



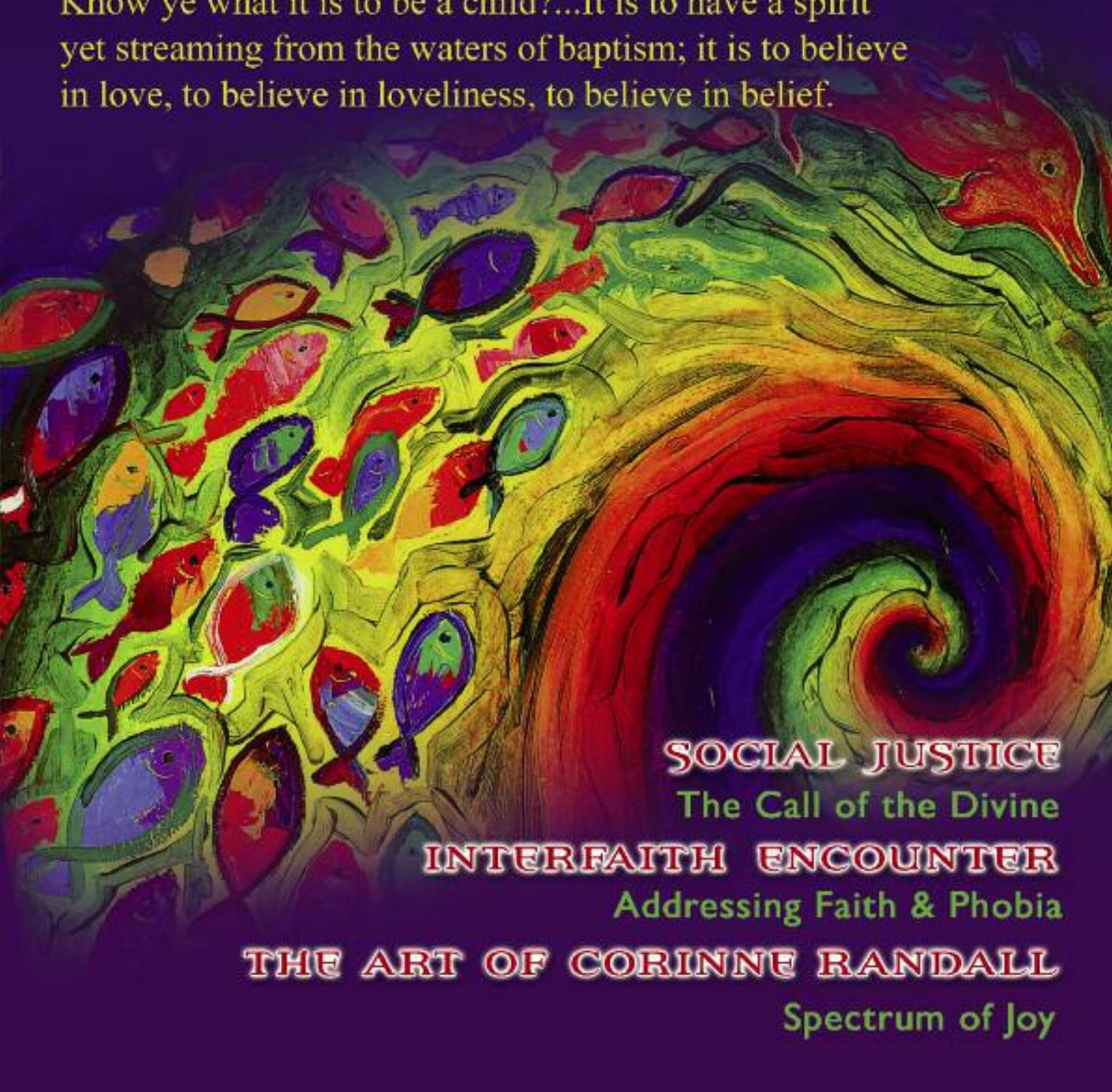
ISSUE 24

faith

INITIATIVE

EMBRACING DIVERSITY

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



SOCIAL JUSTICE

The Call of the Divine

INTERFAITH ENCOUNTER

Addressing Faith & Phobia

THE ART OF CORINNE RANDALL

Spectrum of Joy

“As I look in awe at the grandeur of our mountains I see a reflection of my own spirit and my connection to all of creation. When I traverse our peaks, each step is a step closer to achieving my goals.”

