER CURRY

The vibrant Jewish communities of India have declined - but live on in the diaspora

It was not surprising that a new restaurant in Bombay called Hitler's Cross and decorated with posters of the Führer and Nazi swastikas would so outrage India's Jews that it was obliged to change its name.

More surprising for many people was the news that India has a Jewish community at all. Being a descendant of that community I am used to this surprise. Visitors to my grandmother on festive days are surprised by the scents of curry, which fill the home instead of roast chicken, lockshen and pickled herring. What smells like an experiment in cross-cultural affairs is in fact a typical scene in a Jewish household from India.

My maternal grandmother was born in Calcutta in 1913 and emigrated to the UK after the war. Her life story is one thread in the fabric of a remarkable community. Though best-known as the spiritual domain of millions of Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims, India was once the home to a thriving Jewish community. At its height, between the world wars, the community numbered about 24,000, and was found mainly in Bombay, Calcutta and Cochin. Though India's Jews were a relatively small community, their history and backgrounds were remarkably various. My own ancestors went to Calcutta from Iraq and Syria from 1798 onwards, seeking opportunities in trade and commerce. These "Baghdadi Jews", who settled mainly in Bombay and Calcutta, identified strongly with the ruling British in their lifestyle. They spoke English at home, learnt Shakespeare in schools and increasingly all wore Western-style clothing.

In contrast to the Baghdadis, the largest community in India was the Bene Israel in Bombay, who tended to adopt the language, customs and dress of their Hindu neighbours, while retaining Jewish traditions. The state of Kerala in the south was the home to the third community, the "Cochini" Jews. They first came to the region en masse in the early Middle Ages for trade — although there is some evidence that in fact Jewish merchants first visited India in Roman times.

These different communities, the Baghdadis, Bene Israel and Cochinis, may have been hundreds of miles apart and divided by

their different histories, but they shared a desire to integrate into the societies of which they were part. Members of the Jewish community rose to prominent positions in the government, business, the judiciary and even the military. One of the most lionised was Major General Jack Jacobs, who led the Indian forces in the war of 1971 against Pakistan, which led to the creation of Bangladesh.

Religious life over hundreds of years centred around a number of ornate and beautiful synagogues in the chief cities. Many still stand and are visited by those eager to explore their Jewish heritage.

On a recent visit to the Magen David Synagogue in Calcutta, I discovered that it is now surrounded by a marketplace, whose traders treat the site with the reverence and respect that they accord to one of their own temples.

Another institution of the community still standing is Nahum's bakery in the heart of the New Market of Calcutta, which has supplied kosher patisserie and delicacies for several generations and became a favourite with many Bengalis.

As Jews mixed in wider society, there was the expected rate of out-marriage, but the

community strove to maintain its religious identity. It observed the major festival days, and weddings and community functions were invariably adorned by a rich variety of kosher Indian foods. The community's reputation for hospitality has been confirmed by stories of visitors from the West arriving in India and finding themselves so well looked after that they were reluctant to return home.

One elderly relative told me of an English rabbi who stayed with her family for several weeks in Calcutta, and quickly became a great admirer of the community.

Another notable feature of the community was the absence of any persistent anti-Semitism. Jews in India enjoyed religious tolerance without the anti-Semitism that faced their brethren in other parts of the world and they did not leave India because of any persecution, but because they were lured by the prospect of living in a Jewish homeland after 2,000 years of Jewish exile.



Her life story is
one thread in
the fabric of a
remarkable
community



Cochin Synagogue built 1568: photo Richard Todd

Others were nervous after the withdrawal of the British and the rise of Indian independence and decided to seek a new life elsewhere, often in the UK or Western countries such as the US and Australia.

Now there are only about 5,500 Jews in India, 4,500 of them in Bombay, and the communities of Calcutta and Cochin have only a handful of people remaining: the Passover Seder service in Cochin in April was expected to be the last authentic one to take place there.

Meanwhile, the community in Bombay, supplemented by the tourist traffic, still has a few functioning synagogues. One of the ironies of the decline of the Indian Jewish community is that it has coincided with an influx of hedonistic young Israelis into the country, seeking relief from the pressures of life at home. It is estimated that there are 30,000 young Israelis in India at any given time.

The Indian Jewish diaspora in the UK maintains many of the cultural and religious customs of the community. In my family conversations are sprinkled with Hindustani words, and our Sabbath meals often resemble the food at our local curry house. These traditions are proudly maintained — and in recent months a new Indian kosher restaurant has opened in London.

The illustrious history of the community has been used to promote ties between the Jewish and Hindu communities in the UK with such initiatives as the formation of the Indian Jewish Association, which focuses on the shared values of the communities. A recent example was the reaction of the UK Jewish community to the Bombay bombings, which prompted expressions of solidarity and fundraising.

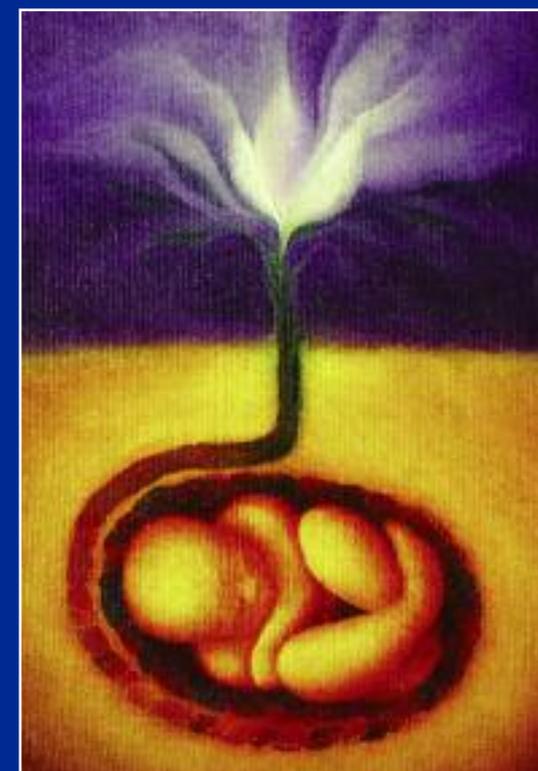
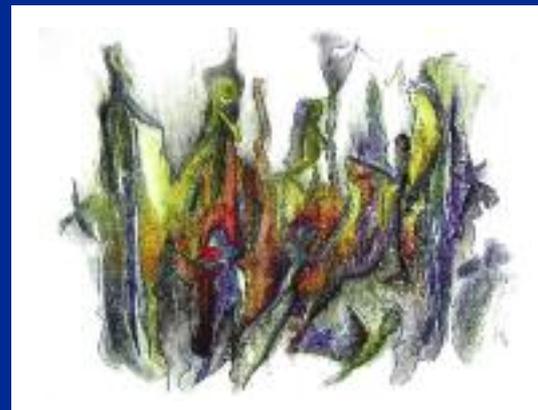
The Jewish community was never more than a drop in the vast ocean of a country with a population now of a billion, yet its contributions to India and the Jewish world went beyond its numbers. Those looking for a model of coexistence and integration would do well to examine the story of this diverse, vibrant and successful group, which lives on in diaspora communities around the world.

This article first appeared in The Times 26th August 2006

From 4 May until 26 July Angela Schütz will be exhibiting works in oil and pastels in the City of London at the Bookshop Gallery of The London Centre for Spirituality at the Church of St Edmund the King in Lombard Street. Opening hours are Monday to Friday 10am to 6pm, admission is free. The exhibition shows snapshots of the artist's inner journey over the last 6 years:

"I believe that images are the language of the soul and that using this language allows us to get in touch and communicate with the hidden parts of ourselves. For me this 'soul communication' is a way of getting in touch with my Inner Light. It helps me to remember who I am and discover who I might become. Letting my pictures 'speak' at an exhibition is an invitation to the viewer to get in touch with their own world of imagery and shine a light on the truth that might be revealed."

<http://insightsart.blogspot.com>



The Marginalisation

At the time of the Prophet Muhammad (may peace and blessings be upon him) when the Qur'an was first revealed, it was quite natural for the women to pray behind the men. Women were not segregated as they are today in upstairs rooms, or made to pray behind a curtain or partition, a situation which occurs in so many mosques today. In our time, in most mosques throughout the Arab world, Turkey, Pakistan, Indonesia and Malaysia, there is a separate entrance for women which leads to their 'quarters' somewhere away from the men's. In most mosques men and women do not even see each other but go their separate ways before, during and after the prayer. Social interaction between men and women is discouraged in Islam, and yet at the time of the Prophet Muhammad the women played an active part in society. They were considered equal at home, went into battle as warriors with their men, as well as looking after the wounded. The Prophet's wives taught and gave advice to the new Muslims. Aisha, his young wife, was an expert in Islamic jurisprudence and gave counselling to both men and women after his death and many *hadiths* are based on her testimony. At the time when Islam was at its greatest height in Baghdad, when scientific discovery, astronomy, music and the arts were flourishing, a great woman Sufi saint, Rabi'a al Adawiya was much sought after by the theologians of the day for her wisdom and saintly presence.

Throughout the Qur'an continual reference is made to 'the believing men and the believing women': thus men and women are addressed as equals. An example of this can be found in the following verse:

'The Believers, men
And women, are protectors,
One of another: they enjoin
What is just, and forbid
What is evil: they observe
Regular prayers, practise
Regular charity, and obey God and His Apostle.
On them will God pour his mercy...'¹

The Prophet even went so far with his reforms for women that some of his companions spoke out openly against his policy of raising their status and of treating them kindly. He even made arrangements for the education of women. Unfortunately, these reforms were not carried further after the Holy Prophet's death, but rather old, patriarchal attitudes took over. Indeed, the situation has remained relatively static until today. In many cases the position of women has even taken a backward step in comparison to the leaps ahead which the Prophet instituted. This tendency towards regression has taken place because of the way in which the Qur'an has been interpreted in any particular period or according to the role which tradition plays in any particular society. There will always be men who seek to gain power over women, who explain the Qur'an according to their lights, bringing in new rules to denigrate and oppress them. In my opinion, however, it behoves a woman to be the possessor of an enquiring mind and to find out about her rights. Muslims are enjoined to **'Seek knowledge, even if you have to go as far as China'**²: this means Muslim women as well as Muslim men. During the centuries following the Prophet's death with Islam's expansion into areas such as Persia, India and Byzantium, many cultural institutions were taken over from these areas, such as veiling and the seclusion of women. Scholars and theologians interpreted Qur'an and hadith so as to segregate women and keep them away from the sphere of men. This can be observed very much today in that more radical interpretations of Islam abound which women unfortunately do not question.

