



ISSUE 20

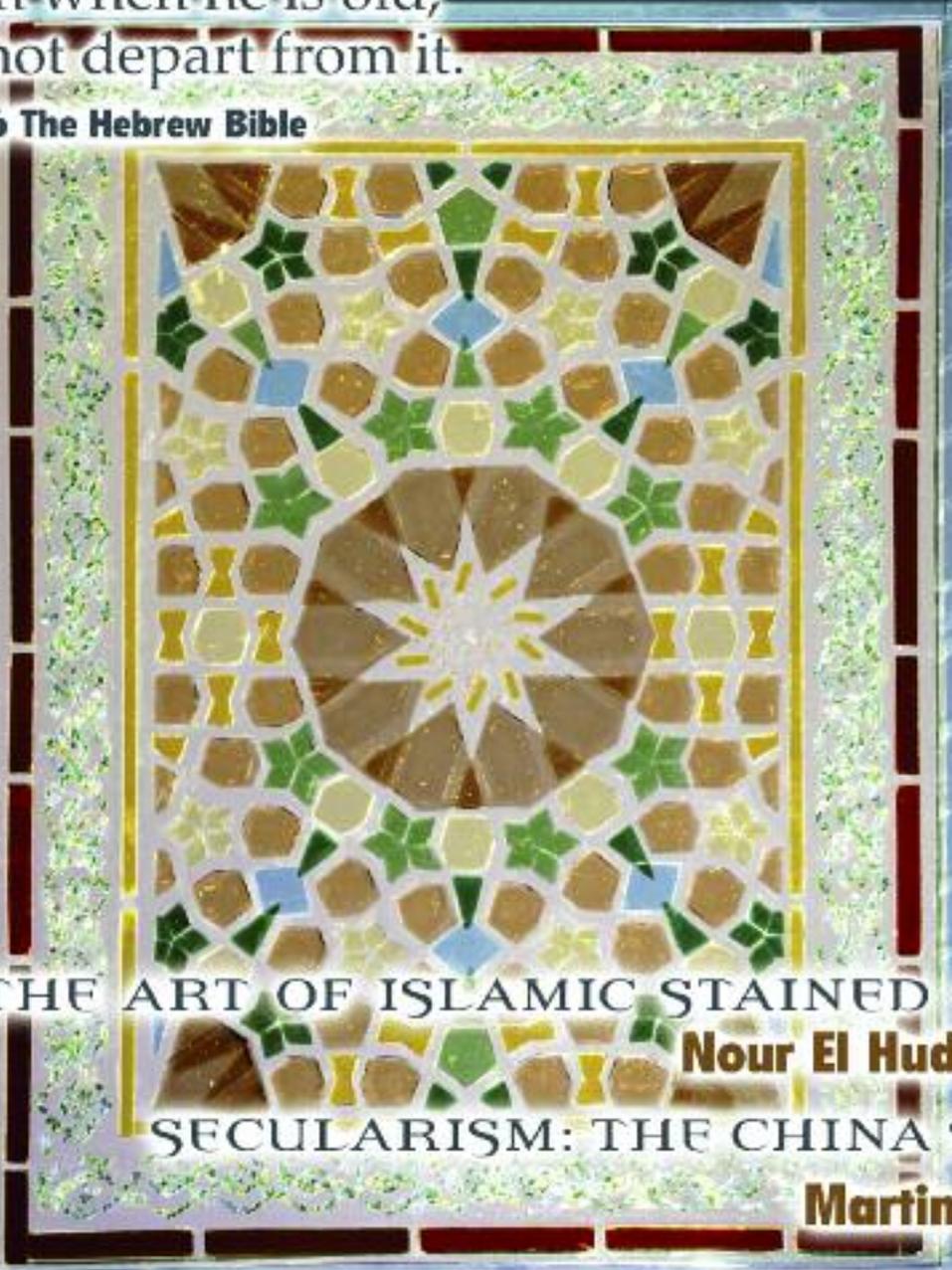
faith

INITIATIVE

EMBRACING DIVERSITY

Train up a child in the way he should go,
and even when he is old,
he will not depart from it.

Proverbs 22.6 The Hebrew Bible



THE ART OF ISLAMIC STAINED GLASS

Nour El Huda Awad

SECULARISM: THE CHINA STORY

Martin Palmer

LIVERPOOL COMMUNITY SPIRIT

Youth in Action

To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact you must give your heart to no one, not even an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in the casket, safe, dark, motionless, airless it will change. It will not be broken, it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable...

C.S.Lewis



Photograph: Brenda Whiteman

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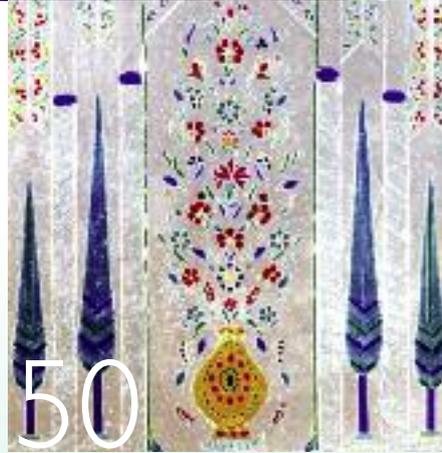
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editorial

Personally I have found 2008 to be a rather difficult year, largely because of a family bereavement and the devastating effect on family members, but this has enabled me to value the closeness of family relationships and the strength of the family structure - extended and immediate. I therefore have felt especially conscious of reports in the media of the neglect, abuse and even murder of young children in our society by family members. There has been much criticism of our Social Services for a lack of care, and where there has been failure within that system then there must be re-evaluation, but ultimately I believe a society is failing if it has to rely on Social Services for monitoring the care of its children. As a child I grew up always knowing that I had parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles who I could call on in times of need. How dreadful it must be for a child without that structure of support, and especially if those who are supposed to be taking care of me are actually inflicting pain. It hardly bears thinking about and yet we cannot close our eyes to the reality, we have to be conscious that such neglect is increasingly taking place within our own communities. We need to ask ourselves what has happened within our culture to bring about such a breakdown of family structure and moral responsibility. Undoubtedly, this has come about in part with the rise of secularism and materialism. Secularism is defined as a doctrine that rejects religion especially in relation to ethics: Materialism as an interest in, and desire for, money and possessions rather than spiritual or ethical values. In other words our culture, that has been shaped throughout history by Christian values, and enriched over time by the input of other religious faiths, has been diluted by secularism and materialism to the extent that the sense of the spiritual, for many people, has all but disappeared. Little wonder then that the spiritual bond between family members has, in many instances, broken down and been replaced by an individualism that breeds selfishness and a lack of regard for any other being. Undoubtedly individualism leads to isolation, which in turn leaves young children vulnerable and very, very alone. As people of faith we need to constantly challenge this social mindset, as our writers do, and draw on the wisdom of our faiths to bring an awareness of spiritual values to those we meet: in the sincere hope that this will penetrate the façade of secularism and enable others to realise for themselves the richness of their own innate spirituality.

Heather Wells

Our thoughts are with the people of Mumbai
and all who are effected by recent tragic
events in that wonderful city.

*May we all be in peace, peace and only peace;
And may that peace come unto each of us.
Yajurveda: Hindu Scriptures*

Cited: 365 Meditations. Collated by M. Braybrooke pub. Godsfield

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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
Editorial team –

Editor: Heather Wells

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Sr. Maureen Goodman • Shiban Akbar

Poet in residence: Rebecca Irvine

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**
Email: hf_wells@yahoo.co.uk

Issue 21 Theme:

• The Sanctity of Life

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Photography: Philp Vile

Back cover: Image: Dancer of Bharata Natyam:
Nilpa Shah

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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



Freeing mind

Boundaries: usually they are man-made! Think of borders, subjects, categories – we love separating and breaking up that which is whole and inter-connected. We often take the boundary as permanent and real. Why, for example, should the secular and the sacred be separate categories? For me, as a Jain, this distinction was never an issue until I started to be educated in the West, where religion was placed in a separate box, and usually outside of science and reason. This is when I first encountered the concept of the boundary, and have struggled with it ever since.

The more I think about it, this sense of classification and categorization is the root cause of the problem. We classify ‘man’ and ‘woman’ by gender, but also man and woman are the same as human and spiritual beings. We create physical borders and boundaries – a classification of territory, which can and does lead to territorialism. Secular and sacred are divisions – as if a knife is cut through a holistic larger truth. The mind is borderless, so why do we create borders and classifications?

Boxes help us to organize and order our knowledge. For many people religion is best kept in a box, lest it might interfere with science. The Indian word for religion is ‘dharma’ which means the science of sustainable living. Dharma was not supposed to be dogma, nor was it supposed to be fixed on a scripture – it was an evolving Universal science of truth and wisdom that was both secular and sacred – it was literally unclassified truth. I often feel upset that modern journalists, trained in secular ways, frequently see all religions through a Christian lens – there has to be a church, a bishop, Sunday worship, a bible, a code of conduct. This is so far from the truth, but where does one begin to change the mindset of a person when he or she has so little time to think or reflect?

As with knowledge, so with practical life. Knowledge is divided

into subjects like history, geography, biology, etc. Practical life is divided into home, work, family, school, play, study, holidays, and dare I say it community? Why should home life be separate from work? Why should family be separate from community? Can the sacred not influence our learning, home life and our business and work ethics?

I tried to integrate all this in a magazine I founded and published for seven years – Jain Spirit. It covered a range of topics

which directly related to contemporary life like Art, Workplace, Inter-Faith, Lifestyle, Youth, Worship ... little did I realize that I was returning Jain dharma to its origins where it informed and infused all aspects of life. I am now working in the Diversity field through my firm Diverse Ethics, and the biggest battle I am facing is these classifications – am I into race equality or gender equality, what about other categories like disability, sexuality, age... I explain that I am not into this categorization of

difference, and my approach is to draw from the wisdoms of the world and build bridges of understanding. In my book ‘Celebrating Diversity’, I devote a whole chapter to the topic of cultivating a borderless mind entitled ‘Minds Wide Open’.

Classifications may help us be organized, but their limitations are easily forgotten – as the famous philosopher Alfred North Whitehead said, “we often mistake the map for the territory”. One of the beauties of faith perspectives is that they tend to be broader in outlook and inclusive of nature, art, knowledge and even social life and history. In ancient India, education was holistic and students were taught all subjects in an inter-related way, such that the approach was to understand truth in all its contexts. It was also often one to one – guru and shishya – the teacher and the disciple. And yes, even spiritual teachers taught science, history, geography and the arts. All was seen as key to learning and personal development.

...it was an
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and wisdom
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sacred...

Even inter-faith was never seen as such as there were no boundaries between faiths – Buddhist and Jain monks had debates about liberation and the destiny of the soul, without it being classified as inter-faith dialogue. It was simply a pursuit of truth and wisdom.

Mahatma Gandhi claimed that 'Truth is God'. For modern scientists: 'Truth is science and God is untruth'. Mahatma Gandhi integrated science and spirituality and showed the world how one can live a holistic life, and use the virtues to bring about social change. He called his mission for independence 'Satya Graha' – the quest for truth. Why did he not call it 'removal of the British' or 'quest for independence' – he saw truth as the larger timeless goal, and it was the truth of India that it should govern itself in its own way, using its own logic, whatever the imperfections.

Ask a secondary school student what is their favourite subject and many will say 'World Religions'. Why? Because religions are diverse, colourful, artistic and illustrate different approaches to ethics, personal goals and aspirations. Unfortunately, the subject is rarely encouraged and even the teachers who can teach it are few and far between. Also, it seems, some Christian Schools do not want to encourage the study of World Religions as it somehow goes against the view that there is only One God and One Truth. All seekers for truth suffer from this mono-theism. My daughter did Hinduism at GCSE purely through her own efforts and resourcefulness - and she is a Jain. For the rest, the compulsory subject was Christianity.

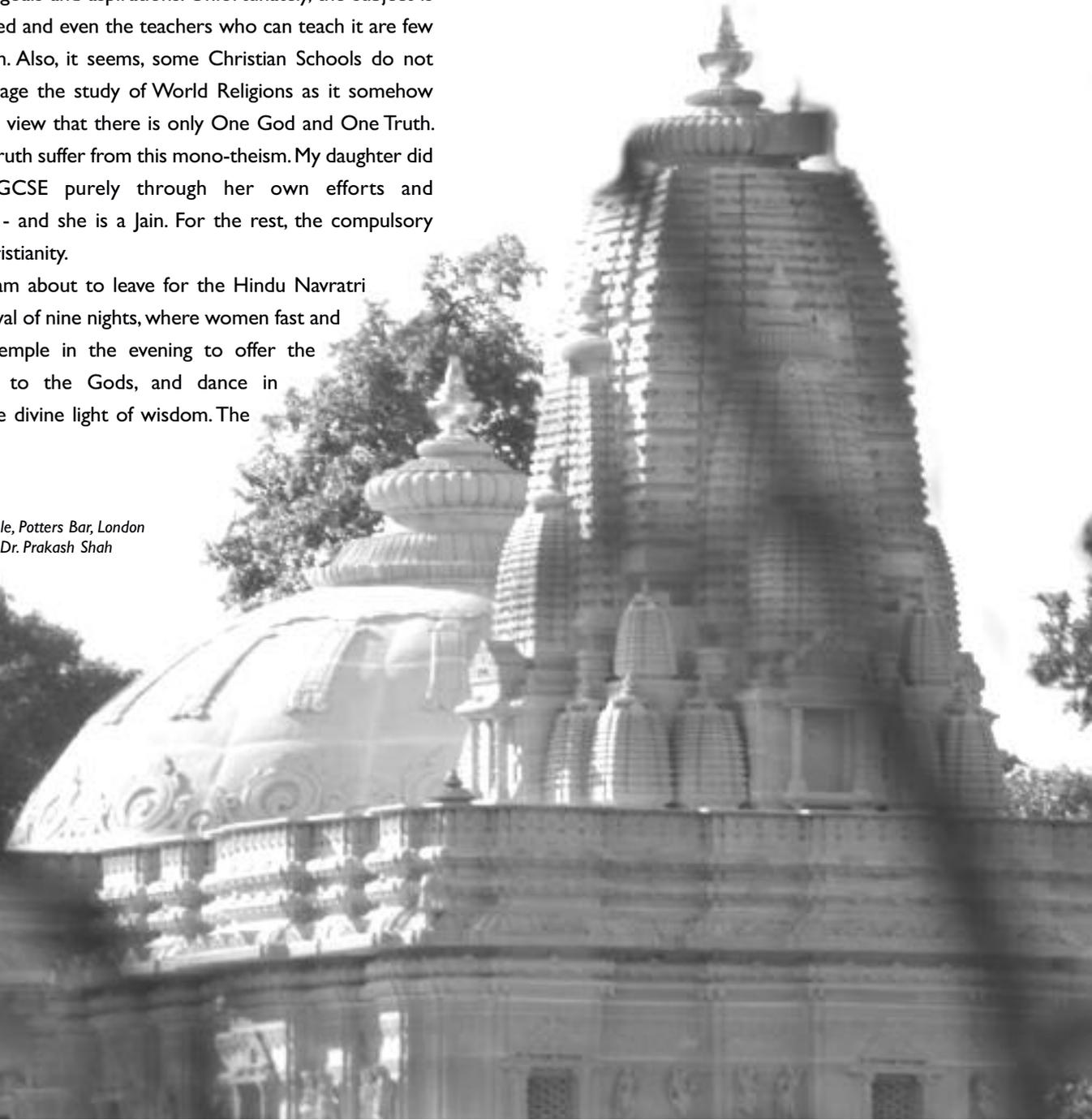
As I write, I am about to leave for the Hindu Navratri festival, the festival of nine nights, where women fast and come to the temple in the evening to offer the choicest foods to the Gods, and dance in gratitude for the divine light of wisdom. The

hall is full of colour with beautiful sarees, and the dancing is totally open and democratic – anyone can participate. Everything is shared – the music, the food, the fun and even the aarti is done collectively. Is this a religious festival – sure it is. Is this a secular festival – why not? Many young people come purely for the dancing and the music, rarely are they spiritual - my nine year old son loves the sacred food - but they still look forward to the event and have a ball. One does not need to have a belief to enjoy the festival, but there are sadly many who say that they would not come because they cannot participate in any religious ceremony. How sad!

Instead of categorizing the sacred and/or the secular, we are better to focus on truth and wisdom. May our eyes and ears be open to seek it everywhere. May we overcome our own limitations of pride, egoism, ignorance and dogmatism to explore and see truth in all its dimensions. Our world will be better for it.

Dr. Atul K. Shah is author of 'Celebrating Diversity' and Chief Executive of Diverse Ethics (www.diverseethics.com) where he writes a regular blog

*Jain Temple, Potters Bar, London
photo by Dr. Prakash Shah*





faith

and the work arena

I am not a scholar of Islam. I am not the most pious of Muslim women and I make no claims of vast knowledge or great works. I am just an ordinary Muslim woman trying to be the best I can be with the blessings and talents bestowed upon me.

I was asked to write about how my faith informs my daily life and the only way I felt I could do this was to take everyone on a small journey through my day.

My day starts at dawn when I wake up to do the first prayer of the day. This focuses my attention firmly on the overall purpose of life and sets me up for the day. Off to work, and as I go through the day I do what I need to do - I go to meetings, events, conferences, manage projects and staff. Many people leave their faith at home when they come into the office, but to me this is the most important arena to bring your faith, as this is where you spend most of your time, have most of your human interactions and make decisions that impact on the lives of others beyond your family and friends.

Throughout the day I try to be conscious of my behaviour in that I am not lying, cheating or acting in an inappropriate manner to achieve my objectives. This can be difficult at times and I sometimes I have an attack of conscience as I wonder whether or not, in a certain incident, I became too embroiled in work politics.

Luckily I am working in the charitable field and the job requires passion and belief in wanting to help others to improve their lives for the better. The choice of job was a conscious choice, and my faith has informed my career. I never wanted a job that did not somehow help to improve the lives of others, even if that was in a 'hands off' manner by representing and informing/forming policy. Last year I decided to take voluntary severance because my job was changing to a more bureaucratic role, rather than a people focused one. The intention was that I would go into self-employment and be my own boss, and while I was exploring this route I decided to take up voluntary work with a women's group. The more I explored the self-employment route the more I realised that my heart was not interested in the possibilities of making money and fortune. I ultimately had to admit to myself that I had to be on a path that involved some kind of service to

people, and the lure of money was not enough.