Chief Ian Campbell, Squamish Nation

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Spectrum of Joy

editorial

The words spoken by Jesus: "Because I am alive you shall come to life also" (John 14:19) are chosen by our keynote writer Chris Chivers to illustrate the commitment of a loving God to a fragile humanity. (p.5/6)

He calls on Christians to emulate this love for all of humanity by using it as a wellspring for action to bring about social justice in the world. The essence of this theology is also reflected in the writing of Nirmal Singh, a prison chaplain, who draws on the sacred words of Guru Nanak Dev ji to convey the divine call in Sikhism for service to others, irrespective of caste, creed or gender. (p.35/36) The Sikh script goes a step further in asking that thanks be given to that person for providing the opportunity to serve them. Drawing deep on the well of humility to respond to such a calling necessitates a denial of one's own sense of importance, and especially perhaps of pride. It provides a means of levelling that overturns all concepts of social hierarchy and epitomises a belief in the oneness of humanity - a belief that each one of us is born to work in unity with other living beings to create harmony in the world. A philosophy reflected also in the teaching of Hinduism: Vasudhaive Kutumbhum - the world is one family. The opportunity to gain insights into the beliefs and practices of other world religions allows for an understanding of the richness contained within, and for the goodness that can ensue. It is precisely to promote such understanding that *Faith Initiative* exists; so that our writers can open windows onto their faiths and cultures and so help eradicate the fear of the unknown that is so often at the very root of prejudice. It is regrettable that we have to witness so much negativity about religion in the media and elsewhere, and so it is that we publish a paper on faith and phobia in modern Britain given at the London Islamic Culture Centre by Sudarsham Bhatia, President of the National Council of Hindu Temples UK. (p.8/9) He calls for respect for, and between, people of faith and regrets that often bigotry is nurtured within the home: children absorb prejudice from their parents against people of different colour or race. This observation is substantiated in the research carried out by Sally Elton-Chalcroft at a school of mainly white boys from low socio economic backgrounds. (p.20/21) A young boy expresses confused but disturbing views on people of a different colour to himself. One can only feel deep concern for this child in his lack of understanding, and trust that good teachers will, over time, help shape his world-view so that racial and religious bigotry become a thing of his past, and diversity a joyful aspect of his future.

Heather Wells

We thank all our contributors - writers, artists, poets and photographers - and of course subscribers. We also gratefully acknowledge the support of donors, who wish to remain anonymous. To sustain and develop the magazine however we need regular financial donations. If any readers know of Trust Funds, Grants or private donors who may be willing to help with funding, however big or small, the Editor (Heather Wells) would appreciate your advice and/or recommendations. For contact details please see above.



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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Matthew Youde • Umm Hanié Rebler

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 25 Themes:

- Religious Freedom
- Expressions of Mysticism

Front cover: Image: Sea of the Spirit by Corrine Randall
Quote: Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822), Letters

Design & Print - Print Graphic Ltd
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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

Because I am alive you shall come to life also

John 14 : 19



Animating the Faith Framework for Social Justice

As an eight year old I thought that Christianity involved a degree of solemnity, a lot of dressing-up, a huge amount of laughter, an awful lot of singing and some of the best stories I'd heard - better even than CS Lewis's Narnia for which I had then, as now, a considerable passion.

The mix that I'd imbibed from a fairly traditionally catholic and didactic parish setting was not a bad one. Certainly memories of the laughter have been invaluable since there's often too little of this where faith is concerned. But I have to confess that beyond observing the round of the Christian year - not a bad rhythm into which to be inducted at a young age - I really had no idea what faith was for. Yes, I knew that Jesus had saved me, and I could trot out a hundred pious platitudes stating various aspects of belief. But none of this had really yet impinged on my life.

I say this not in any way to censure the priests who to this point taught me the faith. Actually I say it in a somewhat caricature way deliberately to do the opposite and to acknowledge the way in which they were preparing the ground and making possible a moment of revelation that might have passed me by but for their care and devotion. To whatever faith and world-view we hold we lose sight of the narrative and other rhythms of our traditions at our peril.

But we also need something more, what we used to call relevance but have more subtly learnt to call resonance.

One night, my mother pulled a book out of the shelf in our front room, a place into which I ventured very rarely. With it came falling to the floor another yellow-spined paperback with purple cover. I bent down to pick this book up and turned to read the back of it. I was about to return it to my mother when the headline "The book that shook the world" attracted my attention, and I spotted, further up the back cover, a photograph of a priest surrounded by children.