This phenomenon of the marginalisation of women can be observed very much with regard to women's space in mosques. The Messenger of God said, **"Do not prevent the maid-servants of God from going to the mosque."**³



of Women

We always used to attend a nearby mosque where we live in Germany. There are few mosques here built in the Arab or Turkish style, with a gallery upstairs for women so they can hear and see what is going on. The mosques in Germany have mostly been taken over from old warehouses, office blocks and factories and are set back from the road in inner courtyards, according to the old German style of building of the time. The women are relegated to a room somewhere upstairs where they are compelled to hear the sermon and prayers through a loudspeaker, which may not always work, or which crackles and distorts the measured tread of the Qur'anic recitations. The men seem to be totally unaware of, or indifferent, to this. The imam prays in front of them, so they can hear quite well in *their* part of the mosque. The men's part is often decorated with fine mosaics and calligraphy around the prayer niche and minbar (pulpit), with oriental hanging lamps to make it more inviting as a place of prayer. On feast days there is often no room at all for women. The men take over the whole mosque at that time, requiring women to stay at home.

Our mosque has had a succession of different nationalities administering it and worshipping in it. It was first run by Turks, then by Bosnians, and subsequently by Kurds, who were extremely patriarchal, one could even say misogynist. In fact, during their administration there was not a single woman to be seen on the premises. Now the mosque has been taken over by Pakistanis. Unfortunately, our Pakistani brothers seem to believe in complete *pardah*, so we women are obliged to stay upstairs in our room, which also doubles as a classroom for children to learn the Qur'an. It is neither very comfortable nor attractive, with its tables and chairs piled up at one end of the room and its loudspeaker, which does not always relay what is going on downstairs.

We used to perform our *Dhikr* (Remembrance of God) once a fortnight in the mosque. I was the only woman taking part so I sat downstairs at the back, where I was able to hear the *surahs* during the prayers and take part in the *Dhikr*. The Pakistani men did not really approve of my being there, and even pointed out to my husband during the ceremony that I should go upstairs. However, the brothers of other nationalities did not consider it right that I should spend the whole time alone upstairs doing *Dhikr* to the accompaniment of a microphone. I knew that if I gave in to these ideas of *pardah* then all of us women would be confined to the upstairs room. As we wanted to attract all nationalities to the mosque, particularly Germans who might be interested in learning more about Islam, it did not bode well if no women took part. At the time of the holy Prophet, it was the



Sisters in Faith

custom for the women to pray behind the men. This form of communal prayers can still be found in some mosques in Turkey. Sometimes there is a thin curtain separating the sexes. Indeed, I would not have even minded a curtain partitioning a space for us women at the back of the mosque. In the end it became more and more clear that I was not welcome. As I had spent enough time sitting upstairs by myself with the door closed, I decided to stay away like the rest of my sisters. Over the centuries men have interpreted Qur'an and *hadith* to suit their particular ideas and to give emphasis to the restrictions which they impose on women. Practices were similar in Europe before the 20th century when women were not allowed at universities and into gentlemen's clubs.

Our mosque was at its best during the Bosnian period, which lasted for ten years. The Bosnians practise a form of Islam which appeals more to our European way of thinking. Their more 'normal' way of relating between the sexes is easier for us converts to accept. At that time the imam celebrated *Dhikr* every Thursday evening for the men, and I was allowed to participate, sitting at the back of the mosque. During Ramadhan the women's section was always full. Many young Bosnian women came, simply but elegantly dressed in long skirts and attractively bound, matching headscarves. There was a great sense of excitement as we looked forward to the *tarawih* prayers and to fellowship. Additionally, we women used to meet once a week in the mosque to talk about aspects of Islam, read the Qur'an and to learn more about our religion. We prayed together, ate together and during Ramadhan and festive occasions we joined the men downstairs in the cafeteria. Everyone interacted in a friendly and respectful manner. There was no feeling of us women being unwelcome during the 'Bosnian period'. Perhaps this illustrates that the differences are cultural rather than Islamic. Strict interpretations of scripture or even cultural distortions do not really further integration and understanding between East and West.

1 The Holy Qura'an Surah Tauba verse 71. 2 Hadith, reported by Anas. 3 Hadith, Muslim No. 888 (See also nos. 884-891 and Bukhari Vol. 1, Nos. 824,832)

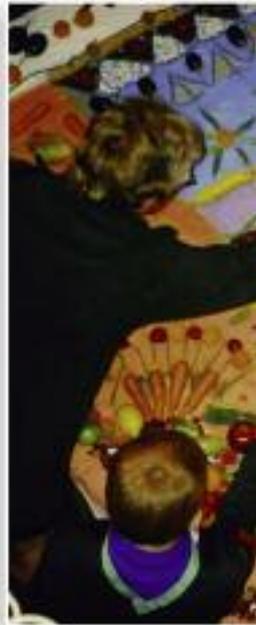
OF

Personal searching

For me there is nothing more wonderful or satisfying than to see a child creating a painting: it is so natural for him or her to freely enter a world of fantasy and colour. Born in England of Indian parentage, colour and texture has always been a part of my life, and I have many happy memories of painting, collaging, drawing, colouring-in and gluing(!) at infant school. In the 1970's, before the formation of a national curriculum, art at my school was used as a natural expression of self-development. My love of painting was very much encouraged by my parents, and their support was paramount to my obtaining an arts degree. I particularly value their backing since youngsters can often be discouraged from taking arts courses instead of more job-centred studies.

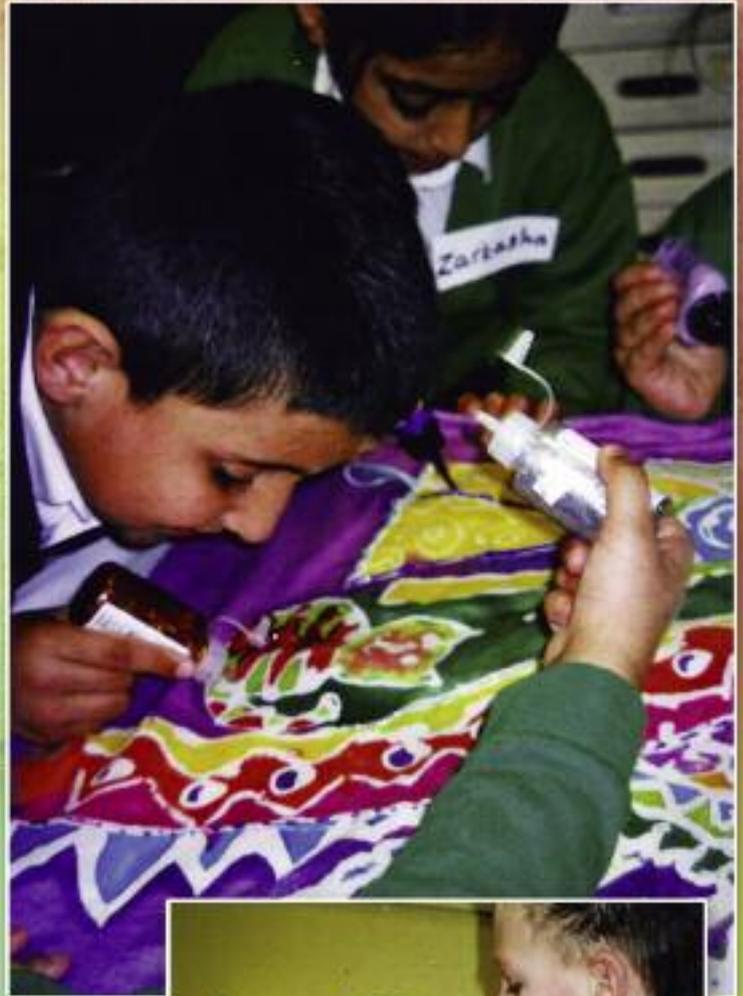
Working in schools is an important aspect of my work as an artist, I get a great buzz from working with children. I find that as a visiting artist they respond with a sense of curiosity, and I feel able to encourage and challenge the pupils in a new and dynamic way. I am there to bring out the best in them – I tell them that there is no such thing as a bad or a good artist. I enthuse them as much as I can, helping to empower them so that they become more confident in who they are, and what they can achieve.

In the past my paintings focused on everyday Hindu rituals, customs and festivals prevalent in Gujarati culture. But now my work has gradually become more about spirituality, experimenting in a variety of medium such as acrylic on canvas, gold paint and charcoal. Being brought up as a nominal Hindu and then becoming a Christian I began to look at the commonalities between Christianity and the Hindu faith, finding universal themes between the two. However, my spirituality is now grounded in Quaker beliefs and practice.



Cartwright Hall, Bradford - Radiant Dance Floor Project. Working with Hollingwood Primary School, St. Joseph's Catholic College and Parkside High School. Images were used from the Transcultural Gallery, Cartwright Hall's collection of contemporary South Asian British arts. These drawings were the basis of three 5ft sq. dance floor mats painted at the schools. It was from these designs that I drew inspiration for the large dance floor measuring 15' x 22' that can be used in a variety of art settings.

Victoria Community School:
Burton on Trent - The focus of this
project was a Bengali folk tale *Jamil's Clever Cat*. I
worked with Years 1-6 creating a batik wall
hanging that is now on display in the school's foyer.



My spiritual path has, to my mind, come full circle with the Quaker belief of acknowledging: 'that of God in everyone' fusing so beautifully with Hindu spirituality, encapsulated within the greeting Namaste' "the God within me blesses and greets the God within you". Today I have the pleasure of leading art projects in primary and secondary schools, museums, art galleries and community venues across the country. My own spiritual journey has influenced the way in which I work with children and adults, and I design workshops to nurture confidence in making art as a tool to represent personal feelings, journeys and development.

Caroline's paintings and 'artist in residence' projects can viewed on www.carolinejariwala.com



Wolverhampton Art Gallery - RAINBOW
Rangoli project using fruit, vegetables and pulses.

Holte High School, Birmingham
Creative mind maps using oil, pastel and paint.
A major project aimed to link the Art and Science
Departments using the curriculum as the base. Images
and symbols in science were married with designs familiar
to the pupils who originate from over 35 countries.

My Mother was not most pleased

My mother
was not most pleased
that I, a schoolboy,
barely 10 years old,
should be shown
my friend's dead aunt,
who lay at home in bed.

My first encounter
with the dead;
I sensed the need for quiet,
as children do,
and stood a while,
and tiptoed out again,
respectful, unperturbed.

Then or since,
I never knew why
my mother
was not most pleased,
for I had learnt
with gentleness
a fact of life.

© Alan Horner

From: *A picture with the paint still wet*: A collection of poems by Alan Horner 2005 Revaph Publications

*When the baby
chose the abode of
womb, its mother's
heart blossomed
with joy*

Extract from devotional and
thanksgiving hymn on the
naming of a child.