As the day continues and stress levels rise and deadlines loom, I stop to pray the mid day prayer and all of sudden, once again, I can focus on something that puts the minor everyday problems into perspective. Through prayer such problems seem miniscule, in comparison to the vastness of the world. Depending on the time of year, I pray the mid afternoon and the sunset prayer at work too. I have prayed in some fascinating places from service stations, hotels, outdoors, a Hindu centre, a church and conference rooms. I have never really stopped to think that this is not the norm or not appropriate it just feels so right and makes no difference other than having a positive impact on my work.

I ultimately had to admit to myself that I had to be on a path that involved some kind of service to people, and the lure of money was not enough.

Work draws to a close and I am off home, and then I am reminded that my faith tells me to look out for family, friends, neighbours and the community. I wonder whether I am a good role model to the people around me. Am I a good Muslim woman? Then I remember all the discussions with my family as I tried to explain

that Islam has given me the right to be an independent, freethinking woman with rights to lead a full and successful life – perhaps in a little way I may have helped open the doors for others with my willingness to engage with those who did not understand my point of view. I guess the time and patience was worth it.

The evening arrives and I am off to Aerobics, visiting with friends, reading or some other activity. Once again, to me, my body and mind are a gift and it is my responsibility to do what I can to keep everything in the best shape possible. Obviously I do my best but can lapse at times!

The day ends with the last prayer, spending some time reciting the Qu'ran and doing some dhikr (a form of meditation). I end the night with a focus on where the day started and the purpose of life.

I feel blessed that my choice of lifestyle, informed by my faith, makes me feel secure and at peace with the world - well most of the time - and it helps me when I do not.

My faith is Islam but my identity is as a human with respect for every human in the world.

THE IMPORTANCE OF

Religion has frequently been labelled as a cause of conflict between individuals, communities and nations. This article looks at religious identity from a psychological perspective and explores how this sense of identity can create prejudice about other religions.

A person's identity contains the following aspects of self:

- Individual self - relates to characteristics that one believes makes one unique
- Relational self - the self that comes from our relationships with significant others
- Collective self - the person no longer sees themselves as unique from others but as similar to and interchangeable with all others in the 'ingroup'. The person's thoughts, speech and behaviour are guided by the group's norms. There is an emotional bond with the ingroup, and situations that affect it will evoke emotions, regardless of whether the individual is personally concerned with the situation. All those who do not belong to this group are regarded as outgroup members.

Human beings have a tendency to rapidly make judgements at an unconscious level on what is harmful or beneficial to the self. Research has found that the centre of fear and anxiety in the brain (the amygdala) is activated in response to outgroup faces. This means that we may not consciously acknowledge anxiety about outgroup members, but when in contact with them primitive emotional responses, such as fear and anxiety, may be activated and the body may go tense, or the heart rate may quicken.

At the conscious level, intergroup dynamics could be affected by what is known as the 'incompatibility error'. The ingroup perceive a greater disagreement between their opinions and those of the outgroup than what actually exists. Not only are the opinions of rival religious groups misperceived, but so are their intentions and motives. This means that ingroup members can see disagreements with other religious groups when no conflict actually exists. For example one could perceive that a core practise in one's own religion is to 'love thy neighbour' and believe that this value is not as relevant for alternative religious groups because their religion is perceived to teach intolerance and violence.

Similarly, the outgroup is often perceived as acting with intent to harm and deliberately undermine the ingroup's religion, whereas the outgroup (and likewise the ingroup) is instead motivated to express their faith. These misperceptions in turn affect the emotions that are felt towards religious outgroups and the subsequent behaviour towards them. Outgroup members are not seen as individuals, but instead stereotypic judgments and prejudices are applied to all outgroup members which further fuels the cycle of misunderstanding, distrust and interreligious hostility.

If the tendency to categorise religious faiths results in disagreement and discrimination between different religions - or 'us' versus 'them', why do we use group boundaries at all? **Is it necessary to distinguish between different faiths, can the mind function without using ingroup-outgroup categories?** It is likely that this tendency to discriminate between 'us' versus 'them' has deep ancestral roots that can be likened to a single celled organism which has two basic needs: 1) to protect itself from threat and 2) to obtain nourishment from its surroundings. Humans

similarly have the need to obtain nourishment and avoid predators, but there is also an expanded representation of what is considered to be part of the self. This includes the social (e.g. our interpersonal relationships) and spatial-symbolic environment (group memberships), where the 'I' becomes a 'me', and then a 'mine'.

The spatial-symbolic self can endow the individual with a sense of meaning and belonging. It can provide the optimal

conditions for one to simultaneously fulfil needs of individuality and togetherness. Religious identity can provide meaning to one's life, enable one to transcend oneself and experience oneness with existence. It can provide protection and security for members. Following strict religious practises and rituals, and having a religious identity, offers structure, unambiguous norms and the law of a higher authority to daily life.

Not only are the opinions of rival religious groups misperceived, but so are their intentions and motives

Religious Identity

It can fulfil the fundamental human need for certainty in an ever-changing world by providing psychological security and stability, which guides social interaction and creates predictability. The Buddha taught that everything is a continual process of change and it is our resistance to constant changes in health, relationships etc that creates suffering. Removing religious identity, which can fulfil basic and transcendental needs, is likely to create anxiety and uncertainty within the individual.

A little over year ago I encountered a meditative technique called Vipassana meditation, as taught by the Buddha. It is a universal technique open to all faiths and develops self-awareness, concentration and experiential wisdom. It has been applied in government, prisons, business management, health education, drug addiction programmes, and is found to have significant positive effects on wellbeing and rehabilitation - and is promising for intergroup relations.

In Vipassana meditation the mind is trained to continuously observe the natural flow of the in-breath and out-breath. When the mind is quietened it can then experience subtle sensations below the nostril and above the upper lip. With this refined perception the mind is more sensitive to body sensations and the mediator moves their attention systematically throughout the body, constantly observing changing body sensations.

The technique works with the unconscious mind – the place where outgroup prejudices are often operating. Whatever arises in the mind whether it is anger, fear, or happiness is associated with certain internal body sensations. Emotions or thoughts towards outgroups can therefore be directly experienced as a physical sensation. If the mind is able to observe these sensations without aversion or clinging, then it becomes easier not to react to them. This reconditioning, or ‘rewiring’ of the mind to stop reacting habitually with *resistance* to displeasing stimuli (such as outgroup members), or *clinging* to pleasing stimuli (e.g. ingroup identity) is transferred to our interactions with all others.

One can theoretically understand the concept of ‘love thy neighbour’ and the need to be accepting of other religions but to know how to create and apply this concept is much more difficult.

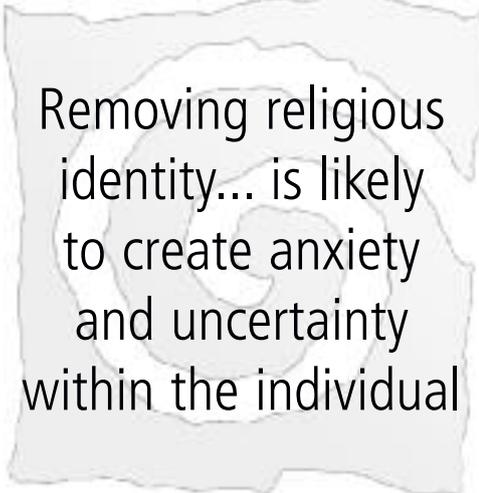
It requires uprooting negativities at the deepest level. By dissolving the barrier between the conscious and unconscious mind one can become aware of subtle fears, desires or prejudices and not react to them. One of the difficulties for interfaith relations is that the existence of other religious groups is often threatening to the ingroup and can undermine one’s own perception of truth, religious beliefs, values and culture. However when the mind develops equanimity to all internal states it loosens its clinging and attachment to ideas, beliefs and opinions.

One’s personal beliefs may remain the same, but there is greater openness to others because one is not suppressing or indulging unconscious reactions.

I believe that religious identity in itself is not a cause of conflict, the conflict is within the unconscious, deep rooted habits of aversion to things that we do not like, whether it is other people’s ideas, religion or political beliefs. **By clinging onto a religious identity we cling to the shell, or surface of a religion rather than using the fruits found in the richness of religious practice.** The essence of all religions is one of morality, love, compassion: if we cling to the label of religious identity, then the inner essence

of the teachings become secondary.

The beauty of religion is that it gives us an opportunity to live a moral life, in harmony with others. I have found that techniques such as Vipassana are a way to achieving this. Religious identity, when used without clinging or aversion, can be a powerful tool for self-development, an opportunity to uphold and attain boundless love, compassion and an embracing of all others, irrespective of religious faith.



Removing religious identity... is likely to create anxiety and uncertainty within the individual

Every created thing in the whole universe is but a door leading into His knowledge, a sign of His sovereignty, a revelation of His names, a symbol of His majesty, a token of His power, a means of admittance into His straight Path.

Text cited: *Meditations of the Blessed Beauty*
Extracts from the writings of Baha'u'llah translated from the original Arabic and Persian
Selected by Gordon J.Kerr and George M. Ballentyne
Image: Mark Sadan

SHOPPING *heaven*

Here's hell: plate glass parts and I'm in light
bland as a huckster's smile, air colder
than the abacus stones of his eyes.
In the chillers, a banquet of torments:
Columbian blackberries, kumquats
from a smudge of ink, a somewhere-else
that serves the spilling horn of pell-mell
plenty in this remorseless harvest time.

Here, the only shortage is seasons and
every sum is counter-intuitive; who knows
which plum's worth a dam, when one
of every two is free, and I am dazzled
by the loneliness of my anger, the worry
I can't worry about distant, starving farm hands
or the loss of the self who thought she'd help
change the world. So I don't see the kid,

burdened by twofers and texting and debt
who doesn't see me for the fear in his eyes,
till my basket clatters, weeping milk over tiles.
And the kid sees I'm winded, fishes chivalry
from pre-occupation, while his son recaptures
caroony apples and a couple of grannies,
breathless as shamans, curse these murderous
floors and all the directors who need to care

more about us, and that us has no borders, till
the chorus drowns the hungry bleat of the scanners,
and for one priceless moment I'm locked in a bargain
of protest, listening to them all, the angels.

the *Sea* of Secularism

Religion and Secularism in an increasingly post-secular world: **The China Story**

When the charity I have the honour of working for – the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC) first started working in China over fifteen years ago people were astonished at what we were doing. We were working with Daoist and Buddhist – the leading historic faiths of China - on environmental projects designed to protect China's fragile and increasingly threatened environment. "Could you find" we were often asked, "two more subjects about which the Communist Party of China is more worried than religion and environment?" To which the honest answer was "No. These are the two subjects most difficult to discuss in Communist China!"

That was fifteen years ago when I used to have to keep bail money in China to get my colleagues, who were working on some of the sacred mountains, out of prison when they were arrested by deeply perplexed and alarmed local Party officials.

In many ways China was the classic example of how secularism, atheistic communism, saw itself as triumphant, and religion as merely a relic from the past – albeit a disturbing one which they found hard to understand or control. As for the environment, the Marxist ideology - indeed the general secular ideology - was that Humanity had Conquered Nature (to quote Marx) and the world for human beings was getting better with modern communications, travel, lifestyles etc. The environmental movement was seen as an attack on the scientific success of secularism and modernity, and as inherently conservative.

How things have changed!

Today ARC is working in careful partnership with the Daoists and Buddhists and with the Chinese Communist Party. The reason for this is startling in the light it sheds on the emergence of a post-secular world.

We were approached about four years ago by the Communist Party and asked if we would help in a programme they wished to develop with Daoists and

Buddhists across China. The programme – the title is one chosen by the Communist Party – is 'Creation of a Spiritual Culture of Harmony'.

We asked them why they wanted to work with the religions and why the religions should trust them, bearing in mind that just a few decades before, the Party had murdered most of the monks, nuns and priests and destroyed or taken over 98% of all temples and monasteries.

The answer was stark. They said that due to the single child policy brought in during the mid 1970's, and the resulting children who were then brought up on a diet of

atheistic ideology, China now had the most selfish generation of single children in its history: and these were children with essentially no moral values other than greed. Add to this the rapid rise of consumerism in China and you have a terrifyingly ego-centric, rapacious culture emerging. So much so that these single children are known as little emperors and little empresses!

The reason the Party has turned to the faiths is because despite The Party's best efforts to destroy them, they have survived and not just survived but flourished in the growing freedom that has been the hallmark of China over the last twenty years or so. As a result, they are the only social structures left which carry a memory of greater values and meaning than that imparted by The Party. The faiths are the remaining Memory Palaces of Chinese civilisation and their wisdom, knowledge, stories, legends and compassion are now desperately needed.

Together, slowly and cautiously, the faiths and the government of China – which is probably best described as post-communist – are trying to find how to rebuild a shattered culture; how to create a culture with values beyond the purely economic and individual. And this is why religion and the environment are now hot topics in China and we find ourselves in great demand.

China now had the most selfish generation of single children in its history

Nor is China unique in this. The return of religion to the public forum, or the rediscovery that religion often is the social forum, is a phenomenon observable around the world. The recent AIDs international congress has at last officially recognised the huge role – far greater than any other aspect of civil society – played by religions in caring for and addressing the AIDs epidemic. For the last eight years the World Bank has worked in a variety of partnerships with the major faiths seeking alternative economic models to the prevailing one of the stock market. The UN has just launched with ARC its largest ever programme working as a partner with major faiths developing environmental projects, and trying to create models of hope in a world overwrought with apocalyptic fears of climate change.

Elsewhere, secularism has failed in so many nation states created out of the old European Empires: for example, Zambia. In 1964 in the enthusiasm of nationalism and freedom it nationalised all the Christian and Muslim schools and clinics/hospitals. The State has failed economically and as a result has returned to the faiths 50% of the schools and some 60% of medical facilities and asked them to run them again.

The problem for us in Europe is that we are left out. I recently compiled for the University of California Press and Earthscan here in the UK, the Atlas of Religion. In that book we explored through maps and graphs the role of religions world wide on issues as diverse as investments, media and sacred sites. What became clear, and is now often officially defined, is the fact that it is only in Western Europe and to a certain extent Australia and Canada that secularism is still rising and is a serious force within society. Elsewhere it either never has been relevant or has had its moment of history – Communism; nationalistic states or fascism – and has failed. Thus we now have to talk of “European Exceptionalism” – that is to say that Europe is exceptional in the role of and significance given to secularism.

And even here things are changing. While there is no doubt that formal religion – be that Christianity, Judaism or even Islam and Hinduism - is losing its traditional hold on younger generations, the expectation that religion and religious beliefs however defined ought to be taken

seriously now shapes many aspects of our cultural life.

For example, every UK government department has had to survey how it already works with faith and how it plans to develop this. The reasons for doing this vary enormously but the fact is this is happening.

So when I see the Dawkins et al on the bookshelves I hear the sound of mild panic and whinging. Their world of the certainty of the triumph of secularism is fading away. We are leaving the meta-narrative of secularism. This does not mean we are returning to the meta-narrative of the Judeo-Christian culture or any other religious meta-narrative. That too has been left behind. But we are no longer living in the secular story – or if we are, we are losing faith in it quite rapidly.

This is not to be triumphant about religion. It is not a return to religion but a return to religion being taken seriously in the pluralism of contemporary cultures within which secularism is just one element of the pluralism.

In the mid 19th century, Matthew Arnold wrote his famous **Dover Beach** poem. It contains these powerful words and images:

The Sea of Faith
Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furl'd.
But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
Retreating, to the breath
Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear
And naked shingles of the world.

Today, we need to change the words Sea of Faith to Sea of Secularism.

Sacred and Secular:

How do you engage faith communities in social change? This was the question that faced me when I was invited to contribute to the recent Global Peace and Unity Event at the Excel Centre in London, an event attended by 70,000 people, the majority of them Muslims.

But before I could get the audience to the part that faith communities may or may not be able to play in social change, I had to unpack for them what could be – and in reality at present often is – a dangerous assumption made, especially by legislators, both national and local, about the role of faith communities in relation to what we have come to call the secular state.

If I'm honest, I don't much like the division here between sacred and secular, because I think that it is a false one. Nothing in this world is outside the care of – and in a profound, though not perhaps always obvious sense – the creative power of the divine. As the psalmist says, 'the earth is the Lord's and everything in it'. But as this truth has receded in the minds of many, and as the state has set itself up as a kind of false God – and recent events in relation to our perilous financial situation have surely reminded us of the sheer arrogance and pervasiveness of such idolatry – so we have been forced, largely as a practical expedient, to acknowledge increasingly what the secular state believes - believes wrongly, of course, but believes nonetheless – namely, that it holds sway. And furthermore, that the sacred dimension, the religious, the faith communities, must somehow be grafted onto, woven into, whatever plan for social change the state comes up with next.

Herein lies the mistaken assumption behind the way in which the 'How to engage...' question is most often posed and understood. Because what this assumption does on the one hand – as I've suggested – is to make of the state and its plans some kind of God; whilst on the other hand inviting faith communities to cooperate with, accelerate and even achieve objectives purely of this idolatrous god, rather than the real God's bidding.

Now, it goes without saying that I'm not against the state *per se* and not against all of its plans for social change either. I applaud, for instance, the desire for community cohesion,

and spend most of my time with my Muslim colleague, Anjum Anwar MBE – the Dialogue Development Officer at Blackburn Cathedral – working for it. But I do deplore, and perhaps even to some degree resent, the way in which faith communities are invited into a post-Enlightenment, post-modern, secularist world view – a world view which has always privatised faith, and stated firmly that it is a matter of personal choice not public concern – and which therefore puts my citizenship of the UK above my membership of the kingdom of God. A world view, which goes on to imagine that I will somehow simply bow down to this false god who announces the main form of social change, which is at present on offer: 'Britishness'.

Let us agree on what that is all about – itself a vain quest, as this is a god of the confused and the mistaken if ever there was one – and all will somehow be well.

If you follow something of the drift of what I'm saying, you will understand that as a member of a faith community, my values – as a Christian, I would claim that these are the values of the kingdom – will always take priority over any earthly allegiance to, and engagement with the state.

I will not sell my soul – as frankly some members of faith communities seem to sell their souls rather easily – in return for a samosa or a cucumber sandwich, over a cosy chat and a British (is it British?) cup of tea with this god's chief acolyte – personally charming though she is – the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government!