GGS p.396-Satguru sache dia bhej-Rag
Asa.5th Guru
(translated by Charanjit Ajit Singh)

Lorna Rae • BOOK LAUNCH

THE FIRE WITHIN

Sermons from the Edge of Exile

Dr Allan Boesak

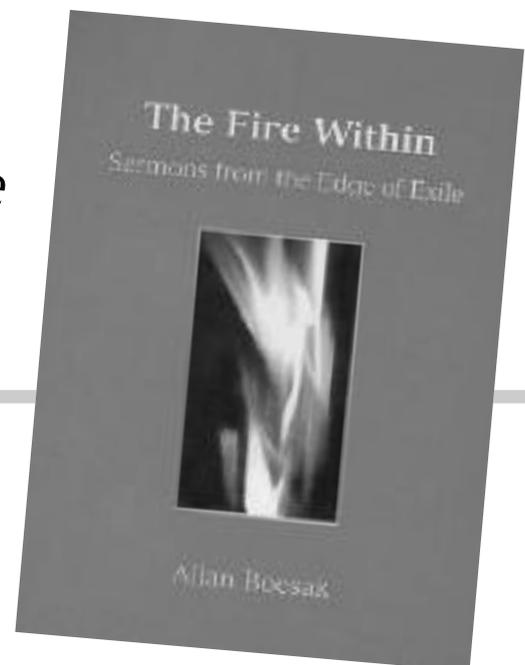
ISBN 978 1 905 010 38 7

2007 Wild Goose Publications (www.ionabooks.com)

£10.99 PBK 170pp

After a long drought, Allan Boesak has come up with a new book of his sermons. Its release indicates that he has not been paralysed by what may have been traumatic experiences in his recent past and which may have made him feel at the 'edge of exile'. On the contrary, the title suggests that he was burning to say what he felt should be said. And he continued to do that when opportunities presented themselves and from the platform that he knows best, namely the pulpit. Through this publication, the contents of his sermons become available to a broader audience.

Allan Boesak has not been, and will not be, silenced by the circumstances that surround him. It could not be done during the years of political oppression and it has not happened even during the first ten years of democracy and the controversies that surrounded his person in recent times. In the past he was dauntless in his exposition of the Word to the injustice of apartheid. In these sermons he identifies and makes the Word speak to the issues of injustices that seem to have remained unattended and sometimes have, perhaps conveniently, not been brought to the table of transformation. *The Fire Within* includes



the present manifestations of racism, of the widening discrepancy between the rich and the poor, HIV/Aids, homosexuality etc in South Africa. In dealing with the status quo regarding these issues, he does not only challenge national inequities, but also the global threats of war, environmental degradation, and the graceless powers responsible for them.

Dr Allan Boesak, a major national and international figure in the South African political struggle of the 1970s, '80s and '90s, was United Democratic Front leader, an ANC politician and human rights activist. He is the recipient of twelve honorary doctorates and several international awards. Theologian and pastor of a local church, he remains an acute political observer and cultural critic of South African life.

APOLOGY As writer of the article about the Bahá'í Fast (issue 16) I would like to apologise sincerely for the error I made in the article. The age after which the Fast is no longer required of believers is 70 and not 75 as stated. In particular I wish to apologise to all Baha'is between the age of 70 and 75 who might have been upset or inconvenienced by this error.

Joy Sabour

Completing the circle

In each thing I do I look to be creative, and that can either be in my own artistic explorations or in guiding other artists in their's: I think of myself as a creative art worker. I am part of a company called Bluestreak Arts, where I am the Community and Outreach Officer. As part of my role I write and facilitate creative projects for a wide range of community groups.

Recently I was facilitating a creative writing workshop with a group of National Health Service' mental health service users. We visited our local art gallery, each carrying a note pad and a pen. I encouraged the participants to walk into the imposing space with eyes wide open - not only to the beautiful, and the not-so-beautiful, old and modern paintings around us, but also to the architecture and the rays of light emanating through the windows. All our senses were attuned to the sights and sounds of everything and everybody around us.

We reached our destination when, by consensus, we found a painting that made us all stop, turn and look: - each making a note of the words that came to mind on first seeing the painting. There was a man in the group who normally says very little, and when he first came to my workshop he would barely write a sentence: his lack of confidence and the effort of concentration creating an inner battle for him that lead to headaches and confusion.

Lately things had become easier, but he stuck to safe sentences. This person stood in front of this particular painting - an oil landscape - and as we gathered around him, he read out his words:

'the desperate abyss was cut with boulders and darkness, cascading to the river below, a tiny light by the tree sits before the mountain.....'

I was shocked, surprised and humbled by what I heard: I was in awe because his description was perfect and beautiful. It seemed that all he needed, to go at least some of the way to overcoming his problems, was to stand before a landscape of oils!

I'm constantly surprised at how many people are bursting with creative energy, but never let it burst out and flow: all they need is encouragement and a safe space in which to do it.

When I lead a workshop I always have in mind the completeness of a circle, and the harmony of mind, body and spirit. I try to convey that the mind should be free to express itself, uninhibited by the constraints that our lifestyle and belief systems have imposed upon us. My art is never directed at, or from, a certain faith, but it is always about positive energy, circles and equality, recognition of different creative talents and each artist's worth.

Bluestreak Arts is a creative and community arts company based in Preston, Lancashire. We deliver creative art workshops, long and short-term projects, events etc. We work with any community group, individual or organisation. We have a wide pool of Associate Artists enabling us to deliver anything from music production, fine and visual art, creative writing, photography, film and music, theatre to storytelling, fashion and graphic design and street art. If you are interested in any workshops, looking for a project or interested in working with us, you can contact myself: Leila on 01772555478 or email: leila@bluestreakarts.com



‘Blessed Is He Whose Speech Is Remembrance Of God’

Malcolm X said:

‘the revolution we need is a revolution of the mind’

(p.13, *Malcolm X, the Great Photographs*, Thulani Davis, New York, Stewart Tabori and Chang, 1993).

His words cannot be more appropriate today.

We are living in a wonderful world and each day is a gift from the Creator: but by the same token, we are living in a world that exhibits acute chaos and discord, rather than peace and harmony. Frankly, I am frightened to be raising my children in this world. My days are spent cherishing my children, feeding their bodies with good nourishment, expanding their minds as sites of responsible learning, nourishing their souls with calm, love and remembrance.

And all this I do with the intention that they need to walk the earth in peace, with love, in reverent contemplation and regard, for both the Creator and all His created. Needless to say then that I am frightened, that one day, they may not be able to deal with the chaotic and discordant world they have inherited from our generation.

It is contrary to the human spirit to be despondent and pessimistic, and it has always been against my nature to wallow in negativity. But the questions that consume me these days are: “what are we turning our world into?” and “when exactly did we lose respect for each other?”. Britain is an ideal place in which to be living: we are a mixed society because we walk in different skin colours, we talk in a multitude of languages, and live by a host of different beliefs. This very diversity is the beauty of our society. Yet my fear is that we are losing the art of acceptance – I do not say ‘art of tolerance’ because I find it offensive to think that I might only be able to ‘tolerate’ somebody (rather like tolerating a bad smell). No! I mean the art of existing in harmony with each other - where we cherish, value, and love the differences in people, safe in the knowledge of who we are, safe in the knowledge that the Maker loves us all regardless.

My fear has grown out of what may seem relatively small incidents in the greater scheme of things – arguments about veiling; offensive cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), inappropriate statements made by Pope Benedict XVI and other issues where huge coverage is given by and through the media. Too many words are spoken and written around these subjects on all sides, some with a malicious intent and others without thought of the consequences. Little is said that will further understanding or promote peaceful coexistence. As a Muslim British woman I feel the time has come for restraint, even possibly a responsible silence.



I am not, I must stress, advocating silence as passivity, as cowardice, and as an alternative to speaking out for justice. What I am advocating, is that perhaps we really ought to think before we speak, about the consequences of our talk, both in the specific contexts, but more widely in a global context. That is, if all speech were thought through, in the shade of the presence of the Divine, in the belief that Godliness ought to manifest through the tongue as love and restraint, through the hands as love and restraint, then I really would not be worrying today about the world in which I am raising my children. For religion, language and culture would not be seen as barriers but as enriching entities - as signs of the wondrous creation of God.

This thought of unconditional kindness and life being a constant act of prayer, takes me to the world of Rabi'a al-Adawiyya (717-801), who is central to the Sufi tradition for her synthesis of theology and asceticism (self discipline). Most of the knowledge that we have of her is based on biographies written at a later period, but we do know about her infamous 'spiritual jousting' with Hasan al-Basra in which she was always depicted as victorious. Seemingly as an aged scholar Hasan al-Basra found it difficult to synthesise theology and asceticism, but with her youthful mind Rabi'a found it a natural marriage.

For Rabi'a affirmation of divinity was not a verbal exercise, but one of turning her whole life and consciousness towards that one deity in *sidq*, sincere love. Sincerity was not compatible with acting out of hope for reward or fear of punishment. She rejected the entire edifice of reward and punishment. The most well known anecdote is of her running down a path with fire in one hand and water in the other, saying she wished to burn Paradise and douse the fires of Hell, so that no-one would ever love God except with pure love. She was asked if she hated Satan, and replied, no, for she was too busy loving God to think about Satan.¹ This sincere love was linked with the concept of *tawakkul* – trust in God – which had to be absolute, with no planning or fear for the future.

The result, whilst appearing to be abstract, is one of acceptance – *rida* – absolute acceptance of the divine will. But this was active acceptance, not passive fatalism. Rabi'a was not fatalistic, but believed that even to ask for anything in prayer would be wrong, as God already knew what she would ask for and would already have decided her future. What is important for me is that all this points towards the loss of the ego-self.²

'The depth of Rabi'a's sincerity acted as a protection for her in an often insecure world... she could not have led the public life that she did had she not been "veiled by the veil of sincerity"'. That is, because she exercised a holistic turning towards God, a life in the constant presence of God, every thought, action and

speech was considered preordained, hence holy. And in that, silence was considered a saviour. Perhaps Rabi'a would have taught us many things if she walked amongst us today. However, we must be people of hope, forever optimistic. So we thank God for the messages he constantly sends in the form of Prophets and wise people. Malcolm X reminded us that if we could change our minds, our homes, then we could affect a revolution of change, of dignity, space and privacy for all. The Prophet Muhammad encouraged people to not

concern themselves with matters that were not their business. He further said, 'blessed is he whose speech is remembrance of Allah, whose silence is meditation and whose speculation is learning lessons.'³ That is, we should not speak about anything unless it is necessary. And even when it is necessary, we should do so sparingly. 'This is because speech is of the nature of the ego, and as long as the ego is speaking, it will predominate over the Spirit. When, however, it keeps silent and silence becomes its nature, we know that the spirit has predominated over the ego, and that it is the spirit which is speaking'.⁴

'The spirit is the locus of Lordly knowledge and the ego is the locus of wandering in the empty sites of the created. . . One should not look at created beings, however, unless one sees them as part of Allah's making.'⁵

If all of us looked upon others as a sign of the Divine breath, His perfect creation, there would be no need to talk hurtfully, unnecessarily. There would be no need for me to worry about the world my children are growing up in.



Raana Bokhari

PhD student University of Cambridge
Research and Development Officer, Lancaster University

1. (p.436, Michael Sell, in *Great Thinkers of the Eastern World*, ed. I. P. McGreal, New York, Harper Collins, 1995).
2. (p.437)
3. (p.70. *The Adab of the True Seeker*, trans. Mokrane Guezzou, Leicester, Viator Books, 2006).
4. (p.71)
5. (p.72).