I will give all I can to promote community cohesion – and to transcend religious or ethnic or cultural rivalry and tension wherever they exist, but I will do so not because this is the social change that the Government bids us make, and certainly not on terms which stubbornly see my faith as secondary to other concerns – it can never be that. I will do so because my faith tradition teaches me that this change is the will of God.

In this sense, I will not be made the means that gets any Government from A to B – and out of a fix – because the area of community relations happens to be the one with which they are most struggling. I cannot – and nor can any other faith community – be part of a prescribed secularist journey, or the glue that holds illusory social change together. Not least, it cannot be so because our legislators are still

the sacred dimension....
must somehow be
grafted onto, woven
into, whatever plan for
social change the state
comes up with next.

a False Divide?

working with, and towards, a new version of the failed model of multiculturalism: the model that isn't about community at all because it gives everyone their own hotel room and says, 'Do what you like, so long as you don't disturb the neighbours!'

As a person of faith, I must play a critically supportive role, offering assistance where I can but also keeping a distance from mistaken quests such as the current 'Britishness' agenda. I must seek, as the Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks has suggested, to find ways of helping our legislators and policy-makers to see that we need to construct, not a hotel with enough rooms for all, but a home where we share common tasks and even aspirations.

This critically-supportive stance is vital because when we think of the vast social changes that have happened in my own lifetime – a mere 41 years – we soon come to realize that the way many of them have happened at the behest of the idolatry of the secular state has led to a diminishment of the voice of faith and a loss of moral values.

Do we applaud secular liberalism when it has produced levels of promiscuity in our society that have perhaps never been higher? Levels of teenage pregnancy, binge drinking and anti-social behaviour that are truly shocking? Violent crime, especially using guns, which is frighteningly on the increase? Do we applaud the loss of the concept of Sabbath, of a day of rest, and the accelerating greed to make more and more money which has gone with this, not to say the loss of time for self, family and friends? It would seem in reality that the social understanding – the unwritten contract between parents, teachers, legislators, religious leaders, law enforcers and the like – which once appeared to undergird our society has completely disintegrated.

Whilst we cannot put Pandora back into her box, we need to acknowledge that she has escaped and at whose behest. We must do so because the secular revolution that produced this kind of social change was frankly not the way to go. It has bequeathed to us a deeply divided and not a cohesive society. A society ill at ease with itself. A society which seemingly more robust – and perhaps less assimilationist – faiths than my own are bound to critique, and to do so with a harshness that sometimes shocks.

Lest we are tempted to think, however, that implicit in this

is an assumption that Government somehow got it wrong in the face of religious opposition, faith communities need to take a long look at the way in which their failure to coherently and consistently challenge the inexorable tide of social change has led – and continues to lead – to society's disintegration. My fellow Christians need, for instance, to reflect on their complicity in all this: the way in which they have most often sold out their faith to a market-place of free choice and rampant individualism.

Do we applaud secular liberalism when it has produced levels of promiscuity in our society that have perhaps never been higher?

In the end, this whole area of debate swings both ways. We need Government which understands the real dynamic of faith – in its own terms not just as the glue to rescue failed social policy – to embrace the whole of life, sacred and secular. But we also need faiths which understand their real dynamic to be outward-focussed, life-enhancing means of making the social changes they are called by God to advance, not holy huddles offering sacred soirees,

but invigorating and inventive institutions speaking to and for the secular because it is sacred: it is God's already.

Chris Chivers is Canon Chancellor of Blackburn Cathedral and Director of exChange, the Cathedral's community cohesion and interfaith development agency.

Editor's Note: SOS for Zimbabwe

We have today received an urgent appeal from Zimbabwe:

"Please pray that the United Nations will come to the aid of our people in what many Zimbabweans feel is our darkest hour."

10th December 2008

As was the will of God, so I ought to have thought;
As was the will of God, so I ought to have spoken;
As was the will of God, so I ought to have acted.
If I have not so thought, so spoken, so acted,
Then do I repent for the sin,
Do I repent by my thought, word, and deed.
Do I repent with all my heart and conscience.

It is human to fail; it is inhuman not to admit one's failure.
Confession of sin is one of the most human of all acts because it
demands total honesty - to admit before God, who sees and
knows all, that we have not measured up to God's demands.

Michael Barnes

THE SOUND OF GOD

OM (also spelled AUM) is a Hindu sacred sound that is considered the greatest of all mantras.

The syllable OM is composed of the three sounds a-u-m (in Sanskrit the vowels a and u combine to be o) and the symbol's threefold nature is central to its meaning, it represents several important triads:

The three worlds - earth, atmosphere and heaven

The three Hindu gods - Brahma, Vishnu and Siva

The three sacred vedic scriptures - Rg, Yajur, Sama

Thus OM mystically embodies the essence of the entire universe. This meaning is further deepened by the Indian philosophical belief that God first created sound, and from these sound frequencies came the phenomenal world. Our total existence is constituted of these primal sounds, which give rise to mantras when organised by a desire to communicate, manifest, invoke or materialise. Matter itself is said to have proceeded from sound and OM is said to be the most sacred of all sounds. It is the syllable which preceded the universe and from which the gods were created. It is the 'root' syllable, the cosmic vibration that holds together the atoms of the world and heavens. Indeed the Upanishads, the philosophical texts of Hinduism, say that AUM is god in the form of sound.

OM is spoken at the beginning and the end of Hindu mantras, prayers and meditations and is frequently used in Buddhist and Jain rituals as well. From the 6th century the written symbol of OM was used to mark the beginning of a text in a manuscript or an inscription.



The essence of all beings is the earth.

The essence of the earth is water.

The essence of water is the plant.

The essence of the plant is man.

The essence of man is speech.

The essence of speech is the Rigveda.

The essence of Rigveda is the Samveda.

The essence of Samveda is OM.

(Chandogya Upanishad)

WILLIAM TEMPLE

A REALIZED IMPOSSIBILITY

William Temple, although only Archbishop of Canterbury for less than three years, has been described as the most 'variously distinguished Archbishop since Anselm'.ⁱ Bernard Shaw said of him 'An Archbishop of Temple's enlightenment is a realized impossibility'.ⁱⁱ Winston Churchill, with whom he often clashed, chose him to be Archbishop because he was 'the only man in a class of boys'. For me he represents the best in Anglicanism, with a deep personal faith, a liberal mind and a passionate concern for unity and for social justice. He had immense knowledge, an amazing memory, and a warm humanity. A person of wide interests and many talents, he was said by his friends to be the most integrated person they knew. This was because his personal relationship with Jesus Christ was at the very centre of his life.

In his *Mens Creatrix* (1917: 'The Creative Mind'), which he completed on the night before his wedding - incidentally a happy marriage, although they had no children - he argued that it was in the Incarnation that the converging lines of knowledge, art, morality and religion converge. He emphasised the real humanity of Jesus, who because he was fully human and fully possessed by God, gives us our clearest picture of both God and humanity at its best. Temple, however, recognised that it was through the Word of God, which was made human in Jesus, that 'Isaiah and Plato and Zoroaster and the Buddha and Confucius conceived and uttered such truths as they declared'. 'There is', he wrote, 'only one divine light; and every person is in measure enlightened by it'.ⁱⁱⁱ Indeed, in a letter written in 1901, Temple had said, that the Divine Spirit in Jesus also 'lived and spoke in Socrates and Buddha and Mahomet (*sic*) as it did also in Hosea and Luther and Browning'.^{iv} Because of the universal presence of the Divine Light - even if often hidden - Temple was interested in the whole of life.

Indeed, Temple's passionate hope was that society should be shaped by that Light or more specifically by Jesus' proclamation of the Rule or Kingdom of God. Some of the last words he ever wrote were, 'Our need is a new integration of life: Religion, Art, Science, Politics, Education, Industry, Commerce, Finance - all these need to be brought into a unity as agents of a single purpose. That purpose can hardly be found in human aspirations; it must be a divine purpose. That divine purpose is presented to

us in the Bible under the name of the Kingdom (Sovereignty) of God, or as the summing up of all things in Christ, or as the coming down out of heaven of the holy city, the New Jerusalem'.^v In the sermon, which he preached at his enthronement, he affirmed the claim of Christ to rule in every department of human life and that society should be based on the principles of God's kingdom.

This is why he devoted so much serious attention to the problems of society. Although he was the son of an Archbishop and lived for more than half his life in Episcopal palaces, his

friendship with R.H. Tawney converted him to socialism and for a time Temple was a member of the Labour Party. It was because of his socialism that he was placed on the government's list of dangerous characters during the First World War. In 1908, he became president of the Workers Educational Association. During the 1926 coal stoppage, which led to the General Strike, he tried with some other churchmen to mediate between the mine owners and the unions. He was rebuked by the Prime Minister Stanley

Baldwin, for this interference in politics. Even so, Temple continued such interference throughout his life. For example, during the Second World War, he argued for a negotiated peace with Germany against Churchill's demand for unconditional surrender. He justified the Church's involvement in politics in his best known book, *Christianity and the Social Order*, which profoundly influenced many people including Edward Heath. Temple chaired the big 1924 Christian Conference on Politics, Economics and Citizenship and became active in the 'Faith and Order' and 'Life and Work' movements that were to lead after his death to the establishment of the World Council of Churches.

Temple was committed to the independence of the Church from the State. His campaign for more democratic structures in the Church led to the setting up of Parochial Church Councils and the Church Assembly. As early as 1916 he expressed his support for the ordination of women, but thought the general emancipation of women and church unity were priorities. Temple also chaired the Commission, which produced the open and still relevant report, *Doctrine in the Church of England* (1938).

There is only
one divine light;
and every
person is in
measure
enlightened by it

It is not virtue that can save the world or any one in it, but Love

Temple's concern for Christian unity was part of this wider concern. "A divided Church", it was said, "cannot lead a divided world". Temple spoke of the ecumenical movement as "the great new fact of our era". Thanks in large measure to his efforts, the British Council of Churches, of which he was the first chairman, was established in 1942. "We owe," he said, "united witness as a duty to our nation and to the hope of Christian civilization".

It was largely thanks to William Temple that in the same year, 1942, the Council of Christians and Jews was established. Temple was anxious to avoid specific mention in CCJ's constitution of anti-Semitism, which he saw as symptomatic of an even deeper evil. "We are dealing", he said, "with a problem of civilisation and not only the relationship between Jew and Christian".^{vi}

Besides his multifarious activities, Temple wrote over thirty books and is the only Archbishop to have given the prestigious Gifford Lectures. His *Nature, Man and God*,^{vii} however, was not written in advance, but prepared in the midst of other activities. Perhaps his most personal book was his *Readings in St John's Gospel*, which he described as 'an attempt to share... my own thoughts as I read the profoundest of all writings.'^{viii} In his meditations on Chapter 15, in which Jesus spoke of himself as the Vine, Temple reflected on Jesus' words "Abide in me", saying 'All truth and depth of devotion, all effectiveness in service spring from this... In all my strivings to attain some ideal or perform some service, unless my heart and will are wholly captivated, there will be some self-assertion, and probably a great deal... It is not virtue that can save the world or any one in it, but Love. And Love is not at our command. We cannot generate it from within ourselves. We can only win it by surrender to it'.^{ix}

**O God of love, we ask you to give us love;
Love in our thinking, love in our speaking,
Love in our doing,
And love in the hidden places of our souls;
Love of those with whom we find it hard to bear,
And love of those who find it hard to bear with us;
Love of those with whom we work,
And love of those with whom we take our ease;
That so at length we may be worthy to dwell with you
Who are eternal love.'**^x

Despite his vast knowledge and the important positions that he held, Temple had a ready smile and a total lack of self-importance. As he travelled the country by bus or train or visited bomb-sites, he made friends with everyone he met. No wonder, he earned the title 'The People's Archbishop'.^{xi}

Postscript: William Temple wrote in one of his letters: 'As we look back, the truth is marked by beacon-lights, which are the lives of saints and pioneers; and these in their turn are not originators of light, but rather reflectors which give light to us, because themselves they are turned to the source of light'. I had not read this passage when I chose the title *Beacons of the Light*,^{xii} for my forthcoming book, which is the story of 100 holy people who have shaped the spiritual history of humanity.

- i *The Spirit of Anglicanism* ed William Wolf Edinburgh, T and T Clark 1982, Wilton Connecticut, Morehouse-Barlow, 1979, p. 101. Anselm was Archbishop from 1093-1109
- ii *The Spirit of Anglicanism*, p. 111
- iii William Temple, *Readings in St John's Gospel*, London, Macmillan, 1939, 1961 St Martin's Library edition, p. 9. Temple is commenting on the Prologue to St John's Gospel, verse 9, which speaks of the True Light 'which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.' (Authorised Version). Not all biblical scholars agree with Temple's interpretation of the verse.
- iv F A Iremonger, *William Temple*, Oxford University Press, 1948, p. 103.
- v William Temple, *The Church Looks Forward*, New York, Macmillan and Co 1944 pp v-vi.
- vi Quoted in Marcus Braybrooke, *Children of One God*, London, Vallentine Mitchell, 1991, p. 11
- vii William Temple, *Nature, Man and God*, London, Macmillan, 1934.
- viii *Readings in St John's Gospel*, p. xiii.
- ix *Readings in St John's Gospel*, pp. 249-251.
- x Quoted in *1,000 World Prayers*, Ed Marcus Braybrooke, John Hunt o-books, 2003.
- xi F A Iremonger, *William Temple*, p. 630.
- xii To be published by John Hunt o-books in the Spring of 2009.

Uplifting the future

Art is used to depict so many aspects of life. Art is a fundamental vehicle for capturing culture, a place in time, and often emotions. It is also a powerful medium of communication where different forms can be used to convey a subtle message or to make a powerful statement. A picture can paint a thousand words...

And as with so many other aspects of society, it is the dominant culture that prevails. More than not, art that conveys the culture, heritage and experiences of minorities is often not in the public domain.

Yet art is so significant in communicating those subtle and powerful messages that give us our identity.

It all began with a poem thirty years ago

Cécile Nobrega, a poet and teacher, arrived in Britain from Guyana in 1968. Driven by a passion to convey the important contribution of Caribbean women to society, Cécile wrote a poem that she titled *Bronze Woman*.

The *Bronze Woman Monument Project* was born out of sheer determination to express her message in a stronger manner – through the commissioning of a magnificent piece of art. Using art as the vehicle, this unique monument provides a platform to convey the message from the perspective of the minority community. Cécile's dream was to see a statue erected as a lasting and public tribute to all women, championed by the example of those who came from the Caribbean

Cécile: "One thing I loved about this work is that it's not just that the child is in her arms but he's up-lifted, you see. The fact that she wants this child on a higher level than she has ever been or could be. It's not that the baby is being cuddled in her arm; this child is deliberately pushed above her head – up-lifted – because that's what she wants: a new start and a higher start for that child".

For the first time we see a monument of a black woman displayed in a public space in England. The statue is a lasting reminder that women can overcome adversity and contribute significantly to the history of a country. They are carers, nurturers and often sacrifice themselves for their children to have a better life and future.

The Bronze Woman Monument Project is supported by Olmec, part of the Presentation Group. Olmec is a dynamic community investment foundation working alongside disadvantaged communities to deliver programmes that lead to positive change.

The monument was unveiled on the 8th of October in South London to coincide with Black History Month.

60cm bronze replicas of the monument are available for sale. All proceeds from the sale will be used to support a legacy project.

"...this child is deliberately pushed above her head – up-lifted – because that's what she wants: a new start and a higher start for that child."

For more information please email tanzeem.ahmed@olmec-ec.org.uk

Bronze Woman: Sculptors: Ian Walters and Aleix Barbat



Bronze Woman

by Cécile Nobrega

Find me a place
in the sun
in the sea
on a rock
near an Isle
in the Caribbee:
There I will set her,
Honoured, Free!

Free
to be kissed
and petted by the wind;
Free
to be washed with the
brine of
sweet and bitter memoirs
Sin:
Free
to be stubborn and
steadfast
as night,
Dark is her Destiny
Wrong her right.

Woman of Bronze!
Symbol of Slavery
Free
Strength
sweat and toil,
who can foil
Your quest
for best
to give your child?

One night a woman
says the Book,
went to Him
late,
late in the gloomy
darkness
of the night;
Went to Him, the Light,
for places for her sons
The left, the right
to sit beside Him.
Chide her not!
Mother instinct is the
same
today
as then
for evermore
however mild,
she seeks the betterment
of her child.

Bronze Woman!
You were no different
When you laid with
massa boss,
Free
or
forced
you knew there was no
loss
of favours
food:
Food for the black and
hungry brood,
Mulato-Eurasian child
money
subsidised economy,
guaranteed
a step away
from want and need:
a step away
from toil and sweat
the heat of day:
Pray
Feel no hurt
with those who talk
of illegitimacy
and illiteracy,
Social stigmas -

Language Craft;
Feel proud
that you have
done your part:
Stained your skirt
with water-mark
waist deep
paddy beds
cane fields
to keep
stinted stomachs
hungry mouth
salt and rice
such sacrifice
as those passed on many
know of
Death!

Consumptive death
Malarial death,
visited troolie huts
clean earthen floor
the same as
Overseer, Manager
before
promotion
to driver
extortion
child labour.
All this you bore,
Feel hurt no more.

Feel Joy
with those who served
the mine,
today your sons and
daughters
shine
like the bright gold you
bartered for,
in great professions,
Music, Medicine, Law.

White Man's purse
has no curse
his seed
no need:
but Men
poor Men
they run away
After the night
the day
is done
they're gone
through need
disown their seed
then you are left alone
Bronze Woman
father-mother
Caribbean Woman
To play a dual role.

Stalwart woman-man
With the sun in your
bones
and the bloods in your
veins;
strength in your heart
and love in your limbs,
Your buxom breasts hang
down
like juicy mangoes
in the mouth of your
child,
Your eyes are determined
Yet gentle and mild,
Who can help but set you
Bronze Woman
above!
Who can help but cherish
This monument of
Love.....

Then find me a place
in the sun
in the sea
on a rock
Near an Isle
In the Caribbee:
There I will set her
Bronze Woman
Free

sustainable interfaith

Faiths4Change Supporting
people of faith and
goodwill to work together
to grow communities

Faiths4Change supports people of faith and goodwill to work in partnership to create environmental projects that enhance their neighbourhoods, build relationships and enable people to gain or develop skills. Underpinning the work is a commitment to social, environmental and economic justice for all. We have a team of six based in faith communities' buildings in Liverpool, Burnley, Preston and Manchester. We serve England's North West predominantly working where need is greatest in urban, deprived areas. It is no surprise that faith communities are strongest in areas of greatest need.