Tariq Ramadan

TOGETHER IN *Practice*

A REVIEW OF PROFESSOR TARIQ RAMADAN'S ADDRESS IN AND TO EAST OXFORD

On November 15th 2006 our Anglo-Asian Association for Friendship in East Oxford arranged an evening in which two speakers would address the key question: How can our communities best work together? One was Professor Tariq Ramadan the other was our county's Lord Lieutenant, the Queen's representative, Mr Hugo Brunner. We were glad also to be able to enjoy a partnership with the Central Oxford Mosque which stands in the heart of our part of the city, through its chairman, Mr Altaf Hussain. Some 150 people attended, a good balance between Asian and Anglo, between male and female, between older and younger. We were all unmistakably excited and stimulated by what we heard. Mr Brunner spoke briefly about the contribution of the monarchy to our total society, providing an interesting insight not least by the fact that we never know exactly what the Queen thinks about any of the questions being toughly debated among our politicians. The star of the evening however was Professor Tariq Ramadan who began his address by stressing the importance of the question. If we in Oxford, he said, could find ways of helping to build a successful pluralist society, this would become a model for much of the wider Western world. He also insisted that while he would be trying to open for us ways of mutual understanding, what is really crucial is what we can do together in practice, not just in theory.

So he offered us *four main suggestions*:

We must acknowledge that we are dealing with sensitive issues.

Whoever we are, and whatever faith we represent, it is up to us to change the present into something better, but we can never

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assume that it is going to be easy. In relation to the episode of the cartoons published in Denmark, which caused so much offence, the answer is not to demand censorship: freedom of speech is an important right. Rather, argue that freedom is tempered by respect for the others and their sensitivities. It is unhelpful to insist on blaming someone else. More creative to critique our own laziness in discovering what we can do together that would enable us to learn those sensitivities. When you feel provoked, don't

react with anger, but go on raising respectfully the real, the tough questions about what has been done, and how it helps – or fails to – the needs and difficulties we face.

In particular, never deny that we need to deal with one another's fears. All my life, Prof Ramadan said, I have been a European Muslim, living among people who are scared about Islam. Whether we like it or not, these must be taken seriously as real fears. Here in Britain, with lots of Muslims becoming visible – and there are likely to be even more in future - it is normal for British people to raise doubts and questions. Anyone watching the TV news at all often will be seeing an horrific, threat-filled world, so don't just seek to dampen down those fears, still less avoid mentioning them. We have to work on them together, doing our best to change the situation of mutual distrust, and to promote a revolution in the assumptions and ideas we each and all start with.

An important step is to be able to listen attentively to what the other is saying. This is true both for those who have long been British and for those who have come here more recently. So don't hide whatever fears or questions you may have – use a meeting like this to raise them, so that you can go home having at least begun to realise how you might be able to make some positive changes. Don't let any of us stay, as it were, locked up in our own ghettos – as dangerous for the age-old British as for the newly arrived Muslims. Never fear trying to get some shared activity at the local level going.

Prof. Ramadan mentioned that when he studied in Leicester a good many years ago, things around him in British society had seemed entirely peaceful, but when he came back just after July 7th 2005 there were many fears around, and many questions about just how far the Muslims who had arrived over the last 20 or 30 years had become truly 'British'. Was there not far too much of each community living in its own ghetto, with not only a lack of real understanding of the other but also a lack of self-knowledge and self-awareness, which greatly adds to the vicious circle of mistrust. He admitted that in today's situation, the term 'Britishness' has become very difficult to define, but insisted that this should not mean we cannot build much better awareness of each other, and therefore much more self-confidence in each community. *Education*, he insisted, *is the key*.

Of course we all start by supposing that it is normal to stay among our own type of people. But we now need to be dealing with the other, reaching out across the frontiers of our ghettos and creating many more contacts.

So we need to decide in which field we are going to go to work. As long as it is local, something that the people around you will see to be worthwhile, then it can be in any area of life and concern as long as it builds up trust and mutual knowledge.

It could for instance be in *education*. Parents will do well to ask themselves: "how can we help our kids to handle *this* society, to build up their own confidence in trusting the sorts of 'Britishness' they will find around them?" He told of the moment when, as a youngster in a family beginning their new life in Paris, his parents had given him a book of French poems.

Speaking to the Anglos present he asked: "How deeply have you accepted that much has changed in Britain from earlier times? Can there be only one single memory determining the history and nature of today's Britain? Are there not multiple memories? If you don't remember me in your past, how can you allow me into your present?"

Keep making opportunities, especially in schools, to raise questions, however blunt or tricky, as also for responding to them. "Do you Muslims want to Islamize the whole of Europe?" may sound like the rude and hostile question it usually is, but it deserves a careful and substantial answer; for instance, my purpose as a Muslim is first and foremost to serve peace, not to force anyone else into something I have thought of. It is important for all of us to be honest, open and clear about the values we are committed to. Only with this as a normal part of our conversations between communities and cultures, let alone faiths, will we build a mutually respectful and satisfying society. So our efforts could well go into occasions for debate and dialogue, in the first instance for its own sake, but hoping that it would soon lead into shared and common action.



Or we can begin to walk and work together on whatever are the real problems affecting us. These could include unemployment, or racism (still horribly powerful in today's Britain). Whatever any of us see as the real problems deserve to be spoken about, so that we can help each other face up to these real questions, and so banish the Islamophobia that can so easily be aroused. In particular, when any of us speak of 'rights', let's be sure that we are thinking and pointing to what are 'rights' for everyone here, not just of our own.

In conclusion, Prof Ramadan spoke of the need to create a new sense of who 'we' are. When we use that little word, are we thinking and speaking of all of us, working together across the ghetto lines and coming together to discover what values can hold us together? Or do we slip into the easy assumption that 'the others' are 'different', so that our 'we' is the limited one? Every time you find yourself saying a 'we', check who you are counting in and who out. Remember that we all have multiple identities: I myself, he said, am a Swiss by citizenship, a Muslim by religion, a European by education, an Egyptian by family memory, and a Moroccan by adoption - and delighted to be so! Let the society we create together be one that allows for and encourages us all to have these multiple identities and so to be able to contribute the best of all of them to our common future. And in answer to a question about the difficulty of 'integration', he responded: Don't let yourself be bothered about your *integration* but on what can be *your contribution*. No one in France would have dreamed of asking Zinedine Zidane where he was from – the whole country could not but be aware of his contribution as a superb asset!

Believe IN YOURSELF

Believe in yourself to the depth of your being.
Nourish the talents your spirit is freeing.
Know in your heart when the going gets slow
that your faith in yourself will continue to grow.
Don't forfeit ambition when others may doubt.
It's your life to live; you must live it throughout.
Learn from your errors; don't dwell in the past.
Never withdraw from a world that is vast.
Believe in yourself; find the best that is you.
Let your spirit prevail; steer a course that is true.

ANON

Angulimala

In a couple of months I will have been doing Buddhist prison chaplaincy for thirty years. It all began in 1977 when I came back to this country with my teacher Ajahn Chah. I had been with him in NE Thailand in forest monasteries under his guidance since early 1972 and when he was invited to London for a two month visit I came too. It happened that the old Hampstead Buddhist Vihara where we stayed was the address the Prison Service then had as its Buddhist contact. We had not long been there when letters came from Pentonville and Parkhurst Prisons and we had a call from the chaplain at Holloway.

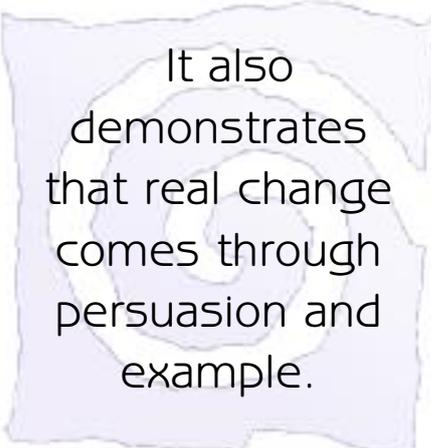
They all wanted someone to visit their Buddhist prisoners and to be what was then called the Buddhist Visiting Minister. There was no one else and it interested me, so I responded. Then on a train to Portsmouth on the Saturday of Jubilee Weekend I asked Ajahn Chah's permission and he answered with one word - 'Go!' And so I've been going to prisons ever since.

In the beginning I thought there were just a handful of prisons in this country. How wrong I was. Pretty quickly I began to collect appointments to prisons all over the place as men I had been seeing in one were transferred to another and I dutifully followed. In time I interested one or two of my supporters and with their help in 1985, Angulimala, the Buddhist prison Chaplaincy was launched. With such a diversity of Buddhist schools and groups here in the UK I had to make sure that we had a wide ranging support and I spent some time developing that as we began to recruit members and potential Buddhist chaplains. From the outset I was determined to maintain a good standard and I recognised the importance of leading by example. We also determined not to emphasise any one school but to offer an approach and style that would be useful to everyone.

We chose to call our new organisation after a rather colourful character who lived at the time of the Buddha and became one of his eminent disciples. The story goes that he was of good family and a student at Taxila, the Oxbridge of India, where his accomplishments so inflamed the jealousy of his peers that they poisoned the mind of their teacher against him, to the extent that what must have been thought an impossible honorarium was demanded. Before the boy could graduate he had to supply the teacher with a thousand right-hand little fingers. To everyone's amazement

instead of giving up our diligent young student set off to get the fingers and commence a career as a bandit and perhaps the world's first known serial killer. As he cut the fingers from his dead and dying victims, he added them to a string that he wore round his neck – and so he was called, Angulimala, 'finger necklace'. Then when he had 999 fingers round his neck he met the Buddha. At first he saw only the last finger and wanted to kill the Buddha

but strangely he couldn't catch him, even though the Buddha was just quietly strolling through the forest. He shouted to the Buddha to stop and the Buddha turned and replied that he had stopped and that now it was for Angulimala to stop, to stop killing and harming. In the end Angulimala threw away his weapons and went with the Buddha back to the monastery as a monk. Then the King arrived on a mission to arrest Angulimala but when he found out what had happened he said to the Buddha, 'It is wonderful, it is marvellous, what we have failed to do by force and with weapons, you have accomplished with neither force nor weapons!' And he left Angulimala to live out his life as a monk and to become an Arahant, a pure and enlightened being.



It also demonstrates that real change comes through persuasion and example.

This story is important. It reminds us that people who have harmed and done wrong can and do change and that even the worst offender is not only capable of better things but the very highest and best. It also demonstrates that real change comes through persuasion and example. And the King's judgement in leaving Angulimala to face the karmic consequences of his terrible crimes while with the Buddha's guidance working out his own salvation is a fine example of wise and sensible justice.

For twenty-two years now Buddhists of different schools, men and women, members of a wide spectrum of Buddhist groups and organisations have co-operated and worked together as supportive members of Angulimala and as prison chaplains to ensure that Buddhist teaching and practice is available in the prisons of this country.

Nowadays, in the prisons we are usually part of a multifaith chaplaincy team and, although our main concern is for the Buddhists, leading Buddhist groups and advising individuals, where we can we contribute to the generic work of the chaplaincy team.

Away from the prisons we meet regularly at our quarterly workshops to meditate together, to reflect on Buddhism in a prison environment, to try to get a better understanding of how the prisons and Prison Service works and to hear from each other how we are getting on. These gatherings are important to us for what we learn and share and for the friendship and support we offer each other. At the end of those long days, our committee meets to oversee the work of Angulimala.