Faiths4Change provides free services to faith communities and their members including local Project Officer support, responsive training and awareness raising sessions, small scale grant funding for partnership projects and opportunities to share stories and lessons learnt.

Our project began life in 2004 as Operation EDEN, a 3 year multi-faith, environmental transformation pilot project covering the area of the Diocese of Liverpool. EDEN* was initiated by the Bishop of Liverpool, the Rt. Reverend James Jones who recognised the potential in the common ground that all faith communities share in their beliefs that the earth and its inhabitants are sacred. Additionally, local people and agencies from all sectors seek to create safe, clean and greener sustainable communities in which people want to live, work and play.

The Bishop engaged with senior faith representatives from across Merseyside, including Monsignor John Devine, Churches Officer for the North West and M. Akbar Ali; Liverpool Islamic Institute Trust and others from a range of secular agencies to explore bringing this understanding into a practical project. All present recognised the potential of harnessing the support and resources of faith communities and other agencies to enable local people to work in partnership to rejuvenate their communities by transforming the environment.

From the outset it was envisaged that if EDEN worked well it would be recreated as a North West wide programme. All faith communities on Merseyside played a major part in EDEN's success from being Steering Group members to hosting training events and delivering projects. Projects delivered were diverse from food growing ones developed by the Muslim led Al-Ghazali

Centre, St Christopher's Church Norris Green & St Anne's RC Church with Asylum Link Merseyside to the Methodist Church in the City & Big Issue in the North renewable energy project which enabled Vendors, local Volunteers and Asylum Seekers to build and erect a wind turbine together.

Faiths4Change grew out of Operation EDEN in July 2007 developing relationships with and support from faith communities across the North West. On Merseyside support has continued for the inspirational Asylum Link Merseyside allotments project. This began back in 2005 when Operation EDEN awarded them a grant to turn the garden around the church into a food growing area for Asylum Seekers and Refugees. The Project was an enormous success, supplying fresh food for many and encouraging them to undertake two allotment plots.

Ewan Roberts, Centre Manager, explains *"The allotment project provides opportunities for Asylum Seekers and Refugees to get better acquainted with their surroundings: people are able to practice their English in the real world, make new friends and integrate, learn new skills or pass on their knowledge to the rest of us. One of the most surprising things at the allotment has been our warm welcome. When the rest of the country seems to be up in arms against Asylum Seekers we have found a small haven of relative calm. It seems to hinge on the context of their involvement with the allotment, in that they are seen first as gardeners and their immigration status is a secondary consideration as well as the relaxed and open attitudes of the other plot holders"*.

Asylum Seekers and Refugees continue to work on the allotment plots on a weekly basis and the food grown contributes to the lunches of many destitute people, served by volunteers at the Centre at St Anne's. We have recently been able to donate 3 bicycles, courtesy of Mersey Travel, to enable Volunteers to travel to and from the allotments easily.

The projects that Faiths4Change supports are grounded in principles of sustainability - environmental, economic, social and spiritual - our practices and the services we deliver also have this at their core. Therefore when we step away the Projects continue as appropriate, supported by local faith communities and a range of other partners from voluntary sector groups to local authorities and of course, local residents.

Psalm 95

Whatever befalls the earth befalls the children of the earth
 Every part of the earth is sacred
 The air is precious, for all of us share the same breath.
 Every part of the earth is sacred.
 This we know, the earth does not belong to us; we belong to the earth.
 Every part of the earth is sacred
 This we know, all things are connected; like the blood that unites one family.
 Every part of the earth is sacred.
 Our God is the same God, whose compassion is equal for all;
 Every part of the earth is sacred
 We did not weave the web of life; we are merely a strand on it.
 Every part of the earth is sacred.
 Whatever we do to the earth we do to ourselves.

Although only active for almost a year, the new Project Officer bases in Burnley, Preston and Manchester have offered a diverse range of projects, new partners and opportunities with which to engage.

Our Burnley Projects Officer Samia is currently working on an innovative programme with the Lancashire Council of Mosques and two local mosques. The programme, which is in its initial phase, will enable various scholars of different schools of Islamic thought to work in partnership to create a sacred scriptures recycling project. Various theological perspectives will be considered to find the right solution: for example could the scriptures be recycled via a paper mill or would composting with/without other organic waste offer a better solution? Potential objections to recycling via a paper mill could be based on whether the chemicals used to clean the paper contain animal by-products or not. Similarly, if composting would the recycled materials come into contact with particular food waste – especially meat. Other questions will no doubt arise and answers will have to be found so that any recycling scheme is acceptable to Muslims and also meet with current UK laws.

Haslam Park, Preston is the location for a Faith4Change supported project that enabled children from two schools to work with a Friends of the Park group & Preston United. The children from two schools, one a Roman Catholic and the other attracting mainly Asian Muslim pupils, in different parts of the city came together to create a sensory garden. A sensory garden is planted to stimulate all senses – sight, sound, touch, taste and smell – and is therefore accessible to all, including people who may have a sensory disability. For instance people who are



partially sighted or blind would be able to enjoy and identify plants such as lavender by their feel and smell, while those who are deaf and blind can appreciate mint through its taste and smell. The schools involved and others in the area around the Park, will continue to be involved in the maintenance with the Friends group.

The St John's Furniture Refurbishment Training project in Old Trafford, Manchester, supported by Karen our Projects Officer is offering local unemployed people a series of accredited sessions to learn new skills in repairing broken household furnishings.

Our project exists to support the energy and commitment of many in faith and local communities to take positive action to live more lightly on our planet. By supporting people to work in partnership to transform their environment, enabling them to make their ideas a reality, really does help to change lives, grow community and care for creation.

*EDEN In terms of our pilot project, is an abbreviation of 'Expanding the Diocesan Environmental representatives Network' – a network of volunteer representatives, called to action by the Bishop of Liverpool from across the Diocese, who pledged to encourage care for creation in their place of worship. The inspiration for both the volunteer representatives and the project itself comes from the Abrahamic faiths' teachings of the Garden of Eden, created by God as a wonderful place for Adam and Eve, the original humans, to live in on Earth in harmony with all other creatures and plants.

Please contact
 Marjorie Griffin for more
 information or details of
 your local Project Officer
 on 0151 705 2111 or email
marjorie@faiths4change.org.uk

The Faiths4change
 website is at
www.faits4change.org.uk



*The Lord is the strength of the weak
Eternal, unborn, undying is the Lord.
Revealed as true through the Guru's word.
When one is weakened with pangs of
hunger and poverty,
No money and none to give consolation
None to offer help and all work comes to nothing,
Remember the Supreme Lord and gain the
everlasting kingdom.*

Adi Granth

*Cited: ALL IN GOOD FAITH: A Resource Book For Multi-faith Prayer
Edited by @ Jean Potter & Marcus Braybrooke.
Published by: The World Congress of Faiths 1997*

Growing Together

Interfaith Harvest Festival or How many faiths does it take to make a harvest festival?

There have now been several interfaith celebrations for One World Week in Chelmsford, all of them held at the Quaker Meeting House which is used by a number of religious groups. The Celebrations grew out of the interfaith work of the Unitarian Fellowship, and following the formation of Mid Essex Inter Faith Forum three have been organised by members of the Forum.

The organising group, from five religious traditions, decided to interpret this year's theme 'Growing Together' as illustrating our common reliance on growing food, and the issues that face people round the world as they work to grow food and bring up their children. Anglican, Jewish, Muslim, and Quaker children, and representatives of the Bahai, Brahma Kumaris and Unitarian traditions brought contributions of fruit, flowers, vegetables, and other fruits of the earth to the central table, each adding a few words. There were references to special foods used in festivals, the importance of agriculture and of preparing food with love. Many references were made to the need to ensure that the bounty of the Earth continues. Another common theme was the fact that some groups of people struggle with drought, flooding and the lack of a reliable income, all of which threaten their security and their ability to nurture themselves and their families.

Despite being the start of half term we were delighted that so

many families made the effort to join in. The Chelmsford Youth choir under conductor Simon Warne sang two songs, *One World* and *Green Fields*, beautifully and with great confidence. Muslim children attending the South East Essex Cultural Centre and from other local families gave a very lively rendering of *Pizza in His Pocket*. This song, about a rather greedy little boy who eats his way round the world before meeting a hungry little girl and mending his ways, was illustrated by the children. Each child represented one of the countries in the song, wearing the appropriate dress and showing us the foods mentioned in the song. Together these songs illustrated vividly the themes of the Celebration – that we all share this world, that we need to care for the Earth if it is to continue to feed us, and that we need to avoid greed and ensure there is enough for all, wherever they are.

Our One World Week events always end with bring and share refreshments and time to meet and talk. This year people were invited to take away any of the harvest contributions, leaving a donation in exchange, and £176 was raised for the Little Havens Children's Hospice, caring for children from all religious traditions.

**we need to
care for the
Earth if it is
to continue
to feed us**

Convenor of Mid Essex Inter Faith Forum is Rev Ivor Moody, Anglican Chaplain of Anglia Ruskin University who can be contacted at ivor.moody@anglia.ac.uk



OF

dancing

LANGUAGE

The ideals of India, through the ages, have retained a remarkable continuity, clearly recognizing in every sphere of activity, the kinship of God and man. Dancing was considered the religious ceremony most pleasing to the Gods and dedication of all activity to the Divine was the highest form of worship.

The antiquity of Bharata Natyam goes to the Rig Vedic hymns and is also based on literary, sculptural, and historical evidences. The intimate association of dance with religion and as a form of worship in the temples is well established. The institution of the devadasis whose duty it was to dance in the temples, together with dance teachers called nattuwanars contributed to perpetuating and preserving the art through the centuries. Dance and music were highly appreciated and patronized in ancient days.

Bharata Natyam could perhaps be called a temple art not because it was necessarily a part of the temple but because its aim was the perfection of spiritual identification. The predominant idea of the temple was that it had to be a place of communication between man and God. With the temple, came the arts and sculpture, and God was worshipped in song and dance. Man's search for his soul continued through the arts. In every temple, a natya sabha or rangamandapa was made, where music and dance performances took place as religious rituals. Within these temple walls, to portray the images of God through the vast centuries of time, artists have created objects of worship in devotion. These artists have left us an art that depicts with joyful abandon and fervent devotion the highest aspirations of the human mind. Even to this day, in India, the basic fundamentals of temple and image making are still utilised. It was no wonder that the vitality of temple art preserved for us the ancient tradition of the civilization of India.

Thus we find that in ancient India, art and religion had no separate identity. Today, though art

has moved from the temple to the stage, the dedication is still the same. Even today we see performances that convey to us that Bharata Natyam is a divine art and is deeply rooted in spiritual philosophy. Being a composite art, it is the art of the stage, drama, music, poetry, colour, and rhythm. Its keynote is the dance which includes all these arts but its message is not merely to the senses, and through them to a purely external enjoyment, but is to the soul of the dancer and of the perceiver. It cannot be adequately danced by anyone without reverence for technique and for spiritual life.

The dancer represents the *jivātma*, the single soul in search of union with the *parmātma*, the eternal soul or the Siddh. It therefore carries a mental and spiritual education that serves the evolution of human consciousness. Consequently the dancer of Bharata Natyam, irrespective of his or her gender is always represented as the female principle; as the *bhakta nāyikā* (heroine devotee) in search of the male principle, the Supreme Lord – the *nāyaka*.



This form of dance is intended to portray all the characters of the Mahabharata, Ramayana, the Puranas, and so on; to give to the world a whole philosophy of life. India is rich in stories that actually express every kind of human experience. Therefore, in order to portray the emotions and actions of all these characters, one must not only understand Gods and Goddesses, but humanity as a whole. Gods and Goddesses are human, their actions are human, their thoughts are human, their emotions are human, but they are also superhuman – divine. They are divine because through human experience they can show the divinity of man and the way to transcend our limitations. Humanity must become divine, as divinity becomes human. While Krishna steals butter from the gopis like any other child, he at the same time gives us the beauty of the divine rasa leela and can charm us into the fantasies of the spiritual world. Bharata Natyam is meant to do the same thing, for through it, we transcend the limitations of the physical. The dancer is no longer conscious of the body and is transported into eternal bliss.

Skill and talent alone are not sufficient. Talent must be trained in order to achieve a higher degree of skill. It has been said that dance is a form of yoga. There is no doubt about this, for if one seeks to achieve perfection, many years of discipline and hard work are needed to train the body, the mind, and oneself. This needs true bhakti or devotion. We have no more temple dancing today, but we can bring the spirit of the temple to the stage. If we do this our whole attitude towards this art will change. It means that we shall not dance for audiences alone. Every performance will become a means of not only making the dancer one with the higher soul but of taking the audience to that level. This oneness is yoga.

As a result, one can see that dance is the motivating energy that inspires devotion, and at the same time it is the expressive force which is inspired by devotion.



every single creature

Having read Michele Klein's moving article 'Standing on their own feet' in issue 19 of this magazine – an article that gave focus to the healing power of love between boys and animals scarred by life - I feel inspired to write something of the on-going work of Quakers to bring about a sense of kinship with our fellow creatures, and raise a greater awareness of the importance of their welfare.

The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), founded by George Fox, is a Christian denomination that emerged in the seventeenth century in England: a movement without priests or liturgies, whose adherents set great importance by personal experience and the individual conscience. We are an inclusive people who seek "that of God in everyone" - symbolized in the concept of the 'Inner Light'.

Those who know Quakers are aware that we try to live by certain precepts we call testimonies, of which the best known is the Testimony to Peace.

"Quakers claim to be a people of the presence of Christ, a claim which implies a realised eschatology. This should be seen not only in church life but also in the quality of the lives we live in the world, both individually and as a people. It is from this understanding that our distinctive testimonies - peace, justice, integrity, equality, simplicity - come. They are not a random selection of ethical principles; all these testimonies demonstrate what life is like when God reigns."

Extract from The Nature and Mission of the Church
- response to a World Council of Churches
document, Section 2, The Purpose of the Church.



www.quaker-animals.org.uk

The testimonies themselves, according to Stephen Cox, of Purley and Sutton Area Meeting, "sprang up from those individuals who experienced the Inner Light within themselves" and "... this is the spiritual core from which action may spring".

The testimonies have always been understood to relate to our human neighbours and the testimony to peace means peace between people. Yet as long ago as 1902, Frederick B. Sainty, - founder of the Friends' Vegetarian Society said: "As a Society, we are opposed to war against man; and should not our testimony also be borne against the war that is constantly waged against animals?"

That war rages even more mercilessly today. The horrors of intensive farming and vivisection imply a sustained and constant attack on our defenceless fellow beings, a refusal to recognise their status as God's creatures: beings who, as vulnerable creatures, are due our protection. "Responsibility to protect" is a current discussion theme in the Quaker peace movement, but it is only, so far, extended to the human animal.

A Quaker peaceworker during the two world wars, Corder Catchpool, saw the logic and virtue of extending Quaker inclusivity to all beings: "...Albert Schweitzer sets the thought of Reverence for Life at the very centre of his philosophy. In doing so, he goes one step further than George Fox... and our central concept of the Inner Light, "that of God" in every man; for Life includes not man only, but all living creatures."

There is a place for living the testimonies of justice and integrity in our willingness to acknowledge the suffering of beings who have no power to complain; there is room for rejecting a divisive hierarchy of species and for recognising the equality of other animals' capacity for love, joy and pain and to act upon that understanding – indeed, to live it. John Bright, nineteenth century parliamentarian and political reformer, said: "There is nothing meaner than barbarous and cruel treatment of the dumb creatures who cannot answer us or resent the misery which is often needlessly inflicted on them."

Number 42 of the Quaker book Advices and Queries says:

"We do not own the world, and its riches are not ours to dispose of at will. Show a loving consideration for all creatures and seek to maintain the beauty and variety of the world. Work to ensure that our increasing power over nature is used responsibly, with reverence for life. Rejoice in the splendour of God's continuing creation."

is full of God

This is excellent advice, but showing “a loving consideration for all creatures” surely implies recognition of their God-given capacity to experience suffering, stress, deprivation and other degrees of anguish inflicted by the human animal, and a serious intention to work towards alleviating that pain. To quote from a concern written for a New Zealand Quaker Area Meeting, we would like to see a general acceptance among Friends that “our every dealing with another animal is considered an act of moral significance”.

In Quaker Faith & Practice, Chris Lawson wrote in 1987: “Finding ways of expressing the testimonies that are relevant to present times is a continuing challenge. Such expressions will not necessarily seem practical, tactful, sensible, expedient or in line with some current vogue of thinking, for they are based on what seems right in an absolute sense of inner conviction.”

As would be expected of a people whose sense of morality resides in our own experience, in all cases where Friends take a position on a subject, it is essentially a matter for the individual conscience. Fortunately, perhaps as a response to the Inner Light we seek, that conscience has been pricked over the years.

On May 22nd 1891, the Friends’ Anti-Vivisection Association was founded, with Joseph Stores Fry as its first President and among its members, the Quaker Member of Parliament, Joshua Rowntree. There is some justification in thinking that this body was the first animal welfare group linked to a Christian denomination, though the Irish Unitarian suffragist, Frances Power Cobbe, had founded the Society for the Protection of Animals Liable to Vivisection (SPALV) in 1875, the world’s first organisation campaigning against animal experiments.

Our Quaker group, widening its interests to encompass all aspects of animal exploitation, was renamed Quaker Concern for Animals (QCA) in 1978. The group disburses funds to national and international animal protection organisations, tries to quicken the Quaker conscience to animal issues, liaises with other animal welfare groups and lobbies ministers and responsible authorities both in Britain and overseas. In regular contact with other religious and spiritual groups, we pursue a committed interfaith policy. Quaker Concern for Animals has a Jain patron, Nitin Mehta, founder of The Young Indian Vegetarians, and the committee includes two Buddhists. Our committee member Feargus O’Connor, Unitarian minister of Golders Green Unitarians and secretary of the World Congress of Faiths, every



September holds an Interfaith Celebration of the Animals. As well as representatives speaking for all the main faiths, speakers from such organisations as the RSPCA, League Against Cruel Sports, IFAW and International Primate League endorse the event. QCA strongly supports the Celebration, considering it vital to speak with a united voice in defence of our sentient brothers and sisters.

Gracia Fay Ellwood, a Friend from a California Quaker Meeting, makes the point that the major model of Quaker campaigners for the protection of other animals has been the movement in the Society of Friends to abolish the institution of human slavery, a process which took almost two centuries of work, with considerable intra-Society conflict. But piecemeal, and by means of the Quaker process, Friends moved from widespread acceptance of slavery to a stand against the “peculiar institution” of treating persons as commodities. To question seriously our view of other creatures as being purely and simply at our disposition, put here to exploit as we like, is a worthy and radical campaign to which an increasing number of Friends is committed.

Let us take inspiration from Meister Eckhart, the Dominican thirteenth century mystic:

*“Apprehend God in all things,
For God is in all things.
Every single creature is full of God
And is a book about God.
Every creature is a word of God.
If I spent enough time with the tiniest
creature
Even a caterpillar -
I would never have to prepare a sermon.
So full of God
Is every creature.”*

Perhaps a vision of “what life is like when God reigns”.

*our every dealing
with another
animal is
considered an act
of moral
significance*



Anyone who visits the magical valley of Kathmandu will find themselves drawn towards the mysterious stare of the Buddha Eyes. Their gaze stretches into the distance in each of the four directions from the top of mound-like memorial structures known as stupas. But what might these features signify and what is their connection to a religion that is famous for its attitude of peacefulness and its practice of compassion?

at the
heart of
wisdom

The style of each feature is deeply symbolic: the snail-like nose is the Nepali character for the number one. It stands for the underlying unity that is hidden within diversity. What looks like a drip on the forehead represents a third eye: it expresses the power of omniscience that the Buddha attained; the ability to see beyond the superficial and look into the true nature of everything and everyone, no matter which way he turned. This is why Buddha Eyes are also known as Wisdom Eyes. The entire image is a symbol of the Buddha's Wisdom, shining out like the sun in every direction, from the pinnacle of his attainment.

Yet these explanations may only compound the mystery for us. What is this wisdom and why is it regarded so highly within the teachings of the Buddha? Surely the world needs more compassionate action, not more time spent contemplating wisdom. If the Buddha recognized that there is unnecessary suffering in the world then why was his response to insist that his followers study teachings about wisdom, and spend time contemplating its deepest meaning before engaging in action in the world?

In the lojong teachings, one of the most widely studied of all the Tibetan texts and commentaries, there are three clues to this puzzle. Right at the beginning of fifty-nine slogans designed to serve as a guide for practising compassion in everyday life, there are just three that specifically instruct the student on how to contemplate the wisdom of the Buddha. Before we start trying to help others we are advised to realize something important about ourselves, otherwise what we attempt to do could end up wasting the precious opportunity of this life.

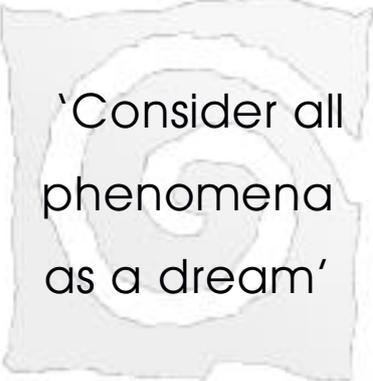
The term lojong itself, sometimes translated simply as 'Training the Mind', also carries with it a hint of their significance, by describing what is expected from the trainee. It points to the profound transformation of our ordinary deluded states of mind, where we think only of ourselves, to a more enlightened perspective where we think principally of others. What are these three then, that can serve to bring about a transformation of our basic attitude so that we can truly focus our attention on bringing benefit to others?

The first slogan that refers to wisdom has been translated 'Consider all phenomena as a dream'. Instead of seeing things around us as solid, permanently existing, separate items, we need to recognize everything in our environment as being part of an interconnected process of changing appearances. Through causes and conditions things are brought into appearance temporarily and then they are gone. It is the same process that we observe in our dreams. It might take a little longer for some things to turn back into the dust from which they were made but they still follow the same process as any dream object does. When we truly examine external phenomena we can find nothing that remains unchanging in existence forever.

The next slogan then reads: 'Analyse the unborn nature of awareness'. Here the practitioner is asked to investigate what it is that perceives. Is one's mind also a temporary manifestation? Are the internal appearances, the thoughts and emotions, which flutter by like butterflies and then are gone, any less subject to this continual process of change than the external appearances? They are dreamlike too. Yet awareness remains. In meditation one learns that there is a state beyond thought and beyond feelings; there is the calm abiding of pure awareness. It is this that we must experience for ourselves before we can accept the possibility as truth. Until then we must rely on our faith to guide us.

The third slogan follows this by saying: 'The antidote will vanish of itself'. At first we may try to make concepts out of that which is beyond concept. We may reach the conclusion that what really exists is something called Mind, or even something called Emptiness. On the other hand we may decide that it is all an illusion and that nothing has any meaning. Either way we will have missed the point. We need to simply rest from our attempts to conceptualize. For only when the analytical mind rests in the absolute nature of pure, unborn awareness can we be free from those illusory concepts of 'I' and 'Others'. Only when we are free from any such concepts are we able to begin to turn away from our own self-centredness and see that work with others is the only way we can free ourselves from the ego's vice-like grip. It is wanting to 'be someone' that prevents us from being truly there for others.

This is the wisdom at the heart of the Buddhist tradition, just as a similar process is at the heart of other religious traditions. It is only through direct contact with the absolute nature of reality that a believer can let go of their own self-importance and grow in confidence within their own faith so that they can genuinely work for the benefit of others.



'Consider all
phenomena
as a dream'

CHALLENGING androcentrism

When the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, the preamble recognised the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family as the foundation of freedom, justice, and peace in the world. Article 2.1 says: 'Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.' However, in June 1993 - 45 years after the Universal Declaration of Human Rights - the World Conference on Human Rights still needed to urge governments, institutions, intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations to intensify their efforts for the protection and promotion of the human rights of women and the girl-child. It took 45 years before the United Nations declared: 'The human rights of women and the girl-child are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights.'ⁱ

The third international meeting of the World March of Women in Montréal, Canada, was devoted to an analysis of the current situation of women around the world. Here delegates from Pakistan and the United States and a representative of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom were asked to give their opinion of the impact of the September 11 attacks and their aftermath. The World March of Women Newsletter reports: 'They all expressed concern about escalating violence, the erosion of human rights and women's rights, constantly raising religious fundamentalism and the daily tragedies of Afghan women and other victims of armed conflict. Each speaker spoke of the urgent need to join forces so that women's voices are heard on the subject of building and preserving peace'.

'The right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion' is one of the fundamental Human Rights. It includes 'freedom to change his religion and the freedom to manifest his religion, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, worship, and observance.'ⁱⁱ Recognition of the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion as a fundamental human right implies that every man and woman has a responsibility to every person and to every community, religion and nation to respect this right in all others. Nobody has the right of imposing his/her beliefs on others, nor to force others to his/her beliefs. However, the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion is frequently abused and religiously motivated by patriarchal religious men to dominate women and girls and to deprive women of their human rights.

Although the three monotheistic religions Judaism, Christianity and Islam stress the importance of justice and truth, as well as love and respect for one's neighbour it is important to realise that they have traditionally been dominated by patriarchal leaders,

whose religious views reflect male-centred or androcentric perceptions of reality. The views and the spirituality in these religions are based on the experiences, problems, questions, feelings, insights, and interests of men and on men's desires, fears, dreams, and fantasies. In the age-old practice of male domination in these world religions, men with such androcentric, patriarchal views consider themselves as superior to women. They claim exclusive authority to determine how God must be viewed; what is human, male, and female, and to identify God's allocation of roles and responsibilities among men and women. Accordingly, women's experiences and views on religion and spirituality are ignored and excluded from the discourse in androcentric religious and academic circuits.

Liberating women - and men - from mainstream androcentric, patriarchal spirituality in male-dominated religions requires a greater understanding of its impact on women, children, and men, and a willingness to transform mainstream spirituality into a stimulating and creative force conducive to equality between women and men.

In the 1980s - when teaching courses Reading the Bible through Women's Eyes - women started telling me their stories about rape and incest. At first, I wondered about the subjects' correlation with the contents of my lectures and courses, and the women's reasons for sharing these experiences with me. Later on, I began to understand the connection between my approach to theological themes and these stories of sexually abused women. As a feminist theologian, I stimulated women to view reality and to interpret biblical texts from our own perspective and with our insights, based on our questions, experiences, feelings, interests, and desires. For the first time these women learned to interpret their experiences with sexual violence from their own perspective. They started to realize they had not brought the assault on themselves through tempting female behaviour - as the androcentric view alleges - but that they had been confronted with sexual violence because of male aggression toward women and children. Becoming aware of this fact changed the attitude of these survivors toward their experience with sexual violence: their silence, out of a sense of guilt imposed by others, made way for expression of the sense that they had been wronged. Hearing these women's stories increased my awareness of the negative and harmful spiritual contents for women of mainstream androcentric spirituality, theology and religion.

While sharing these stories with people from different religious and cultural traditions, women and men from all over the world started telling me stories about their own religious and cultural backgrounds. Exchanging our stories based on experiences from our different backgrounds has allowed us to identify basic themes in our assorted traditions. We recognised the oppression and neglect of women and our insights, feelings, and talents. Women

and some men acknowledged the destructiveness of androcentric patriarchal thought processes and spirituality in their religions. They illustrated their views with stories and books they recommended or sent to me. This exchange convinced me that in all male-dominated religions, men use religion to affirm their power and control over women. The effect of this male religious and spiritual abuse of power over women is the neglect and mutilation of women's and children's minds, spirits and talents.

The stories women and men have told me also contained inspiring elements, which taught me that every tradition has tales about wise, strong, and creative women. These stories also convinced me that much of this material, knowledge and insight has been covered up in the mainstream discourse and in the media. Underneath or beyond the dominant androcentric patriarchal view of spirituality lies the hidden spirituality of women and other outsiders. We can rediscover our underground spiritual heritage. We can share these gifts from our different traditions with others to stimulate each other in spiritual growth. Conversations with women have revealed that women know what is right and wrong about our religious and cultural traditions. We know that our traditions need to change to stop the world-wide phenomenon of mental, physical and sexual violence against women and children. We also have ideas, imaginations and knowledge regarding the transformations that are necessary for creating a world in which women are respected. And will acquire opportunities for using our talents to create a good life for all human beings.

It is clear that the world-wide religiously motivated injustice and violence against women and girls will not stop so long as religious people ignore the aspects and texts in their religion that are oppressive for women and girls. Neither will this violence be stopped merely by quoting religious texts that respect women and girls, and their human rights. Instead, if we really want to create cultures of peace, justice and healing, we need to become aware of aspects, structures and texts in religious and spiritual traditions that may lead to religiously-motivated injustice and violence against women and girls.

A few days ago, on October 27, it was reported in the media that Aisha Ibrahim Duhulow a 13-year old Somali girl, who told her father that she had been raped by three men, was accused of adultery and stoned to death by dozens of men in a stadium packed with 1.000 spectators: they said that they were carrying

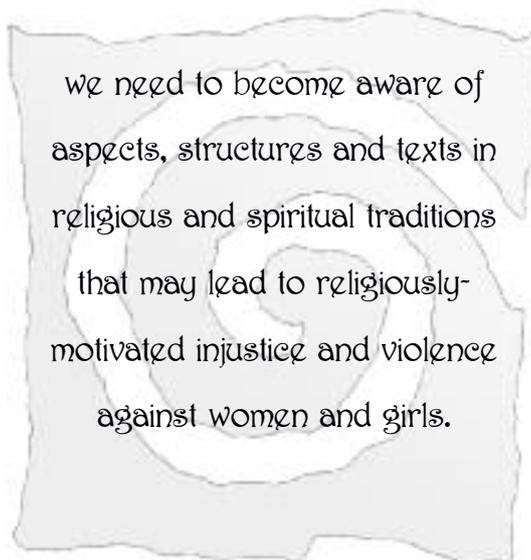
out this punishment "in the name of Allah"! The brutal killing of this 13-year old girl expresses the importance of addressing and stopping religious motivated violence against women and girls in our own religious and cultural community. We need to transform our religions into instruments of peace, justice and healing and to hear the voices of women speaking of their experience and their spirituality.

Last September, I had the opportunity to participate on behalf of United Religions Initiative Europe in a United Nations conference to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. While preparing my participation in the conference, I read in a Dutch newspaper that UN peacekeepers sexually abuse children. I was shocked and decided to address these crimes against children during the conference,

which I did at a plenary session. The next day a male participant expressed his frustration about the worldwide violence against children and about the fact that no action was taken at this conference to help stop this violence. That afternoon I participated in a workshop about UN resolutions 1325iii and 1820iv. Resolution 1820 demands: 'immediate and complete cessation by all parties to armed conflict of all acts of sexual violence against civilians'. The Security Council expresses in this resolution its deep concern that, despite repeated condemnation, violence and sexual abuse of women and children trapped

in war zones is not only continuing, but, in some cases, has become so widespread and systematic as to 'reach appalling levels of brutality'.

Near the end of this workshop an ambassador recommended to write an Open Letter to the UN Secretary General. We drafted the letter 'Making Senior UN Leadership accountable for sexual abuse/exploitation by UN personnel in Peace Operations.' Marie-Liesse Mandula, Secretary General of the World Movement of Mothers took care that the UN Secretary General received these letters. Two days ago I received an e-mail from Marie-Liesse Mandula. She wrote that as of that date copies of the letter have been signed by 180 international non-governmental organisations and 84 public figures, including academics, writers, government officials, peace advocates, human rights activists, and former UN officials and forwarded to the UN Secretary General. If you would like to support this letter, please send an e-mail to my address womcounc@xs4all.nl



we need to become aware of aspects, structures and texts in religious and spiritual traditions that may lead to religiously-motivated injustice and violence against women and girls.

Annie Imbens-Fransen is Co-ordinator United Religions Initiative Council for Women and a Member URI Europe Executive Committee.

i The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, adopted at Vienna, June 1993. Part I, paragraph 18. ii The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 18.

iii Adopted October 31, 2000. This resolution reaffirmed "the need to implement fully international humanitarian and human rights law that protects the rights of women and girls during and after conflicts". iv Unanimously adopted June 2008 by the UN Security Council.

Children and the Sanctity of Life

“Be a community that calls for what is good, urges what is right, and forbids what is wrong.”

There have been a number of incidents in Britain where unwanted and unloved young children have been viciously murdered by their parents, or by the very people who were entrusted to care for them. Not so long ago the appalling case of Rosemary and Fred West – who systematically raped their own daughters and tortured and murdered at least 10 other young people – captured the attention of the world media. Having had an Islamic upbringing (in a third world country) where the relationship between parents and children is sacred and something to cherish, the story of the West family was a terrible eye-opener for me. I grew up with the understanding that girls and women belong to the class of mothers, and we must therefore show respect for the womb that carries us, and be protective towards ‘daughters’ in our society.

And now some years on, Britain is again rocked by a similar case of a father systematically raping his two daughters from the age of seven years - with the terrible consequences of having fathered their several children - while their mother was aware of what was taking place in their own home. Is it possible that depravity of parents can sink so low! As I write the news of the heart-breaking story of the brutal murder of ‘Baby P’ from Haringey in North London dominates our headlines. His mother and two other adults living in his home have been convicted for ‘causing or allowing his death’. This tragic case is being aggressively discussed in Parliament, Local Government and the Media as yet another story of two vulnerable siblings from Cheetham Hill in Manchester, also brutally murdered, unfolds.

Although every society has its fair share of social and moral failings such pro-longed systematic brutality cannot fail to shock us to the core. Fortunately, in this country, the accountability apparatus is brought to bear not only upon the perpetrators of the crime, but also every element of Social Services that has demonstrated incompetence - and individuals higher up the ladder of authority – and hopefully lessons will be learned. This may offer us a crumb of comfort, but we should remember that other societies are not so privileged. Societies where the accountability apparatus is virtually non-existent, and where bruised by poverty or famine the battle for survival is fought and lost everyday; where there is no social benefit system or National Health System to care for even the basics; where there are no counselling or stress management and personal development classes to escape to; and where, ravaged by war and collateral damage, innocent lives are broken, beaten and traumatised.

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My own experience has shown that strong family relations, rooted in mutual care and trust, are the most important basis to a healthy society and I find it disturbing, therefore, that the culture of single young girls having unwanted pregnancies is growing in this country at an alarming rate. If a child comes into the world as a result of a ‘one-night stand’ or because their biological parents were simply ‘messing about’, what will the future be like for this child? What kind of parenting will they receive? And above all will they be wanted? How many of these unwanted pregnancies, I wonder, result in another child being added to the ‘at risk’ register held by Local Authorities.

Nowadays, many women seek termination of their unwanted pregnancy. Increasingly it seems that their thinking behind this decision is based on the fact that it is their life, their body and therefore their choice to do what they like. They fail to acknowledge the existence of another body/another life and its right to be carried to full term. The dependant life was entrusted to the protection of the mother by God, yet in Britain alone, each year thousands and thousands of unborn children are slaughtered through abortion.

Abortion by human intervention is forbidden in Islam and especially if it takes place after the end of the fourth month of conception, because by that

time the ‘ruh’ or soul is firmly stationed in the unborn child when Allah breathes of His Spirit in the embryo. Abortion however is allowed when it is medically established that a mother’s life may be at risk if the pregnancy were to continue. Then saving the life of the mother will take precedence over the life of an unborn foetus that has not yet acquired a personality, though such loss is regrettable.

That life is sacrosanct in Islam is well encapsulated in the following verse from *The Noble Qur’an*:

“He [Allah/God] originated the creation of the human being out of clay...then He proportioned him and breathed His Spirit into him. He gave you hearing, sight and minds...” (32:7-9)

‘Human bodies are alive because the divine spirit animates them’. ‘The spirit belongs to God, just as light and life belong to God’.¹ When Allah gives us our precious life and His spirit animates our body, what a stupendous responsibility we have to protect and honour our own life and that of others; to honour the body that is entrusted by the Divine Spirit; to honour the life that is contained in the body; and even when the soul is no more, to honour the corpse that once was inhabited by the Divine Spirit.



God is there

The Hindu festival of Diwali has just finished, I can still smell the wonderful sweets and spices and remember the glorious fireworks but now it is time to look forward to Christmas and all the joys that brings. Is that a contradiction for a Hindu? No, not at all. Hinduism is one of the few faiths that encourages unity between all religions. As a young Hindu child growing up in London I experienced this early in life but true acknowledgment and understanding came later in life.