To fulfil its role as the Buddhist Religious Consultative Service (RCS) to the Prison Service we have for a few years received a grant but otherwise, for everything else, including the provision of literature and Buddha Images for prisoners, for all that we give, we rely on what is given. Giving is a great merit and to us the greatest is the giving of Buddhism.



The Importance of Believing in HMP Risley

HM Prison Risley, based in the North West of England, is the largest Category C male training establishment in the country holding almost eleven hundred prisoners.

Risley's Governor, Bob McColm, leads a senior management team made up of operational and non-operational managers, who have responsibility to manage a wide range of services, such as psychology, education, healthcare, canteen, safer custody, personnel, chaplaincy, gymnasium, finance, and offending behaviour.

Risley's prisoner profile and the array of services offered within the establishment by a variety of different people provide a snapshot of the diversity that is at play in UK prisons. Just consider the following:-

The prison population in the UK is now over 80,000 as compared to 42,000 in January 1993. The UK imprisons a higher proportion of its population than any other Western European country (around 148 per 100,000).

The vast majority of prisoners are male. Female prisoner population has doubled over the last twelve years, but despite this the prison system in the UK is essentially designed for men.

12% of prisoners are foreign nationals (FNPs), the vast majority of whom are women serving long sentences for acting as drug couriers. The FNP population of Verne is 48% and Morton Hall (a female prison) is 75%.

70% of prisoners are estimated to be suffering from at least one diagnosable mental disorder.

Black and minority ethnic (BME) communities are heavily over-represented in the prison population. They can face racial abuse, harassment, and bullying. The Zahid Mubarek Inquiry, chaired by Mr Justice Keith, made 88 recommendations in 2006. The Inquiry drew parallels to the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, which proved to be a watershed for the Police and the wider criminal justice system.

When we take the above factors into consideration, it is no

surprise to learn that prison life, both for prisoner and officer, is no easy task. This is exacerbated by negative headlines in the popular media, which tend to focus in the main on 'bad news' stories pertaining to overcrowding, shoddy conditions, gangs, violence, forced religious conversions, and drugs. Perhaps this is why many turn to religion and belief as a means of strengthening their resolve and inner self – keeping one's head when there is chaos all around you, seems to be an instinctive approach for some.

Perhaps this is why many turn to religion and belief as a means of strengthening their resolve and inner self

Religion and belief holds a pivotal place in the lives of many prisoners and staff. At HMP Risley there is a strong chaplaincy team headed by the Co-ordinating Chaplain, Reverend Steven Gough. The team includes trained and qualified chaplains from Christianity (both Church of England and Roman Catholic), Islam, Sikhism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Jehovah's Witness. Managing a multi faith team, made up of individuals with strong personal beliefs and convictions, can be quite difficult at times. This balancing act is performed by the Co-ordinating Chaplain with help from Area Chaplains and the Chaplaincy Team based in London. This multi faith approach to prison chaplaincy, which was the brainchild of the Chaplain General of Prisons, the Venerable William Nobblett, and Reverend Wendy Carey (Prison Service College, Newbold Revel), has transformed the provision of religious and faith services available to all prisoners. Critics of the multi faith approach tend to 'home in' on the disproportionate allocation of resources, where the Orwellian type perception seems to be that "all men are equal, but some are more equal than others". This however, has not been my experience. The multi faith approach to chaplaincy has proven to be beneficial from an educational, tolerance, integrative and communication perspective. In the absence of proactive measures, demand and necessity would have dictated otherwise - perhaps with far more serious consequences.

Chaplaincy

At Risley, the multi faith approach takes the form of the decency agenda, where for example the provision of religiously sensitive food, such as Kosher and Halal, and the celebration of religious festivals, such as Christmas, Eid, and Divali have added colour and diversity within the establishment. Ian Scott, Head of Facilities, does an excellent job in ensuring that cross contamination and handling food is addressed both in the kitchens and in the Servery areas. The decency agenda, which essentially means 'dealing with people in a fair and consistent way', is the ethos of various Prison Service Orders (PSOs) and Prison Service Standards (PSS). There are Orders and Standards on Religion, Race Equality, Equal Opportunities, Disability, Human Rights, and Sexual Orientation – and all are aimed at trying to cover the entire diversity framework.

At Risley, the diversity framework, which also encompasses domestic and national legislation, such as the Race Relations Amendment Act 2000, is delivered through the Race Equality Action Team (REAT), which is chaired by Louise Spencer – the Deputy Governor, who happens to be a female, is indicative of the positive direction that the Prison Service is taking.

Over the recent years, there has been a great drive to recruit a wider representation of people, including more women, young people, and BME communities into the prison service. At Risley we have been assisted in this task by our Area Diversity Manager, Mahtarr Samba, who is helping to create a more diverse and flexible prison service.

At Risley we are committed to meeting the difficult challenges that undoubtedly lie ahead. Appreciation of a diverse society, as an important constituent of social cohesion, is our strong belief.

Khalid Hussain is Diversity Manager – HM Prison Risley

*Only God can
show us the way
out of the mess that
the world is in*

We need both a deeper spirituality and a more outspoken witness. If our spirituality can reach the depths of authentic prayer, our lives will become an authentic witness for justice, peace and the integrity of creation, a witness which becomes the context for our prayer. Out of the depths of authentic prayer comes a longing for peace and a passion for justice. And our response to violence and for justice is to pray more deeply, because only God can show us the way out of the mess that the world is in. And only God gives us the strength to follow that Way.

Gordon Matthews, 1989

Cited: Quaker Faith & Practice: the book of Christian discipline of the Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain 23.10

THE PERSISTENCE

In a poem called *The Toys*, Coventry Patmore, the Victorian writer, tells how he once struck his disobedient and motherless child and sent him off to bed 'unkiss'd'. Later, feeling guilty, he went to see how the boy was. He found him asleep with some possessions placed on a table nearby: a box of counters, a red-vein'd stone, a piece of glass 'abraded by the beach', some shells, a bottle with bluebells; and ...two French copper coins, ranged there with careful art, To comfort his sad heart.

This vision of simple childish possessions seems a world away from the electronic bedrooms of today's young people. But their childhood is also a long way from my own. I played in the street every day, safe and unsupervised. I rode my bicycle into the countryside in warm summers without causing any anxiety.

Childhood experiences inevitably change over the years and from place to place and many of our children seem to have a wealth of material possessions ie computers, mobile phones, dvd players etc. but now a Unicef report has compared the lives of today's children across the western world and concluded that Britain's children are the least happy. For whatever reason, we British adults have grown seriously apart from our children.

The Unicef team assessed the treatment of children in six different areas – material wellbeing; health and safety; education wellbeing; family and peer relationships; behaviours and risks; and the young people's own perceptions of their wellbeing – and sad to say that the UK is bottom of the league of 21 industrialised countries in all but education wellbeing. The report has triggered what may be seen as a national debate – a debate that has at times amounted almost to moral panic. Professor Al Aynsley Green, England's first Children's Commissioner, whose role it is to give a national voice to all children and young people, especially the disadvantaged and vulnerable, says: "There is a crisis at the heart of our society and we must not continue to ignore the impact of our attitudes towards children and young people and the effect that this has on their wellbeing." One has to ask if this unhappiness is linked in any way to the largely secular world in which we live today.

Whatever the reason, inevitably the politicians have sensed an important cultural shift and are seeking to position themselves in relationship to it, not least by acknowledging the importance of FAMILY to the wellbeing of children. We

have witnessed a transformation in the family unit over the past twenty years or so with more one-parent families, second marriages and those choosing not to marry at all. Although social and economic circumstances have changed, emotionally, family ties are still as important as ever no matter what the family's shape or size.

I think this goes some way to shed light on what is otherwise a puzzling phenomenon – the persistence of infant baptism in this cold religious climate. Popular religious rituals in these circumstances - where there are no social pressures to take part in them – are of the greatest sociological significance and also take on new meanings. Although the number of Christian baptisms continues to fall, the number of children baptised is still in the region of 20% - and that is a very large number and substantially more than the 8% of the population that is found in church on Sunday morning. When we look for evidence of religious observance this should not be overlooked. Sunday attendance is not the only marker.

So what does a 'christening' mean today?

Young parents, who instinctively understand what Unicef describes as 'a good childhood', and who want the best for their children, recognise that this involves more than providing for them materially. If their children are to grow up confident and secure they also need a scaffolding of values around their lives. A baptism is one of the ways – one of the few ways - in which all this can be articulated and a commitment made.

It is sometimes said, not least by church members, that baptism 'means nothing' to those who bring babies for christening, or that it is done 'for social reasons'. In my experience, nothing could be further from the truth.

For the past three years, as an Anglican parish priest, I have made a note of what parents tell me when they come requesting baptism for their children. I have been impressed by the thoughtful things they say and have come to the conclusion that high on the list is a recognition that if children are to be raised successfully they need to be well rooted in a moral tradition – in their case, the Christian moral tradition – from the very start of their lives. This is not what the town hall offers, or the local medical centre; but it is what the church stands for.

OF BAPTISM

The church speaks the language of values, and of course, as a religion Christianity is not alone in this. All world religions hold within the wisdom of their sacred texts a moral code by which people can live their lives in an ethical way, safe in the knowledge that through their example their children will grow up confidently, encircled by a framework of values that will be with them for life. Indeed, issue 11 of this magazine gave focus to the ceremonies and rituals through which children are welcomed into the different religious communities, and are thus endowed with the love and support of that community.

The Unicef report gives emphasis to the strong link between women's empowerment and children's development and wellbeing. The amount of influence women have over the decisions in the household has been shown to positively impact the nutrition, health care and education of their children. It is probably worth saying that in both my largely working class town parish and more socially mixed rural one, it is usually the mother that takes the initiative in asking for baptism and is most articulate in talking about it. Whatever lip-service we pay to equality, child-rearing still falls heavily on mothers and it is not surprising, therefore, that they are much more likely to be reflective about what is entailed in bringing up children successfully. All of this explains another curious, new phenomenon in the Christian church - the increased numbers of friends and relatives at infant baptisms. Twenty years ago a baptism party consisted of a handful of people - parents, grandparents and a few friends and relatives. Now parties can be very big indeed - and this is an occurrence that is repeated across the country. Why? Because parents understand the point that Unicef is making: that if children are to be nurtured successfully they need more than parents, they need a network of supportive adults. This is also why many parents ask for a larger number

of godparents than the traditional three: two godfathers and one godmother for a boy, and two godmothers and one godfather for a girl. Those invited to share in today's infant baptism are being enlisted in the task of nurturing the next generation.

It is hard for adults to stoop and enter the house of children. But the Unicef report says that it is imperative that we try. One of the harshest comments Jesus of Nazareth ever made was with reference to our nurture of children. He said:

'Whoever causes one of these little ones to stumble... it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened round his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.'

Canon Dr Alan Billings is Vicar of St George, Kendal, priest-in-charge of St John, Grayrigg, in Cumbria, and Director of the Centre for Ethics and Religion, Lancaster University.