I was born and raised in London. My parents were very early migrants arriving in the late 1950's when prejudice was still quite apparent and Race Relations had not yet been born. My parents actually met and got married in London. They were both Hindu, born and raised in Durban, South Africa - third generation South Africans but originally our ancestors were migrants from South India.

When my brother and I came along my parents set about raising us as Hindus. At the time this was not as easy as it is today. There was no temple nearby and not much literature and the curriculum for Religious Education at schools had not yet expanded beyond Christianity. We went to a school where there were very few Asian children and both of us struggled with peer pressure and a longing to belong. Morning assemblies and other school functions and holidays all centred on the Christian faith. We learnt about Noah and Moses, Easter, Harvest Festival and the Nativity but not Diwali.

My parents in recognition of Hindu teachings of the unity of all religions embraced all the religious festivals and holidays of their adopted country and set about ensuring that my brother and I never felt left out. At Christmas we would have a splendid tree with all the lights, ornaments and tinsel, we would have presents and we would have a sumptuous turkey dinner with all the trimmings. At Easter my father would buy us each an Easter Egg. Then when it came time for Diwali we would have a wonderful week of cooking, feasting, fireworks

and family. We would be dressed in new clothes and say our prayers for another year just as good as the last. What could be better we had the best of both worlds.

As a young adult I started to become more curious about the Hindu religion and all that it encompasses. I wanted to know why Ganesha had an elephant head, what exactly the *festival of lights* was all about and why we wore a dot on our foreheads. I started to read all the stories in the Ramayana and the Bhagavad Gita. In hindsight these would have made great bedtime stories but once hooked I sought out more books and literature and discovered more about the religion itself.

I feel the warmth of Hinduism engulf me as it welcomes all mankind

It actually was not as complicated as it appeared: as Hindus believe in reincarnation, God could manifest himself in many different forms and each of these forms became a deity which was worshipped. But in reality there was and still is only one God, even though there might be over 300 deities.

At first I was a little angry that I had not been taught this earlier and that I had been forced to learn so much about Christianity. But then it slowly dawned on me, that anger was futile as I had not lost anything. I now knew a lot about two religions and because of the unity inherent in Hinduism I could still continue to take the best of both of them.

Mahatma Gandhi said "I consider myself a Hindu, Christian, Muslim, Jew, Buddhist and Confucian". He was a fierce advocate for Hindu/Muslim unity and much of his writings post Indian Independence focus on this topic.

My conclusion is that it does not matter if you call him Allah, Jesus, Guru Nanak, Krishna or Ganesha, God is there. He is around us always. I take pride in the diversity of Hinduism and in the knowledge that in its purest form the religion does not claim to be superior to other religions. I feel the warmth of Hinduism engulf me as it welcomes all mankind. I am at peace because I am a Hindu looking forward to Christmas.

exploring Life

When I was a child in the town of Milford Haven in the south-west corner of Wales my family did not go to Church; we were non-conformists among whom it was usual to refer to their place of worship as Chapel. In the town there were five big chapels but only two churches, St. Catherine's Church of Wales in a prominent position and a Roman Catholic Church in a back street. My sister and I went with our mother to Tabernacle Congregational Chapel and on special occasions such as Sunday School Anniversary, to North Road Baptist Chapel with our father. We actually lived next door to the vicarage of St. Catherine's Church and I was a bridesmaid there at two weddings but we never went there on Sundays. The Church of Wales, which is disestablished did not have quite the standing in the community that the Anglican Church had, and perhaps still has, in England.

As far as I remember relations between chapels and the churches were friendly with Bazaars and Sales of Work well attended by local people. The Vicar, a Canon of St. David's Cathedral, was a jolly man who used to drop in on my first school, which was run by two sisters in the parish hall, and make us laugh at silly jokes. He also visited my grandfather with whom we lived and prayed with him in his bedroom in his last months of illness. It was a great source of pride to everyone that in medieval times two pilgrimages to St. David's Cathedral were regarded as equal to one to Rome! In general chapel-going and church-going were a strong, vigorous part of town life in my childhood before the Second World War.

My mother would go to chapel on both Sunday morning and evening but my sister and I were only expected to go with her in the morning. She kept a packet of sweets in her glove to be handed to us one by one during the sermon. The sermon of course was the important part of the service. The Minister was expected to preach and pray without notes in the belief that the Holy Spirit would guide him to speak the Word of God, and bring the congregation to an understanding of scripture and of righteous living. Welsh people expected a sermon to be hard-hitting and concerned with individual salvation, but in practice sermons tended to be rather incoherent and contain little consistent teaching –

with the minister lacking the ability to know when to stop. The Congregation left the leading of worship to the minister but women and men members in the monthly meeting organised other aspects of chapel activities. The Congregational Union was non-hierarchical; it ordained its first woman minister in 1912. Members were not expected to subscribe to any formal creed, justifying their description as non-conformists and free-thinkers. The only

time we heard of other faiths was from visiting missionaries on leave from India or the South Seas; I was impressed by a call for the training of women doctors to serve the needs of women who refused to be treated by male doctors.

Hymn-singing, the desire to sing with feeling about one's faith, is a legacy from my Welsh upbringing. Welsh people are not afraid to sing, especially the men. To hear a male-voice choir sing Cwm Rhondda, "Guide me O Thou Great Jehovah", can stir my heart and raise my religious temperature more than any other single item. Sadly I can only sing it in English as my part of Wales was non-Welsh speaking for historical reasons – it was colonised by the Normans as part of their campaign to conquer Ireland. Welsh was not spoken in the streets of the town, Milford Haven, but I often heard it spoken at home when my grandmother's relations from Gwaelod y Garth, near Cardiff, came to stay. The adults seemed to keep it to themselves as a language the children could not understand – something I really regret now as I have two grandchildren brought up in North Wales who are Welsh speaking.

My mother... kept a packet of sweets in her glove to be handed to us one by one during the sermon



through Faith

Boarding school introduced me to Cranmer's Prayer Book and Anglican worship, but I always felt slightly apart from it. School eventually led me to Oxford University where childhood training prompted me to look for a Sunday morning service that was more to my liking. Through a friend I found the chapel at Mansfield College, not a college of the University, but a theological college for the training of Congregational ministers. I immediately felt at home there. This was the type of worship I was used to, but a richer, more coherent, more intellectual style. Things I half knew took on real meaning and I became a church member and later president of the Oxford University Congregational Society. John, whom I married three years later, had taken much the same course and when we came to London we joined Palmers Green Congregational Church (not Chapel). I am still a member there though it is now Palmers Green United Reformed Church. My three children and the members of the PGURC have supported me in the thirty years since the death of my husband. My eightieth birthday party was celebrated by bringing both 'families' together at a Sunday lunch party, my children and grandchildren undertaking the hospitality with willing zest.

The connection with worship at Tabernacle, Milford Haven, is still there: the sermon is important but much better prepared and based on biblical study; many members take part in the preparation and leading of worship. We talk and laugh together but always with a serious purpose, issues concerned with injustice and world poverty are high on our agenda and a willingness to look for dialogue and joint activity with other faiths. We are much more conscious of the instability of our world than when I was a child and I have responded to that.

I am very certain that my Christian faith has led me to explore life and to question everything including that faith and its teachings. I consider that the Bible needs to be reinterpreted for each generation in the light of research on the text itself, and on the understanding of the world gained from new knowledge. The Bible gives us real insights into the human condition and the Church needs to hold on to those insights while being wide open to other ways of thinking and other forms of belief.

Things I half knew took on real meaning

I remain in the faith in which I was brought up, keeping what I see as its basic elements of love, acceptance and forgiveness from the teaching of Jesus, but discarding dogmatism and triumphalism. During their childhood my three children came to church with my husband and me, and to Sunday School but none of them now have any association with a church, except that they will occasionally accompany me when they are home. They say they respect what Christians believe but cannot understand that belief, finding no need to worship in a church. Oddly enough, I find this position perfectly understandable and respect it. They are all loving people with honest relationships and worthwhile work. My debt to them and to my grandchildren for the love and support they give me is immense. I pray for them every night and hope that God has them in his love and care. Surely there is a place for honest disbelief in the Kingdom of God.



LOOKING OUT FOR THE ONE EYED TURTLE

When I was asked to schlep over to Ealing to support an activity for young girls early in my Buddhist practise, I didn't expect it to involve Blue Peter style collage. The Buddhist thing about it was the subject of the collage. The One Eyed Turtle lives at the bottom of the sea, dreaming of a perfectly fitting piece of sandalwood to float on for a while. Problem is, he only surfaces once every thousand years, and the chances of him finding just the right size piece of sandalwood in his brief time up there are remote. The story is told to illustrate how rare it is to encounter the dharma, or Buddhist teaching. Apart from that, the little gathering was typical of ten year olds: the giggle factor was pretty high.

I was relieved. Though I believed, and still do, that children have a right to education, and their seniors to meet that right, I am diffident about how it is applied to faith. There is but a sliver of difference between instruction and indoctrination, unless the greatest care is taken.

At the end of the afternoon, some of the girls chose to join us in evening prayers. Others did not. The huge one-eyed turtle they had made bobbed blissfully across his sugar paper on a perfect fit of sandalwood log, looking like a job well done.

Later I reflected how successfully the activity illustrated some fundamental tenets of Buddhism. One was the concept of respect. No-one was coerced into doing anything, and that included the recitation of the sutra. At the same time, they were working away on a project based on a Buddhist tale, so the transference of teachings was taking place. The girls had also made or renewed friendships: should the need arise, they would know they had their own faith peer-group to fall back on.

Years later, when I was expecting my own child, I had to consider the matter again. Finney's father was from a different religious tradition. The potential lines of disagreement were obvious.

I hoped that, during his childhood, I would be able to supply my son with the tools he needed to make informed choices about his future. These included, with equal importance, a good all round education and opportunities to explore his own spirituality. I would neither force him to chant with me, nor would I prevent it. I hoped his father would make similar decisions when introducing Finney into his faith. Between us, I hoped we'd manage to nurture the spirituality of the man our boy would become, without foisting our own beliefs on him as a child.

In the event, the chances didn't arise. Finney was stillborn and a Buddhist funeral was arranged. As Finney never had the chance to make his own choice of belief system, it was down to his parents to choose his form of farewell. His father was not, at that time, an active practitioner of his own religion,

and understood that the funeral now signified the one act of motherhood open to me. I wanted the daimoku of the Lotus Sutra to help my love speed Finney on to his next place of being.

These choices brought me up sharply against my non-prescriptive view on how to nurture a child's faith. I wanted this, I wanted that. Clearly, I wanted Finney to be embraced by my own faith community. Had he lived, clearly [suddenly], I would have wanted him to understand not only the basics of Buddhism but why this was the way of life that I had chosen. Why, for me, Buddhism provides the finest blueprint for walking courageously, wisely and compassionately over the earth.

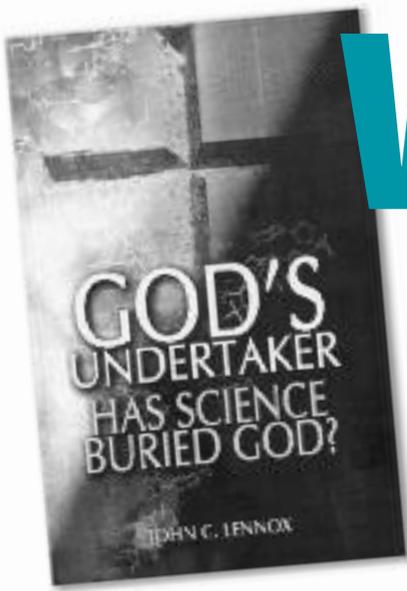
In short, I would have wanted him to understand my faith as well as the faith itself. I would also have wanted him to understand those family members whose paths were different. Not to mention the great mass of his fellow human beings who also had the right to have their beliefs respected. I have to hope also, that I would have understood if he had chosen to sound a different prayer bell.

Very probably the effort of exemplifying that kind of respect to Finney would have been even more challenging than I find teaching it to myself. If he had turned out like the rest of the family, though, there would have been some laughs in the attempt.

Now, as a sometime teacher of university students, I am conscious of similar issues. I don't always know what faith my students have, or whether they have any at all. Plus, I'm sensible that for some, all religions are scary, tinged with present violence and ancient war. Those people too are worthy of respect. So whenever I start teaching a new Creative Writing Group, I ask members to be aware that their peers might have strong religious views, and to respect these, by indicating when/if their own work contains passages that might be offensive. This does not mean they have to censor their work, far from it. Simply, it reminds them of a critical part of the job: awareness of the reader. And it gives their colleagues the chance to explain that their own criticisms are based on a strong belief system, as well as literary taste.

Each new cohort of students presents an opportunity to re-evaluate my own position: to return, in fact, to that afternoon with those little West London lasses. I believe, more firmly than ever, that if we adults want to nurture faith in our young people, we must first nurture their belief in their own highest potential as human beings. In so doing we have the chance to reveal that same potential in ourselves. Nurturing faith is not a job we finish, after all, it's an ongoing adventure. We are all one-eyed turtles one way or another, it's crucial that the sandalwood floats and fits.

There is but a
sliver of
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between
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indoctrination



War of the worldviews

Extract from *God's Undertaker: Has Science Buried God?*
by John Lennox Pub:Lion Hudson plc 2007

"A brilliantly argued re-evaluation of the relation of science and religion, casting welcome new light on today's major debates...."

Alistair McGrath, Professor of Historical Theology, University of Oxford

'Science and religion cannot be reconciled.' Peter Atkins

'All my studies in science... have confirmed my faith.' Sir Ghillelan Prance FRS

'Next time that somebody tells you that something is true, why not say to them: "What kind of evidence is there for that?" And if they can't give you a good answer, I hope you'll think very carefully before you

believe a word they say.' Richard Dawkins FRS

The last nail in God's coffin?

It is a widespread popular impression that each new scientific advance is another nail in God's coffin. It is an impression fuelled by influential scientific thinkers. Oxford Chemistry Professor Peter Atkins writes:

'Humanity should accept that science has eliminated the justification for believing in cosmic purpose, and that any survival of purpose is inspired only by sentiment.'¹ Now, how science, which is traditionally thought not even to deal with questions of (cosmic) purpose, could actually do any such thing is not very clear... What is very clear is that Atkins reduces faith in God at a stroke, not simply to sentiment but to sentiment that is inimical to science. Atkins does not stand alone. Not to be outdone, Richard Dawkins goes a step further. He regards faith in God as an evil to be eliminated: 'It is fashionable to wax apocalyptic about the threat to humanity posed by the AIDS virus, "mad cow" disease and many others, but I think that a case can be made that faith is one of the world's great evils, comparable to the smallpox virus but harder to eradicate. Faith, being belief that isn't based on evidence, is the principal vice of any religion.'²

More recently, faith, in Dawkins' opinion, has graduated (if that is the right term) from being a vice to being a delusion. In his book *The God Delusion*³ he quotes Robert Pirsig, author of *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*: 'When one person suffers from a delusion, it is called insanity. When many people suffer from a delusion, it is called Religion.'

For Dawkins, God is not only a delusion, but a pernicious delusion. Such views are at one extreme end of a wide spectrum of positions and it would be a mistake to think that they were typical. Many atheists are far from happy with the militancy, not to mention the repressive, even totalitarian overtones of such views. However, as always, it is the extreme views that receive public attention and media exposure with the result that many people are aware of those views and have been affected by them. It would,

therefore, be folly to ignore them. We must take them seriously.

From what he says it is clear that one of the things that has generated Dawkins' hostility to faith in God is the impression he has (sadly) gained that, whereas 'scientific belief is based upon publicly checkable evidence, religious faith not only lacks evidence; its independence from evidence is its joy, shouted from the rooftops'.⁴

In other words, he takes all religious faith to be blind faith. Well, if that is what it is, perhaps it does deserve to be classified with smallpox. However, taking Dawkins' own advice we ask: Where is the evidence that religious faith is not based on evidence? Now, admittedly, there unfortunately are people professing faith in God who take an overtly anti-scientific and obscurantist viewpoint. Their attitude brings faith in God into disrepute and is to be deplored. Perhaps Richard Dawkins has had the misfortune to meet disproportionately many of them.

But that does not alter the fact that mainstream Christianity will insist that faith and evidence are inseparable. Indeed, faith is a response to evidence, not a rejoicing in the absence of evidence. The Christian apostle John writes in his biography of Jesus: 'These things are written that you might believe...'⁵ That is, he understands that what he is writing is to be regarded as part of the evidence on which faith is based. The apostle Paul says what many pioneers of modern science believed, namely, that nature itself is part of the evidence for the existence of God: 'For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.'⁶ It is no part of the biblical view that things should be believed where there is no evidence. Just as in science, faith, reason and evidence belong together. Dawkins' definition of faith as 'blind faith' turns out, therefore, to be the exact opposite of the biblical one. Curious that he does not seem to be aware of the discrepancy. Could it be as a consequence of his own blind faith?

Dawkins' idiosyncratic definition of faith thus provides a striking example of the very kind of thinking he claims to abhor – thinking that is not evidence based. For, in an exhibition of breathtaking inconsistency, evidence is the very thing he fails to supply for his claim that independence of evidence is faith's joy. And the reason why he fails to supply such evidence is not hard to find – there is none. It takes no great research effort to ascertain that no serious biblical scholar or thinker would support Dawkins' definition of faith. Francis Collins says of Dawkins' definition that it 'certainly does not describe the faith of most serious believers in history, nor of most of those in my personal acquaintance'.⁷ Alister McGrath⁸ points out in his recent highly accessible assessment of Dawkins' position that Dawkins has signally failed to engage with any serious Christian thinkers whatsoever. What then should we think of his excellent maxim: 'Next time that somebody tells you that something is true, why not say to them: "What kind of evidence is there for that?" And if they can't give you a good answer, I hope you'll think very carefully before you believe a word they say?'⁹ One might well be forgiven for giving in to the powerful temptation to apply Dawkins' maxim to himself – and not believe a word that he says.

But Dawkins is not alone in holding the erroneous notion that faith in God is not based on any kind of evidence. Experience shows that it is relatively common among members of the scientific community, even though it may well be formulated in a somewhat different way. One is often told, for example, that faith in God 'belongs to the private domain, whereas scientific commitment belongs to the public domain', that 'faith in God is a different kind of faith from that which we exercise in science' – in short, it is 'blind faith'...