"Elizabeth sent the basket
John doesn't need anymore.
A Moses basket, reeds criss-crossing,
Plaited, almost like the pattern of a vine.
He'll come like hoar
Like manna spread
A Sabbath double portion
And I will gather Him up
Our Son, God's gift.
A harvest all our own,
Mysterious, awe-inspiring,
Cuddly, a bundle of wonder
Whose rise and course
Is given to my care.
I long to see your face,
Later, you'll long for mine
Baby eyes search-lighting
Meeting mine.
All too soon, I'll struggle
With the cipher of Your mystery
Teaching You to speak
Interpellating Word."

© Sister Delores Dodgson
For Izzy and Maxim

Sharing the Light

ubuntu: I am because we are

Dear Dom and Greg...

The other day when we you were playing at the bottom of the stairs, you asked me about one of the photographs that hangs there. It is a wonderful picture of a young blond-haired and white South African passing the light from his candle to a curly-haired black South African of the same age. You made the observation Greg, that it was a bit like the Christingle service we have around Christmas. "It's about Jesus the light of the world," you confidently asserted Dom. And at a very profound level you're right. It is about divine light. But, as I tried to explain, it's not in fact a photograph of a Christingle Service, like the one of you and me Dom, taken in Westminster Abbey, that the Children's Society used a couple of years ago for their publicity. No, it's actually a photograph of a project which I co-authored exactly ten years ago with the remarkable priest and teacher, Vivien Harber, who baptised you Greg.

At the time I was training to be a priest, and was on placement in Cape Town, where you were born a few years later Greg, and where we took you to live Dom when you were just four months old.

It was an amazing time for South Africans because they had only very recently freed themselves from nearly fifty years of terrible conflict between people of different races. We have spoken before about the word apartheid – or 'apart-hate' as it is pronounced. We have thought together about the fact that only white people were allowed to go onto Clifton beach where our friend Nancy has a house, and the fact that in parks there were separate benches and even toilets for white and black South Africans. We've also thought about the separate schools that existed and the divisions within hospitals, of what it was like, for instance, for some other friends of ours when they had their first baby. The mother was white. Her husband was coloured. As she went into labour and drove up to the hospital, they had to decide which bit of it they would enter. Would it be the whites only part

where they would get better care – but into which the husband would not be allowed – or the part for coloureds and blacks, where there was less equipment and fewer staff but where they could be together. The mother had not had an easy pregnancy. She feared that all sorts of things might go wrong. What decision would they make?

As I write this to you, the baby in mummy's womb is six days overdue! Imagine if Mummy and I were from different races and we were making that drive to the same hospital. Well, that kind of terrible decision – the sort that divides families – affected people everyday of every year in the apartheid years in South Africa, when a minority of white people tried to govern the majority of South Africans. Remember another friend of ours

telling you how she would go to the swimming baths with her cousins. They were classified as white. She was classified as coloured because when someone ran a pencil through her hair – the bizarre test used to determine your race – it got stuck, so she was said to be more African than them. This meant she couldn't swim. She just had to wait outside with the towels.

This was why, when South Africa became what we call a democracy and everyone – not just the white people – could vote to decide who would run the country, they knew that South

Africans of all races – whites too, since some of them had, for instance, tried to fight against all the silly rules – needed a way of getting things 'off their chest' as we say.

So, your high-five-giving friend, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, was chosen by Nelson Mandela, one of your other big heroes, to be the head of what was called the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

When I first went to South Africa in 1996 the TRC, as it was known, had just begun its work which was to listen to people telling those stories. Often they were like the ones I've just written about but sometimes they were much more unpleasant. Indeed, many of them were horrific. The idea was that people could say what had happened to them, and also find out from those who had hurt them why they had done what they had done.

She was classified as coloured because when someone ran a pencil through her hair it got stuck, so she was said to be more African than them.

Christingle Service: Photo © The Argus, Cape Town



Often in history when wars come to an end, or periods of conflict like the one in South Africa, the ‘baddies’ are put on trial and punished. After the Second World War they had famous trials at Nuremburg which led many of the Nazi leaders to their execution. You’ll remember that when Saddam Hussein was hanged – and you somehow saw in the papers all those terrible pictures of the hanging – we had a conversation about this. It wasn’t one that I had anticipated having with you, at ages seven and six, but such is the world in to which you are growing up, we had to have it.

Anyway, in South Africa they decided that they wouldn’t take what is called ‘retribution’. They wouldn’t punish people in the normal way. The punishment – if it was a punishment – would take the form of making the people called perpetrators, which is those who had done terrible things, own up to what they had done in front of the victims or survivors (as many of them prefer to call themselves). This is what is called ‘restorative justice’. In other words, trying to give back to people the facts of what happened if, for instance, their loved ones were hurt or even killed; trying to give them back their dignity, the sense that they are not lesser people because they are brown or black; trying too, to give back to those who have done awful things a sense that they can also become human again.

It was an amazing process full of tears and pain and terrible heart-wrenching stories. But, as you’ve learnt already in your short lives, sometimes it isn’t until you get what’s hurting you from the inside to the outside that you can start to feel just a bit better. I went to a number of the hearings as they were called when people told their stories. Occasionally what happened was so extraordinary I had to write it down. This is what I wrote in November 1996 after a hearing in Guguletu, a township community in Cape Town:

I sat for the whole of today in a civic hall in Guguletu. Towards the end of the afternoon, a 70 year old woman was called to testify concerning the activities of a policeman in her township. It transpired that he had come one night with some others and in front of the woman had shot her son at point-blank range.

Two years later, the same officer had returned to arrest the woman’s husband, whom she supposed subsequently to have been executed.

Sometime later, the policeman came yet again. This time, he took her to a place where he showed her her husband, still alive. But as her spirits lifted, the policeman doused the husband with gasoline, set him on fire and killed him.

As the woman concluded her testimony, the presiding officer addressed her: “What would you like the outcome to be of this hearing?”

After a long pause, the woman answered, “I would like three things. First, I want to be taken to the place where my husband was burned, so I can gather up the dust and give his remains a decent burial. Second, my son and my husband were my only family. Therefore, I want this police officer to become my son, to come twice a month to my home and spend a day with me so I can pour out on him whatever love I still have remaining inside me. Finally, I want this officer to know that I offer him forgiveness because Jesus Christ died to forgive me. Please would someone lead me across the hall so that I can embrace him and let him know that he is truly forgiven?”

As people led the woman across the room, the police officer, completely overwhelmed, fainted. Officials helped him, whilst the woman’s friends and neighbours, most of them victims or survivors of the same sort of violence, began to sing softly, “Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me...”



I don't think I'll ever be able to convey to you in words the power of that moment. It was the one time in my life when I really understood what forgiveness was all about.

Archbishop Desmond and all the other commissioners who listened – people like our friend Glenda whose little boy is your age Greg – tried to help both the people who had done awful things and the people to whom they had been done. Some, like the woman I wrote about, could forgive the perpetrators. Some could not. Some were angry and bitter. Many were confused or distraught. All of them received help in one way or another. But there were other people close to those involved in the hearings – children or grandchildren, who were too young to know what apartheid was like. They wondered what on earth was happening within their families, as people who seemed on the surface to be fine suddenly had their lives turned right upside down. Why was Mummy crying? Why was granddad not talking to anyone, and looking so distant? Why were people talking about white people being horrid to black people or calling other black people traitors because they had helped the white rulers?

These were some of the questions that Vivien Harber and I tried to help some of those young people to answer. We did so by devising a workshop called the *Children's Ubuntu Project*. This was aimed at children just a little older than the two of you – nine- and ten-year-olds.

We had both been to see an exhibition of art at the Castle in Cape Town which, you'll remember, was on the way into the city from Walmer Estate where we lived. One piece, by Lien Botha – whose father had been the foreign minister in the apartheid government – really captured our attention. Lien had installed a washing line across two prison cells in the Castle. At one end, she had pinned on the line torn white sheets on which had been printed photographs of the worst that apartheid had thrown up. At the other end, however, there were images of the election in 1994 and of South Africa winning the Rugby World Cup in 1995. By using a washing line she was trying to say something about how and whether you can cleanse your dirty washing, your history.

Seeing this amazing piece of art, we decided that we would take all the chairs out of St George's Cathedral – where I worked and where we all went to church – and that we would put a giant washing line around the nave. We had set a symbol around the space where all the children were going to come – all 128 of them! We needed next to think about what the ending of the day they would spend with us would be like.

We wanted something that would feel like an ending but also something that would help the children to think of what they could do in the future. We needed another symbol and a ceremony – like the ceremonies you have at Beavers and at Church for important occasions.

Street child.
Photo © Andrzej Sawa



Photo © Cape Times

Which is where the Christingle you talked about Dom, comes in. For in this symbol, from Europe where we now live, we found something really useful. You've already heard several Christingle sermons – a couple of mine among them! – so I don't need to go on at length. But you'll remember that the Christingle consists of an orange representing the world, wrapped about with a red ribbon for the blood of Jesus shed "to save the world" as you put it Greg, with a candle on top to show "Jesus as the light of the world" as you told me Dom, when we were looking at the photo on the stairs, and that there are also four cocktail sticks surrounding the candle, decorated with sweets and nuts as a reminder of all the fruits of creation we enjoy.

Since we had children of every faith and race – Muslims, as you have in your classes at school, Hindus, Buddhists, Jews, Bahai's and Jains, as well as Zoroastrians, Christians and children from African traditional religions – we needed to adapt this Christian symbol so that it spoke to everyone.

So we replaced the red ribbon with South African flag braid. We also simplified things a bit by taking off the cocktail sticks – we gave them sweets with their lunch! But we kept the candle. We now had an Ubuntu candle.

Ubuntu is an African word which is hard to translate into English. It means something like **"a person is only a person because they have to relate to other people"**. To put all that more simply you might say: "I am because we are". But I'm not sure that helps! It's not an easy idea to put into words but what it's trying to tell us is that to grow as human beings we need each other.

The candle then was each child. The flag was the country in which they were growing up – the country Greg, of your birth. The orange was the world, of which all of us are citizens.

We had the ending. We would light the candles and think about our place in our country and in the world. All we had to do now was to think about how we would get there!

Lien Botha's washing line had told a story in photographs. So we decided that we would have the children working in small groups of eight to think together about photographs

Firstly, they would think about what we called an 'image of truth' from the apartheid years (such as a black child being chased by white policemen). Then they would look at a couple of photographs together. One would be an 'image of hope' (like a picture of happy Rugby fans waving their flags as South Africa won the world cup in 1995). The other would be an 'image of responsibility'. So much had changed in

South Africa for the parents and grandparents of the children who would spend a day with us. But so much still needed to change. We wanted the children to think of something they saw needed to change (like a street child begging on the roadside for food: a child who needs a home, and most of all, love).

Looking at the picture from history – the image of truth – the children would try to tell the story of what they thought was going on. So we asked them to say what was happening in the picture, and what might have happened before and after it was taken. We also wanted them to think about where the people photographed might be today.