...let us get at least some idea of the state of belief/unbelief in God in the scientific community. One of the most interesting surveys in this regard is that conducted in 1996 by Edward Larsen and Larry Witham and reported in *Nature*.¹⁰ For their survey was a repeat of a survey done in 1916 by Professor Leuba in which 1,000 scientists (chosen at random from the 1910 edition of *American Men of Science*) were asked whether they believed both in a God who answered prayer and in personal immortality – which is, be it noted, much more specific than believing in some kind of divine being. The response rate was 70 per cent of whom 41.8 per cent said yes, 41.5 per cent no and 16.7 per cent were agnostic. In 1996, the response was 60 per cent of whom 39.6 per cent said yes, 45.5 per cent no and 14.9 per cent¹¹ were agnostic. These statistics were given differing interpretations in the press on the half-full, half-empty principle. Some used them as evidence of the survival of belief, others of the constancy of unbelief. Perhaps the most surprising thing is that there has been relatively little change in the proportion of believers to unbelievers during those eighty years of enormous growth in scientific knowledge, a fact that contrasts sharply with prevailing public perception.

A similar survey showed that the percentage of atheists is higher at the top levels of science. Larsen and Witham showed in 1998¹² that, among the top scientists in the National Academy of Sciences in the USA who responded, 72.2 per cent were atheists, 7 per cent believed in God and 20.8 per cent were agnostics. Unfortunately we have no comparable statistics from 1916 to see if those proportions have changed since then or not, although we do know that over 90 per cent of the founders of the Royal Society in England were theists.

Now how one interprets such statistics is a complex matter. Larsen, for instance, also found that for income levels above \$150,000 per year, belief in God falls off significantly, a trend not noticeably limited to those of the scientific fraternity.

Whatever the implications of such statistics may be, surely such surveys provide evidence enough that Dawkins may well be right about the difficulty of accomplishing his rather ominously totalitarian-sounding task of eradicating faith in God among scientists. For, in addition to the nearly 40 per cent of believing scientists in the general survey, there have been and are some very eminent scientists who do believe in God – notably Francis

Collins, the current Director of the Human Genome Project, Professor Bill Phillips, winner of the Nobel Prize for Physics in 1997, Sir Brian Heap FRS, former Vice-President of the Royal Society, and Sir John Houghton FRS, former Director of the British Meteorological Office, co-Chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and currently Director of the John Ray Initiative on the Environment, to name but a few.

Of course our question is not going to be settled by statistics, however interesting they may be. Certainly the confessed faith

in God even of eminent scientists does not seem to have any modulating effect on the strident tones used by Atkins, Dawkins and others as they orchestrate their war against God in the name of science. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that they are convinced, not so much that science is at war with God, but that the war is over and science has gained the final victory. The world simply needs to be informed that, to echo Nietzsche, God is dead and science has buried him. In this vein Peter Atkins writes: 'Science and religion cannot be reconciled, and humanity should begin to appreciate the power of its child, and to beat off all attempts at compromise. Religion has failed, and its failures should stand exposed. Science, with its currently successful pursuit of universal competence through the identification of the minimal, the supreme delight of the intellect, should be acknowledged king.'¹³ This is triumphalist language. But has the triumph really been secured? Which religion has failed, and at what level? Although science is certainly a delight, is it really the supreme delight of the intellect? Do music, art, literature, love and truth have nothing to do with the intellect? I can hear the rising chorus of protest from the humanities.

One might well be forgiven for giving in to the powerful temptation to apply Dawkins' maxim to himself - and not believe a word that he says.

What is more, the fact that there are scientists who appear to be at war with God is not quite the same thing as science itself being at war with God. For example, some musicians are militant atheists. But does that mean music itself is at war with God? Hardly. The point here may be expressed as follows: Statements by scientists are not necessarily statements of science. Nor, we might add, are such statements necessarily true; although the prestige of science is such that they are often taken to be so. For example, the assertions by Atkins and Dawkins, with which we began, fall into that category. They are not statements of science but rather expressions of personal belief, indeed, of faith – fundamentally no different from (though noticeably less tolerant than) much expression of the kind of faith Dawkins expressly wishes to eradicate. Of course, the fact that Dawkins' and Atkins' cited pronouncements are statements of faith does not of itself mean that those statements are false; but it does mean that they must not be treated as if they were authoritative science. What needs to be investigated is the category into which they fit, and, most important of all, whether or not they are true.

Before going any further, we ought, however, to balance the account a little by citing some eminent scientists who do believe in God. Sir John Houghton FRS writes: 'Our science is God's science. He holds the responsibility for the whole scientific story... The remarkable order, consistency, reliability and fascinating complexity found in the scientific description of the universe are reflections of the order, consistency, reliability and complexity of God's activity.'¹⁴ Former Director of Kew Gardens, Sir Ghillean Prance FRS, gives equally clear expression to his faith: 'For many years I have believed that God is the great designer behind all nature... All my studies in science since then have confirmed my faith. I regard the Bible as my principal source of authority.'¹⁵

Again, of course, the statements just listed are not statements of science either, but statements of personal belief. It should be noted, however, that they contain hints as to the evidence that might be adduced to support that belief. Sir Ghillean Prance explicitly says, for example, that it is science itself that confirms his faith. Thus we have the interesting situation in which, on the one hand, naturalist thinkers tell us that science has eliminated God, and, on the other hand, theists tell us that science confirms their faith in God. Both positions are held by highly competent scientists. What does this mean? Well, it certainly means that it is far too simplistic to assume that science and faith in God are inimical and it suggests that it could be worth exploring what exactly the relationships between science and atheism and between science and theism are. In particular, which, if any, of these two diametrically opposing worldviews of theism and atheism does science support?

We turn first to the history of science.

The forgotten roots of science

At the heart of all science lies the conviction that the universe is orderly. Without this deep conviction science would not be possible. So we are entitled to ask: Where does the conviction come from? Melvin Calvin, Nobel Prize-winner in biochemistry, seems in little doubt about its provenance: 'As I try to discern the origin of that conviction, I seem to find it in a basic notion discovered 2,000 or 3,000 years ago, and enunciated first in the Western world by the ancient Hebrews: namely that the universe is governed by a single God, and is not the product of the whims of many gods, each governing his own province according to his own laws. This monotheistic view seems to be the historical foundation for modern science.'¹⁶

This is very striking in view of the fact that it is common in the literature first to trace the roots of contemporary science back to the Greeks of the sixth century BC and then to point out that, for science to proceed, the Greek worldview had to be emptied of its polytheistic content. We shall return to the latter point below. We simply wish to point out here that, although the Greeks certainly were in many ways the first to do science in anything like the way we understand it today,

the implication of what Melvin Calvin is saying is that the actual view of the universe that was of greatest help to science, namely the Hebrew view that the universe is created and upheld by God, was very much older than the worldview of the Greeks.

This is, perhaps, something that, to borrow Dawkins' language (which, we note, he himself borrowed from the New Testament!), ought to be 'shouted from the housetops' as an antidote to a summary rejection of God. For it means that the foundation on which science stands, the base from which its trajectory has swept up to the edge of the universe, has a strong theistic dimension. One person who drew attention to this circumstance much earlier than Melvin Calvin was the eminent historian of science and mathematician Sir Alfred North Whitehead. Observing that medieval Europe in 1500 knew less than Archimedes in the third century BC and yet by 1700 Newton had written his masterpiece, *Principia Mathematica*, Whitehead asked the obvious question: How could such an explosion of knowledge have happened in such a relatively short time? His answer: 'modern science must come from the medieval insistence on the rationality of God... My explanation is that the faith in the possibility of science, generated antecedently to the development of modern scientific theory, is an unconscious derivative from medieval theology.'¹⁷ C.S. Lewis' succinct formulation of Whitehead's view is worth recording: 'Men became scientific because they expected law in nature and they expected law in nature because they believed in a lawgiver.' It was this conviction that led Francis Bacon (1561–1626), regarded by many as the father of modern science, to teach that God has provided us with two books – the book of Nature and the Bible – and that to be really properly educated, one should give one's mind to studying both.

For it means that the foundation on which science stands, the base from which its trajectory has swept up to the edge of the universe, has a strong theistic dimension.

Many of the towering figures of science agreed. Men such as Galileo (1564–1642), Kepler (1571–1630), Pascal (1623–62), Boyle (1627–91), Newton (1642–1727), Faraday (1791–1867), Babbage (1791–1871), Mendel (1822–84), Pasteur (1822–95), Kelvin (1824–1907) and Clerk Maxwell (1831–79) were theists; most of them, in fact, were Christians.

Their belief in God, far from being a hindrance to their science, was often the main inspiration for it and they were not shy of saying so. The driving force behind Galileo's questing mind, for example, was his deep inner conviction that the Creator who had 'endowed us with senses, reason and intellect' intended us not to 'forgo their use and by some other means to give us knowledge which we can attain by them'. Johannes Kepler described his motivation thus: 'The chief aim of all investigations of the external world should be to discover the rational order which has been imposed on it by God, and which he revealed to us in the language of mathematics.'¹⁸ Such discovery, for Kepler, amounted, in his famous phrase, to 'thinking God's thoughts after him'.

How different, as British biochemist Joseph Needham records, was the reaction of the Chinese in the eighteenth century when the news about the great developments in science that had taken place in the West was brought to them by Jesuit missionaries. For them the idea that the universe could be governed by simple laws which human beings could and had discovered was foolish in the extreme. Their culture simply was not receptive to such notions.¹⁹

Lack of appreciation of the precise point we are making here can lead to confusion. We are not claiming that all aspects of religion in general and Christianity in particular have contributed to the rise of science. What we are suggesting is that the doctrine of a unique Creator God who is responsible for the existence and order of the universe has played an important role. We are not suggesting that there never has been religious antagonism to science. Indeed, T.F. Torrance,²⁰ commenting on Whitehead's analysis, points out that the development of science was often 'seriously hindered by the Christian church even when within it the beginnings of modern ideas were taking their rise'. As an example he states that the Augustinian theology that dominated Europe for 1,000 years had a power and beauty that led to great contributions to the arts in the Middle Ages, but its 'eschatology which perpetuated the idea of decay and collapse of the world and of salvation as redemption out of it, directed attention away from the world to the superterrestrial, while its conception of the sacramental universe allowed only a symbolic understanding of nature and a religious, illustrative use of it' thus 'taking up and sanctifying a cosmological outlook that had to be replaced if scientific progress was to be made'. Torrance also says that what often seriously discouraged the scientific mind was a 'hardened notion of authority and its relation to understanding that went back to Augustine... which first gave rise to bitter complaints against the church'.²¹...

Torrance nevertheless gives strong support to the general tenor of Whitehead's thesis: 'In spite of the unfortunate tension that has so often cropped up between the advance of scientific theories and traditional habits of thought in the church, theology can still claim to have mothered throughout long centuries the basic beliefs and impulses which have given rise especially to modern empirical science, if only through its unflagging faith in the reliability of God the Creator and in the ultimate intelligibility of his creation.'

John Brooke, Oxford's first Professor of Science and Religion, is more cautious than Torrance: 'In the past religious beliefs have served as a presupposition of the scientific enterprise insofar as they have underwritten that uniformity... a doctrine of creation could give coherence to scientific endeavour insofar as it implied

a dependable order behind the flux of nature. ... this need not entail the strong claim that without a prior theology, science would never have taken off, but it does mean that the particular conceptions of science held by its pioneers were often informed by theological and metaphysical beliefs.'²²

More recently, John Brooke's successor at Oxford, Peter Harrison, has made an impressive case that a dominant feature in the rise of modern science was the Protestant attitude to the interpretation of biblical texts, *War of the worldviews 21* which spelt an end to the symbolic approach

of the Middle Ages.²³

It is, of course, notoriously difficult to know 'what would have happened if...', but it is surely not too much to say that the rise of science would have been seriously retarded if one particular doctrine of theology, the doctrine of creation, had not been present – a doctrine that is common to Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Brooke issues a healthy warning against overstating the case: Just because a religion has supported science does not prove that the religion is true. Quite so – and the same can, of course, be said of atheism.

The doctrine of creation was not only important in the rise of science because of its entailment of order in the universe. It was important for another reason... In order for science to develop, thinking had to be freed from the hitherto ubiquitous Aristotelian method of deducing from fixed principles how the universe ought to be, to a methodology that allowed the universe to speak directly.

That fundamental shift in perspective was made much easier by the notion of a contingent creation – that is, that God the Creator could have created the universe any way he liked. Hence, in order to find out what the universe is really like or how it actually works, there is no alternative to going and looking. You cannot deduce how the universe works simply by reasoning from a priori philosophical principles. That is precisely what Galileo and, later, Kepler and others did: they went and looked – and revolutionized science. But, as everyone knows, Galileo got into trouble with the Roman Catholic Church...

The doctrine of creation was not only important in the rise of science because of its entailment of order in the universe...

The real conflict - naturalism versus theism

With this we come to one of the major points we wish to make in this book which is that there is a conflict, a very real one, but it is not really a conflict between science and religion at all. For if that were so, elementary logic would dictate that one would find that scientists were all atheists and only non-scientists believed in God, and this, as we have seen, is simply not the case.

No, the real conflict is between two diametrically opposed worldviews: naturalism and theism. They inevitably collide. For the sake of clarity, we note that naturalism is related to, but not identical with, materialism; although they are sometimes very hard to tell apart. The Oxford Companion to Philosophy says that the complexity of the concept of matter has meant that 'the various materialist philosophies have tended to substitute for "matter" some notion like "whatever it is that can be studied by the methods of natural science", thus turning materialism into naturalism; though it would be an exaggeration to say the two outlooks have simply coincided'.³⁴ Materialists are naturalists. But there are naturalists who hold that mind and consciousness are to be distinguished from matter. They regard the former as 'emergent' phenomena; that is, dependent on matter, but occurring on a higher level which is not reducible to the lower-level properties of matter. There are also other naturalists who hold that the universe consists purely of 'mind stuff'.

Naturalism, however, in common with materialism, stands opposed to supernaturalism, insisting that 'the world of nature should form a single sphere without incursions from outside by souls or spirits, divine or human'.³⁵ Whatever their differences, materialism and naturalism are therefore intrinsically atheistic.

We should also note that materialism/naturalism comes in different versions. For example, E.O. Wilson distinguishes two. The first is what he calls political behaviourism: 'Still beloved by the now rapidly fading Marxist-Leninist states, it says that the brain is largely a blank slate devoid of any inborn inscription beyond reflexes and primitive bodily urges. As a consequence the mind originates almost wholly as a result of learning, and it is the product of a culture that itself evolves by historical contingency.

Because there is no biologically based "human nature", people can be moulded to the best possible political and economic system, namely, as urged upon the world through most of the twentieth century, communism.

In practical politics, this belief has been repeatedly tested and, after economic collapses and tens of millions of deaths in a dozen dysfunctional states, is generally deemed a failure.' The second, Wilson's own view, he calls scientific humanism, a worldview that he thinks 'drains the fever swamps of religion and blank-slate dogma'. He defines it as follows: 'Still held by only a tiny minority of the world's population, it considers humanity to

be a biological species that evolved over millions of years in a biological world, acquiring unprecedented intelligence yet still guided by complex inherited emotions and biased channels of learning. Human nature exists and it was self-assembled. It is the commonality of the hereditary responses and propensities that define our species.' Wilson asserts that it is this Darwinian view that 'imposes the heavy burden of individual choice that goes with intellectual freedom'.³⁶

It goes beyond the scope of this book to consider the various nuances of these and other views. We wish here to concentrate on what is essentially common to all of them, something that astronomer Carl Sagan expressed with elegant economy in the opening words of his acclaimed television series *Cosmos*: 'The cosmos is all there is, or was, or ever shall be.' This is the essence of naturalism. Sterling Lamprecht's definition of naturalism is longer but nevertheless worth recording. He defines it to be: 'a philosophical position, empirical method that regards everything that exists or occurs to be conditioned in its existence or occurrence by causal factors within one all-encompassing system of nature'.³⁷ Thus there is nothing but nature. It is a closed system of cause and effect. There is no realm of the transcendent or supernatural. There is no 'outside'. Diametrically opposed to naturalism and materialism is the theistic view of the universe that finds clear expression in the opening words of Genesis:

'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.'³⁸

Here is an assertion that the universe is not a closed system but a creation, an artefact of the mind of God, maintained and upheld by him. It is an answer to the question: Why does the universe exist? It exists because God causes it to be.

The Genesis statement is a statement of belief, not a statement of science, in exactly the same way as Sagan's assertion is not a statement of science, but of his personal belief. Thus the key issue is, we repeat, not so much the relationship of the discipline of science to that of theology, but the relationship of science to the various worldviews held by scientists, in

particular to naturalism and theism. Thus, when we ask if science has buried God, we are talking at the level of the interpretation of science.

What we are really asking is: Which worldview does science support, naturalism or theism?

E.O. Wilson is in no doubt of the answer: Scientific humanism is 'the only worldview compatible with science's growing knowledge of the real world and the laws of nature'. Quantum chemist Henry F. Schaeffer III is in no doubt of his answer either: 'A Creator must exist. The Big Bang ripples (1992) and subsequent scientific findings are clearly pointing to an ex nihilo creation consistent with the first few verses of the book of Genesis.'³⁹

*...when we ask if
science has buried
God, we are
talking at the level
of the
interpretation
of science.*

War^{of the} worldviews

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Extract from

The Uppsala Interfaith Climate Manifesto 2008
Faith traditions addressing Global Warming

Hope for the Future!

As religious leaders and teachers from the whole world, gathered in Uppsala 2008, we call for effective leadership and action in view of the global threat to the climate. From religious traditions, with different approaches to religious life, we come together at this time in human history to assure the world of what we have in common. We all share the responsibility of being conscious caretakers of our home, planet Earth. We have reflected on the concerns of scientists and political leaders regarding the alarming climate crisis. We share their concerns.

The world religions are a source of empowerment for change in lifestyles and patterns of consumption. Religious faith remains a powerful force for good among a considerable number of the human family. We undertake this mission in a spirit of responsibility and faith.