When the children saw the photograph of the boy being chased by policemen, they said that the boy must have done something very wrong. When we asked them if they thought adults should chase children like this with sticks to beat them, most said "No, this is child abuse". One boy said however that he thought the group had got it wrong, and that the picture was about apartheid. The white men, he said, were not policemen but soldiers. They were chasing the boy because he was black.

The group of children then saw things very differently. When they were asked where the boy might be nowadays they said that they hoped he was "telling his story to the TRC".

When the children looked at the other two photographs – the images of hope and responsibility – we tried to remind them of the excitement they had felt when South Africa won the World Cup or when they had celebrated with their families Nelson Mandela's election as President. Alongside this, when we looked at the picture of the street child, we thought together about people who did not have many happy smiling experiences, and how we could include them in all that excitement and joy. The children painted t-shirts and pictures with drawings and messages on them to remind themselves and their families and neighbours what we all had to do to make things better. These were hung on the washing lines.

To help us think about all this we learnt a song in the three main South African languages – Xhosa, Afrikaans and English. It had a refrain with a very simple message: 'Because the future's mine, like candles we must shine.'

And when we ended the day by forming a circle all the way round the cathedral, to light the candles with our washing lines on which the newly-painted t-shirts were hanging, it was then that the picture which prompted our conversation and this letter was taken. We had put all the lights out so that the cathedral could be lit by

the one hundred and fifty candles of the project's children and staff. And as we lit them so we sang the South African national anthem which you know so well: *Nkosi sikelele Afrika*: God bless Africa.

I caught a glimpse of something I have been trying to work for ever since

I have to confess that I was in tears when the photo was taken. For so long people of different races had been caught up in a conflict which had torn a country apart. But when that blonde-haired white boy passed his candle-light to the curly-haired black boy – he was in fact a street child – I caught a glimpse of something I have been trying to work for ever since: the new world, promised us by Jesus and Muhammad, shown us in the Vedas and the Torah, and sensed in the peacefulness of temples and Gurdwaras, as in so many other people. I just hope that I have never lost the light that was ignited within me as that photograph was taken. It is the light that I most want to pass onto the two of you. May it burn ever more brightly in you and in your generation.

All my love,

Daddy

Chris Chivers is Canon Chancellor of Blackburn Cathedral where he has responsibility, as Director of the Cathedral's outreach agency exchange, for inter-faith relations. He was previously Precentor of Westminster Abbey and St George's Cathedral, Cape Town. As a freelance writer he is the author of several books and writes frequently for *Cape Times*, *Church Times* and *The Tablet*. A book of letters to his two sons, *Dear Dom and Greg...* was published in South Africa in February. Copies are available from Blackburn Cathedral Shop or via email from chris.chivers@blackburn.anglican.org



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*“Just as a mighty mango tree is hidden
within the stone of the mango,
even so, O man, divinity itself is hidden within you.
Rest not until you uncover it.”*

Bhagwan Mahavir
Jain Tirthankar: one who reveals the dharma

NEW Breeze OF THE Spirit

LATIN AMERICAN LIBERATION THEOLOGY

I would like to share with you an evaluation of more than twenty one years of pastoral activity in the south of Brazil, Sao Paulo and nearby areas.

Born in 1936, I spent my childhood and youth in Italy until the time of my ordination as a priest in 1961. At that time it was predominantly a Roman Catholic country both in its culture and its ethos: parish communities, state schools, the major political party - Christian Democrat - all seemed conducive to the public acknowledgement that being a Catholic was great.

I grew up in the countryside, attending the State Secondary School in the nearby town of Cremona, south of Milan, and at twenty I entered the diocesan seminary. After three years' of study I left the seminary to become a member of a missionary order called the Xaverian Missionaries. My inner impulse was great: to go abroad to help the poor and the marginalized. I was sent out to Brazil at the start of the 1970's to preach the Gospel, to convert people to the Catholic Church and to help the founding and the growing of a local community for their eternal salvation. The vision of my pastoral activity, however, was inspired by a Christian ideology that I later realized was deeply flawed.

This became evident through an event that took place immediately after my ordination as a priest - an event that would profoundly affect the future of the Catholic Church. It was the Second Vatican Council and it was convened to seek to renew Church spirituality, and to reconsider the Church's place in the modern world. The Council was the brainchild of Pope John XXIII and was carried out against all the odds by his vision and courage: it lasted more than three years.

Through Vatican II the Roman Catholic Church became more open: its language during the Sunday Church services turned from Latin to local languages; ecumenism (unity between the different Christian churches) became a new dimension; the study and interpretation of the Bible became a more ecumenical affair; and the seeds of a new relationship with people of other Faiths were sown.

In the follow up to the Second Vatican Council the Latin American

Churches were the first ones to open themselves to this new breeze of the Spirit. Vatican II ended in 1965 and in 1968 the Latin American Bishops Conferences held a meeting in Medellin, Colombia to reflect on and apply the implications of Vatican II on the pastoral activity of the Churches in Latin America - it proved to be a turning point: the dawn of a new era.

After many centuries of Roman uniformity, the Churches in Latin America sought - with Divine guidance - to identify and meet the needs of its own peoples, and bring about a transformation in their material and spiritual lives. They looked to inspire and encourage a new order of social justice and recognized that this required engagement on political, economic and cultural matters as well as spiritual. They chose two priorities: the preferential option for, and solidarity with, the poor - and the supporting of Christian Base Communities.

What happened in Medellin was the drawing back of a veil that had covered a stark reality: that those we call poor are in reality impoverished by a cruel global political-economical system - a system that is steeped in injustice. We only have to remember

the genocide of the Indigenous peoples and the Slave Trade, which in Brazil lasted more than 300 years. The Catholic Bishops in Medellin exposed a cover-up that had lasted for approximately 500 years. They had the courage to say that when the colonial powers of Christian Europe went to Latin America or Africa or Asia, under the pretext of bringing Christian Faith and Civilization to the whole world, they had in reality gone to colonize and conquer in order to plunder!

The Bishops introduced the ethical notion of 'structural sin' into the vocabulary of the Roman Catholic Church, and as a result a gradual transformation took place: the emphasis on personal sin has changed to global, institutional sin; from personal salvation to salvation 'in togetherness'. As the Bishops brought into being this new approach to pastoral activity, the core values of Jesus of Nazareth were reinstated - compassion, justice, reconciliation and inclusiveness - and more than Saviour, Jesus was revealed as Liberator from all personal and communal shackles.

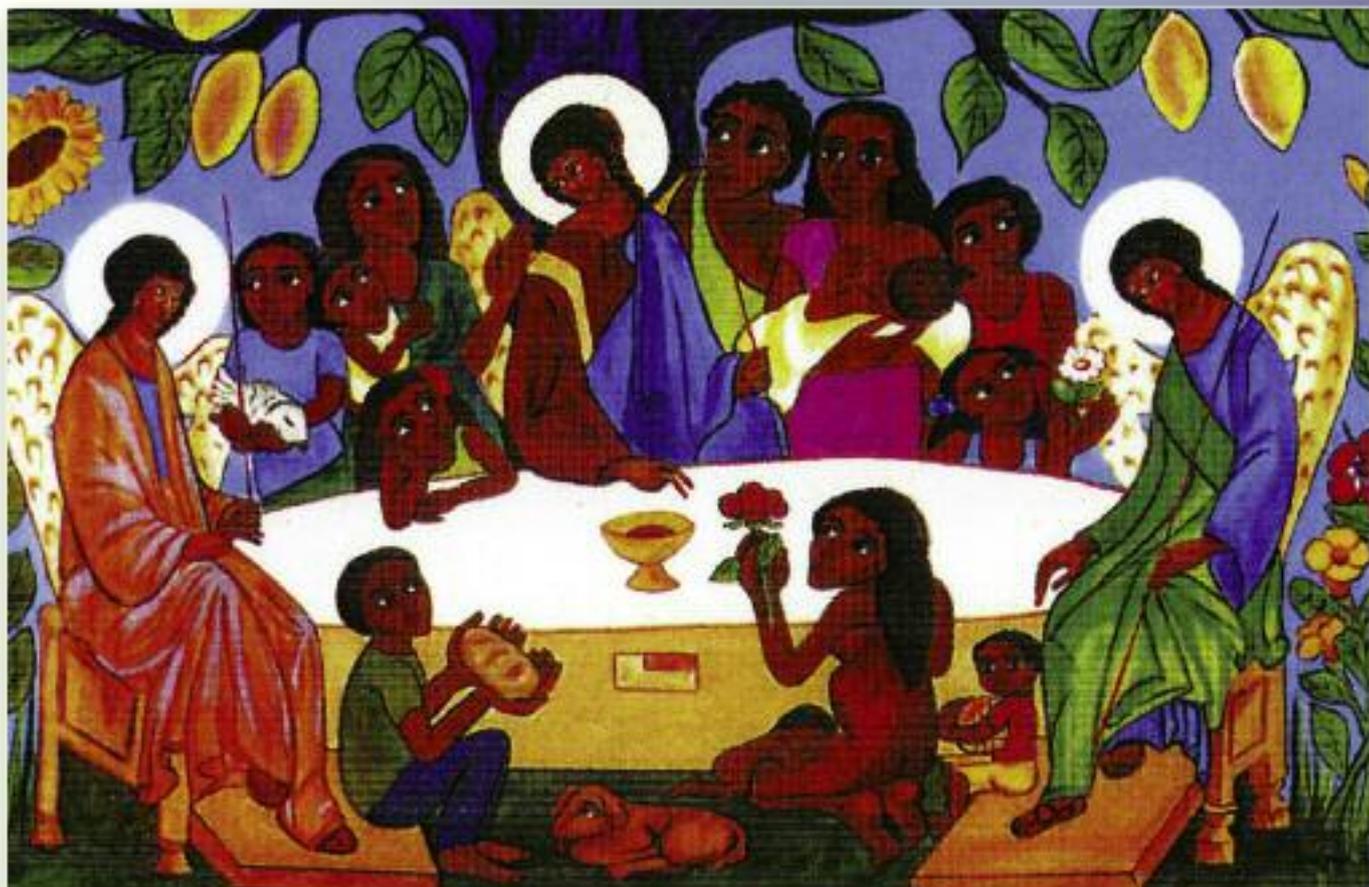
the emphasis on personal sin has changed to global, institutional sin; from personal salvation to salvation 'in togetherness'

Although the option for those who lived on the edges of society was a real, living, breathing dimension in Jesus' life, I have to admit that coming from the Christian background of Catholic Italy, the 'option for the poor' was totally new to me. The way I was educated to engage with the poor was, I realized, patronizing and, worse still, it emphasized feelings of self-gratification rather than how much good one could do for others. The option for the poor in Latin America had overall repercussions on the way of being Church. Rather than the centre of the church being the altar at which the priest encompasses the core activities of the Christian community, the centre of the church has become the people – the poor and the marginalized – for it is here where God speaks and lives are transformed in the Spirit of God.