OUR APPEALS TO THE COPENHAGEN PROCESS

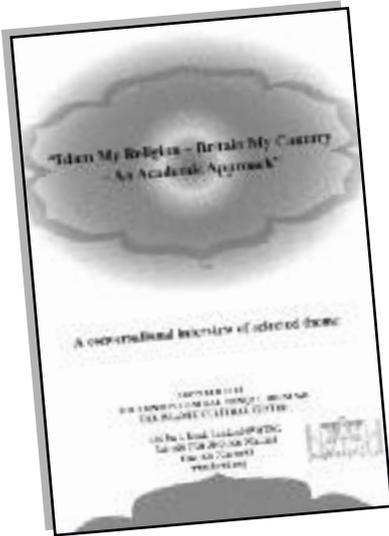
As people from world religions, we urge governments and international organisations to prepare and agree upon a comprehensive climate strategy for the Copenhagen Agreement. This strategy must be ambitious enough to keep climate change below 2° Celsius, and to distribute the burden in an equitable way in accordance with the principles of common but differentiated responsibility and respective capabilities. *Greenhouse Development Rights* offers one concrete model of such burden sharing. We urge all actors concerned to find politically acceptable tools to realize this.

The Copenhagen Agreement must counteract misuse of land, of forests, and of farmland, using creative incentives for landowners, users and indigenous communities to manage growing forests as carbon sinks.

As religious leaders and teachers, we want to counteract a culture of fear with a culture of hope. We want to face the climate challenge with defiant optimism to highlight the core principles of all major sacred traditions of the world: justice, solidarity and compassion. We want to encourage the best science and political leadership. We commit our communities to fostering a spirit of joy and hope in relation to the greatest gift given to us all - the gift of life!

Forwarded by Charanjit AjitSingh one of the many signatories of the Manifesto, and a member of our editorial team..

Please see our website www.faithinitiative.co.uk for more details.



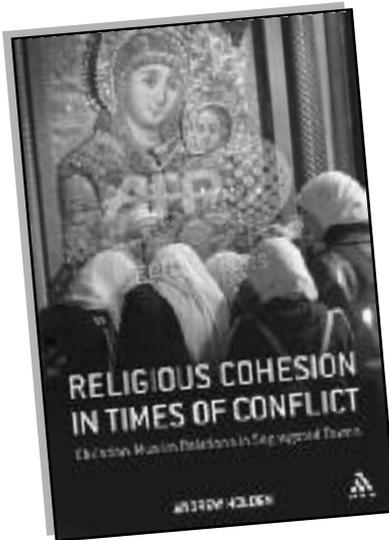
Islam My Religion - Britain My Country - An Academic Approach

Issue 17 of Faith Initiative featured the lifestory of Dr. Sultana Saeed. In this article Dr. Saeed referred to a project gathering the views of Young British Muslim Women on the premise "Islam my religion and Britain my country". In relation to this project Dr. Saeed carried out an interview, with searching questions related to the central message of Islam, with Dr. Ahmad Al-Dubayan, Director-General of The Islamic Cultural Centre. A booklet covering this interview is now available to interested parties:

Islam My Religion - Britain My Country
An Academic Approach
A conversational interview of
selected theme

Dr. Ahmad Al-Dubayan
and Dr. Sultana Saeed

Please contact Dr. Saeed by email:
dr.saeed@uclmail.net



Religious Cohesion in Times of Conflict: Christian-Muslim Relations in Segregated Towns

Issue 17 of this magazine carried an extract of a paper evaluating the contribution of interfaith dialogue to community cohesion. The extract was entitled: *The Burnley Project: Faith attitudes among young people in Burnley & Blackburn, Lancashire* and it explored religious inclusivism in that area. We are pleased to announce that Dr. Holden's book presenting the results and key findings of his wider sociological investigation has now been published and will be available from January 2009.

Religious Cohesion in Times of Conflict:
Christian-Muslim Relations
in Segregated Towns.

Published by Continuum

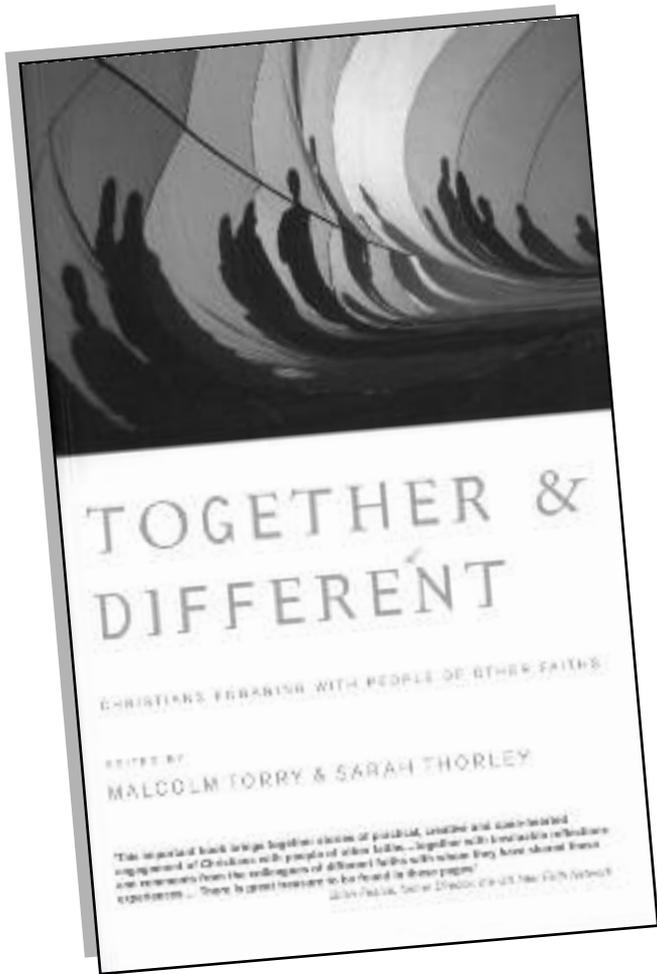
Please contact Dr. Holden for further
information: email@draholden.plus.com

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Train up a child in the way he should go
and even when he is old
he will not depart from it.
Proverbs 22:6, The Federal Bible

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Together & Different

Issue 15 of Faith Initiative carried a feature entitled: *Engaging Togetherness* in which Sarah Thorley advocated a broad and inclusive approach to Religious Studies in the classroom – from primary school onwards - and a positive focus on bringing people of faith together in a variety of practical ways. Sarah, in partnership with Malcolm Torry, has now edited a book entitled: *Together and Different: Christians engaging with people of other faiths*. Pub.Canterbury Press 2008

‘Whether you are a church or community leader seeking to build relationships, a work colleague of people of other faiths, a parent meeting Muslim or Hindu parents at the school gate, or simply someone with unanswered questions about religion in society. *Together and Different* will encourage you to take the risk, tread new ground, push out your boundaries – and find your own spiritual journey surprisingly enriched as a result.’

The book is endorsed by Brian Pearce, former Director of the UK Inter Faith Network who says: ‘It is a thought-provoking book but one I hope will also prompt action: action inspired by faith and commitment to the common good.’

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THE WILL OF God

*The will of God will never take you
Where the grace of God cannot keep you,
Where the arms of God cannot support you,
Where the riches of God cannot supply your needs,
Where the power of God cannot endow you.*

*The will of God will never take you
Where the spirit of God cannot work through you,
Where the wisdom of God cannot teach you,
Where the army of God cannot protect you,
Where the hands of God cannot mould you.*

*The will of God will never take you
Where the love of God cannot enfold you,
Where the mercies of God cannot sustain you,
Where the peace of God cannot calm your fears,
Where the authority of God cannot overrule for you.*

*The will of God will never take you
Where the comfort of God cannot dry your tears,
Where the word of God cannot feed you,
Where the miracles of God cannot be done for you,
Where the omnipresence of God cannot find you.*

*Author Unknown
(From 'The Messenger', St. John's United Church)*



we can
ALL still be
friends...

www.community-spirit.org.uk

Liverpool Community Spirit is a multi-faith education partnership based in the heart of Liverpool's diverse faith and cultural communities. Since 2002, LCS has run a highly successful, popular multi-faith Youth Council drawing young people from diverse faith and cultural backgrounds from across Liverpool together to promote understanding of Liverpool's faith communities, to raise self-esteem and aspirations and to promote good citizenship.

At present, Liverpool is a predominately white city but has a long history of immigration due to its port and its history of the Slave Trade with Europe's oldest Black and ethnic communities. LCS works within and between communities to empower people of all ages in two ways: firstly to improve their self-esteem and knowledge of their own identity, and secondly to inform and acquaint people of the values, traditions, beliefs and history of all the faiths in our city that make Liverpool such a vibrant and fascinating place. The Youth Council is LCS's medium for reaching young people and offering them the opportunity to explore the faith communities of Liverpool, their own identity and their position as citizens in not only their own faith/cultural communities but also at their education establishment, within Liverpool, nationally and internationally.

Currently the Youth Council has over twenty members, aged 12-20, from North and South Liverpool (a historic divide within the city, north Liverpool traditionally being a white, working class area and South Liverpool a slightly more affluent and diverse area) and from a variety of faith and cultures, including White and Black Christians (of different denominations), Yemini, Pakistani and Somalian Muslims, British-born Hindus and Sikhs, British-born Persian Baha'i, members of the Jewish community and those of no faith from the white community.

Meeting at least every two weeks, the Youth Council offers a variety of activities, from community-based projects to team-building days out. During 2006 and 2007, the Youth Council spent 12 months producing a DVD called *Seven Deadly Sins*. Originally the project set out to explore St George and the Seven Deadly Sins, however, as the Youth Council explored these topics in greater detail, it became clear that a focus on the timeless nature of the Seven Deadly Sins was more appropriate.

They developed contemporary stories around each of the seven sins: the scene of 'envy' that considered racism was based upon the

Parable of the Good Samaritan. The location of filming each scene were places young people in Liverpool would recognise, places that they may unknowingly partake in these sins. This was a deliberate attempt to allow the audience to recognise as many factors of the scene as possible. Youth Council members devised story lines, scripted scenes, acted in the film, edited it and finally designed a DVD cover.

The DVD launch in April, was a fantastic and joyous evening held in a local community centre with traditional Somalian dancing, displays of the DVD production and a wonderful spread of food with each dish representing one of the Seven Deadly Sins. It gave Youth Council members an opportunity to celebrate all their hard work during the project. The DVD will soon be available as an educational resource for schools and youth groups.

One of the issues explored in the DVD was Sloth and a lack of consideration for elders in our communities. Over the last four years, LCS has been tackling this concern through the intergenerational Elder Buddies project. Youth Council members are paired with elders from Liverpool who are of a different faith and/or culture to themselves. Following an introduction session, where the pairs become better acquainted with one another, the Youth Council members will interview them about their lives. This interview is used to form a basis for a *This is your Life* book that is filled with photos and interview text about the elder's life.

The project culminates in a celebratory evening where the Elder Buddies are presented with their book. This year the celebration will take place at a Jewish Cultural Evening in Liverpool's Jewish community Centre, Harold House. The Elder Buddies project endeavours to build a relationship between two generations that do not normally mix, except for perhaps within a family. It is also exciting to see how the pairs discover so many common interests and build a relationship during the project, as well as sharing wisdom and insight into each other's generation and background.

Cultural Evenings are a new addition to the Youth Council programme. Youth Council members share their faith and culture with one another through an evening of food, music and cultural activities they engage in, along with a presentation on the basic tenets of their faith and culture. Cultural evenings will often involve a visit to the relevant place of worship so Youth Council members can experience how one another's faith influences and shapes their lives.

During school holidays, day trips and overnight trips are organised to provide Youth Council members with an opportunity to get to know each other better and to work together, this are obviously very popular with Youth Council members and provide those of a less fortunate economic background a chance to leave Liverpool and explore other areas of the UK. Most recently, the Youth Council were invited to Penrhyn Castle, North Wales to explore the Slave Trade, the castle, tree planting, and try their hand at archery; we spent an outdoor pursuits day in Snowdonia climbing a mountain and going deep into the old slate mines; and visited the Next Wave Ship in the Albert Dock, run by Christian Volunteers, for an evening of climbing the rigging, and being hoisted in the bosun's chair.

Finally, in 2006 we decided to extend the work of the Youth Council by forming Liverpool Youth SACRE (Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education). The Youth SACRE, comprised of secondary school students from different faith backgrounds, works alongside the adult SACRE in Liverpool offering young

people an opportunity to influence community cohesion within the Liverpool LEA RE syllabus. In June 2008, the Youth SACRE organised Liverpool's first inter-faith conference *Living Together in Liverpool*. The day was a huge success with over 150 year 12 students attending the conference from all over Merseyside. Inter-active workshops on different aspects of faith were held such as Faith and Fashion, along with a 'Question Time' session and plenary session exhibiting the products of the workshops from the day.

Working with the Youth Council and Youth SACRE is a huge pleasure. It is a wonderful opportunity to see young people grow and develop and come together to work on projects. I have been asked whether the Youth Council and SACRE works so well because the members are not particularly 'religious', however, that it not the case. All our members are strongly committed to their faith or belief system, maybe it is their strength that fuels that faith or belief system that gives them the strength to work so well with those who outwardly are perceived as so different to themselves.

This is one Youth Council member's experience:

I joined LCS about 2 years ago and I enjoyed it then and still enjoy it now!

When I attended the first meeting, I was made very welcome by all the other members. Within Liverpool Community Spirit (LCS) there are people from different faiths and backgrounds (Christians, Catholics, Sikhs, Muslims, Jews, Hindu to name just a few). This allows us to learn from each other, and shows that no matter how the media portrays a religion, we can ALL still be friends and that we are all equal no matter what we believe in or what race we are, after all we are all human!

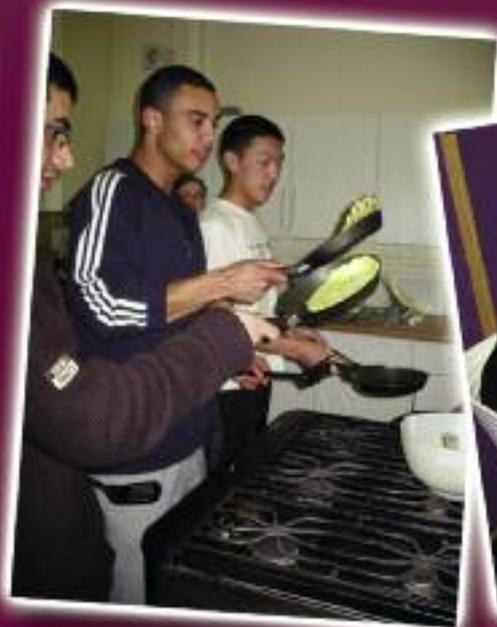
Since becoming a member of LCS my confidence and my communication skills have improved dramatically, which has enabled me to achieve more outside the Youth Council.

I starred in a DVD called Seven Deadly Sins that was produced by the Youth Council, this allowed me to build my self-esteem and gave me an insight into what goes on during film production. It was based on St George so we travelled to Windsor Castle to visit St George's Chapel.

I was involved in the Elder Buddies project – where a Youth Council member interviews an elder about their childhood memories. I interviewed Bisakha Sakar (an Indian dancer) and Father Christopher (a priest in Liverpool). This project helped me understand how people used to live in the 1950's and also built a friendly bond between us.

I enjoy being part of LCS because it is a community in itself. Everyone is very supportive of each other and it's great to get young kids off the street and giving something back to the community. I had the opportunity to attend the LCS Steering Committee meeting and I got to see 'behind the scenes' of what goes on. The time and passion from Dr Matthew Thomson and his team that is brought to the table is amazing. It is great to see that people are spending their free time to help the young people from the community!

Mohamed Ali, 19



FAITH IN AN *unseen God*

NOUR EL HUDA AWAD

Light of Guidance is the translation of my name: Nour El Huda. I strive to live up to it. I was born in Sudan, Islam is my religion, and Arabic is my first language. I studied fine art painting in Cheltenham before moving to Swansea to study Architectural Stained Glass. There I gained a grounding in the technical skills required to produce high quality work in glass. The medium itself has opened a new horizon of perception and it has become my preferred method of expression. I perceive glass as an extension of God's light:

'God is the light of the Heavens and the earth. The similitude of His light as a lustrous niche, wherein is a lamp. The lamp contained in a crystal globe, the globe 'glass' as bright as a glittering star; It is kindled from a blessed tree, an olive neither of the East nor of the West, the oil thereof would nearly glow forth though no fire touched it. Light upon light: God guideth unto His light whom He will.'

Holy Quran, chapter 24 Al noor-The light. Verse 24

Islamic Art is a unique, intellectual and universal language. It is recognised as a science and one of the most powerful forms of sacred art. I am most fascinated by its splendour, grandeur, balance, and great elegance. It is a vast sea of knowledge which I do not claim to possess. My work is a humble contribution towards keeping this symbol of a civilisation alive, and more accessible. It is an attempt to consolidate the past with the present. To learn new skills, to create honestly and sincerely is an act of faith in itself.



Wild Flowers of North Wales, inspired by forest in Llangollen

My glass pieces are based on the exploration of contemporary techniques, whilst retaining traditional Islamic designs and patterns. All the panels in my recent Alhambra Exhibition are kiln fused and embrace the three main styles of Islamic art: geometry, arabesque and calligraphy featured singularly or in various combinations. The results are sparkling, shimmering panels with multiple forms reflecting an aesthetic, spiritual and symbolic meaning. This relates to the philosophy based on mystical awareness and knowledge of the creation, a reference to the divine unity. The colours follow the Arabic tradition of emulating gemstones, aspiring to create an atmosphere of meditative tranquillity. Jalal-Adin Al-Rumi wrote:

The universe is said to be born from darkness. God created the moon and sun to flood it in light. The light resembles the truth and darkness is merely a curtain from the light.

My quest for light and beauty continues.



Bustan (translates as Garden - symbolizes Garden of Eden. Fused in 5 layers containing over a thousand pieces, all hand cut)



Wild Flowers of North Wales, inspired by forest in Llangollen

And what is it to work with love?

It is to weave the cloth with threads drawn from your heart, even as if your beloved were to wear that cloth. It is to build a House with affection, even as if your beloved were to dwell in that house. It is to sow seeds with tenderness and reap the harvest with joy, even as if your beloved were to eat the fruit. It is to charge all things you fashion with a breath of your own spirit.

Gibran K. Gibran

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*The dancer of Bharata Nātyam
represents the jivātma,
the single soul in search of
union with the parmātma,
the eternal soul*

Nilpa Shah