The homes of the poor, the small Community Centres, the School Halls became the new gathering places for their material and spiritual needs. They were called Christian Basic Communities, grass-root communities in which Priests had to re-invent their roles as Coordinators and Spiritual Animators: where people have a real say in the running of the church and the community, and women in particular have a greater opportunity to contribute

with their special qualities of wisdom, strength, compassion and inclusiveness. These groups have been criticized by the media for being politicized, inspired by Marxist principles. In a sense this was true, but when the Church finds herself in a country where the gap between rich and poor is scandalous she cannot help but mix with politics, particularly in the situation of Archbishop Helder Camara of Recife in the northeast of Brazil and Archbishop Romero in El Salvador. In this case politics means standing for food, housing, employment, education, health for everybody. These services are related to Jesus' dream, expressed in the coming of God's Kingdom on earth.

However, this always comes with a price, to some extent summarized by Dom Helder Camara, Bishop of Recife in the northeast of Brazil in his statement: "When I give food to the poor 'they' call me a saint; when I make the poor aware of their situation 'they' call me a communist". For Archbishop Oscar Romero however the sacrifice was much greater – he was to lose his life in his service of the poor – murdered by the military regime in March 1980 for his uncompromising message of justice and reconciliation.



Painting by: Andrei Rublev c1370-1430
The Trinity at the Eucharist Banquet

LUCY ALINE EVERITT

CONNECTING WITH nature



As a Pagan, I am always inspired by Mother Nature. I see all life as beautiful and sacred, and so wildlife is often the subject of my artwork. Although the real thing cannot be beaten, the colours and forms that Nature holds is something that I cannot resist attempting to reproduce myself.

Whilst I was studying Illustration at the University of Central Lancashire in Preston, I discovered - in a very round about way - my creative process. Through a combination of oil pastels, sewing, and Brusho Colours™ on paper, I found a technique to recreate the vibrant colours and organic lines found in Nature. University was a great learning experience for me, as I was able to join a Pagan society, along with Bluestreak Arts, a community arts group that helps various people through art projects.

I have grown up in a family who are non-religious, but who always have appreciated Nature. I am also lucky enough to live in the countryside, which has played a huge part in helping me to connect with the elements. But it wasn't until I went to University that I met other Pagans for the first time. This was wonderful for me, at last I had other people to share my faith with! But I soon realised that everyone's Pagan beliefs are individual, a very personal thing. Many of the people I met knew so many facts and admirable amounts of information about Pagan legends, sacred sites, Gods and Goddesses and numerous traditions. But that is not the kind of mindset I have. Far too many times I attempt to read an interesting and enlightening Pagan book, get fidgety and end up outside hugging a tree!



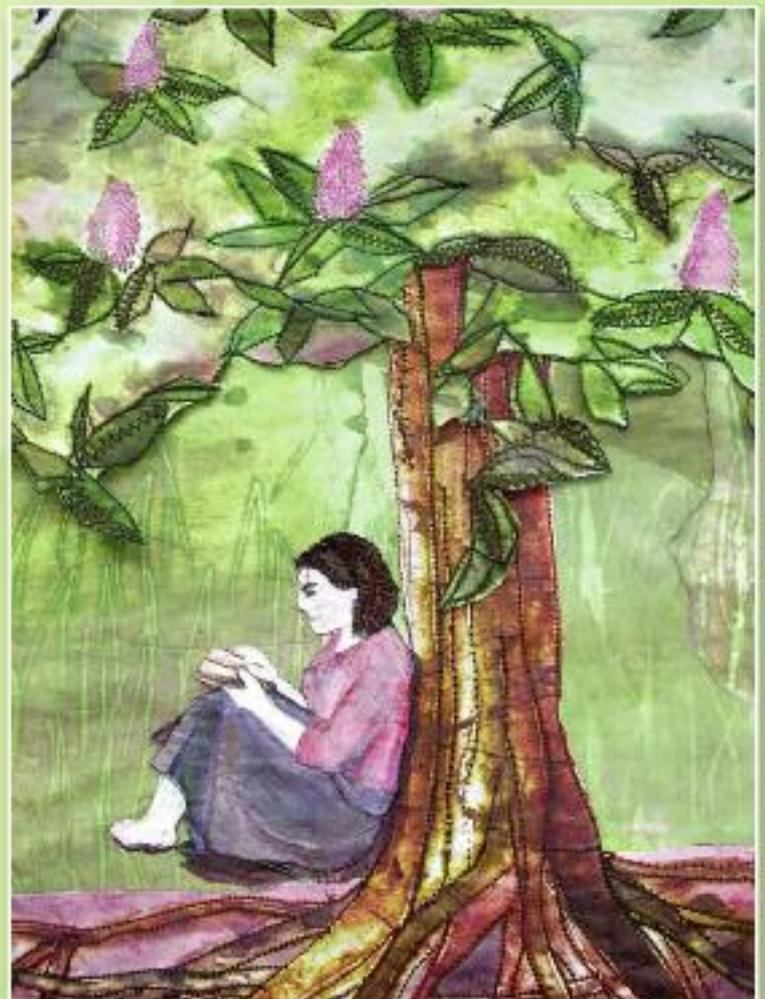


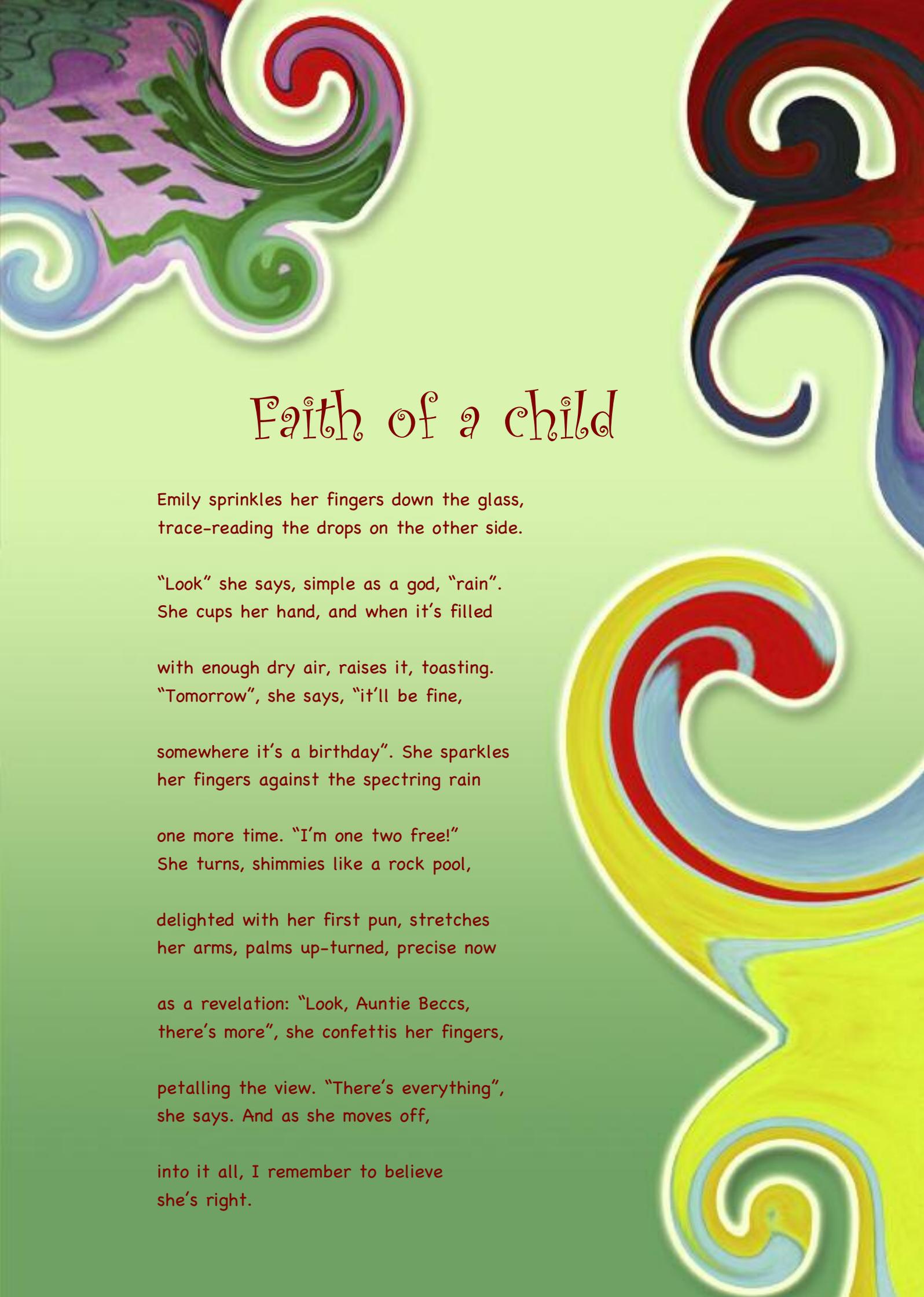
For me, Paganism has always been about spending time in Nature. Through simply observing and experiencing the outdoors, I began to see how everything that is Nature is a miracle! It was this sense of wonder that led me to Paganism and I began to feel a connection with the underlying forces of the Earth. I soon realised that my way of thinking and my spiritual beliefs fitted in to Paganism. This is my faith. It has no rules, and no religious book: it comes from the heart. Being an ancient, pre-Christian religion, I feel this is where I come from, this is how my ancestors lived. They were completely dependent upon Nature and the elements. They prayed for the Sun to rise and the Spring to come. They did not take anything for granted. And like my ancestors, I too do not want to take Mother Nature for granted.

My beliefs have led me to change, in many ways, the way I lead my life. After being vegetarian from the age of 11, I subsequently decided to become vegan. I felt that all Mother Nature's creatures should be treated with respect, and not used for human consumption in any way. As a Vegan I feel very compassionate about animals, and that we, as humans, have a lot to learn from them. I believe many animals/birds/insects come to us - be it in physical or spiritual form - to teach us lessons and help us on our life's path. By simply looking at how animals survive and live their lives, we can learn how we too can live. Pigs, for example, are so intelligent and organised, and - if we let them - could teach us how to organise our own lives. One of my personal animal guides is the ladybird, who comes to me whenever I have to learn to let go, forgive and move on in life. And just to generally cheer me up!

By attempting to depict such beautiful creatures, such as 'Owl' and 'Deer', I can express the awe I feel for them: and create, in the most compassionate way possible, artwork as a dedication to them!

This is my faith.
It has no rules,
and no religious book:
it comes from the heart.





Faith of a child

Emily sprinkles her fingers down the glass,
trace-reading the drops on the other side.

“Look” she says, simple as a god, “rain”.
She cups her hand, and when it’s filled

with enough dry air, raises it, toasting.
“Tomorrow”, she says, “it’ll be fine,

somewhere it’s a birthday”. She sparkles
her fingers against the spectring rain

one more time. “I’m one two free!”
She turns, shimmies like a rock pool,

delighted with her first pun, stretches
her arms, palms up-turned, precise now

as a revelation: “Look, Auntie Beccs,
there’s more”, she confettis her fingers,

petalling the view. “There’s everything”,
she says. And as she moves off,

into it all, I remember to believe
she’s right.