"May I borrow this?" I asked my mother, knowing that to borrow anything from the front room was like asking for the holy grail. "Yes, of course," she replied, somewhat taken-aback I think. "I don't know how much you'll be able to get out of the book. But have a go".

That four-word invitation - I realise now that it was also perhaps unrecognised expression of hope - shaped the rest of my life.

The book was Trevor Huddleston's *Naught for your comfort*. And my mother was right. I couldn't always understand what I came much later to recognise as the theological, interpretative, historical, sociological and political elements. But I got all the stories. The injustice of the apartheid police officer tearing up Jonas's pass-book to arrest him on the trumped-up charge of not having one. The sheer delight at Father Huddleston marching into the police station to pull the pass-book out of the bin. The ebullience of the Huddleston Jazz Band. The achievement of the Olympic-sized swimming pool he built in the township community he was serving. The endless stream of children coming to talk to him about their mistreatment. Huddleston finding not just the right words to say, but the right things with which to encourage each of them. The trumpet he gave Hugh Masekela starting a journey that would turn this boy into the world's best Jazz trumpeter. I loved this picture of a Christianity that was changing life for people, turning things upside down and making them better. My priests had prepared me well. The people of Israel freed from slavery. The prodigal son given a second chance. The injured man helped by the proverbial good Samaritan. All these stories at last made real sense. Indeed, an almost overwhelming feeling of outrage at the story Huddleston narrated, of the homes of Sophiatown's residents bulldozed because they were black and their area had been re-designated for whites only, burned itself indelibly onto the hard-drive of my faith.

So this, I thought to myself, is what it means when they keep saying that Jesus dies for our sins, and shares the miseries of life, and that his resurrection can change everything.

Nothing was ever quite the same for me again. And my sense that Christianity was a living faith, a faith that could change everything was reinforced in a hundred ways in the years to follow.

As a chorister at Bristol Cathedral I remember the Dean, Horace Dammers, introducing me to the concept of the Lifestyle movement - live simply that others may simply live - and thus my responsibility at the most basic level for my fellow-human beings. As also, when he asked me to look after a young cellist from India, Anup Biswas, a member of a famous boys' string orchestra from that great country. I see now the way he connected my musical interests with someone from a culture as different to mine as it could be, yet was teaching me about the common ground, and the common good to be shared and fought for. As well as what we now rightly call, following the Chief Rabbi's lead, the dignity of difference to be cherished and celebrated. Another priest on the staff of the cathedral, Canon David Isitt, introduced me to a painting by a Japanese artist who had depicted the contemporary meaning of the story of Lazarus at the rich man's gate in a way that I found incredibly arresting and disturbing: a black dog licked Lazarus' sores outside the gate whilst a white dog snarled at him from within.

I was growing up in a very segregated city, Bristol. There were race riots when I was barely a teenager, in a place called St Paul's, which might just as well have been on Mars so unlikely was it that I would ever encounter anyone who lived there. Horace Dammers and David Isitt corrected this too. They invited young black Bristolians from a primary school in St Paul's to the cathedral, and asked us senior choristers - we were all white - to look after them. We rejoiced in our commonality and we puzzled over our different experiences of what it meant to be Bristolians. It was challenging stuff.

Of course I could go on in a barely disguised litany of thanks to list the other ways I was introduced to the idea that if faith meant anything at all it had - not just gesturally but structurally - to go hand in hand with the concept of social justice. The Dean asked me to take the sculptress and Auschwitz survivor, Naomi Blake, around the cathedral: Amnesty International was hosting an exhibition at the time of art made by political prisoners. We subsequently joined with local Jews when she presented a statue: *The Refugee* to the cathedral and it was set at the communal gateway, a challenge to all to recognise that no-one should ever be seen as outsider or stranger.

I'm deliberately labouring the personal in what I'm writing because if faith is to be real, we need to give our young people the sort of mentoring experience I received.

We need first to get them round the contours of our faith in the rhythmic, structured way that I experienced. I shall always be grateful to my parents, to Canons Richard Bennell and Kenneth Clark, and their curates, for ensuring the security of this for me. Our young (and not so young) people need to know the story - and those of us who are Christians frankly still spend far too little time on this - because only a secure framework makes possible an acknowledgement of the social justice which is central to the whole.

As a priest in South Africa I've watched the ministry of some priests deteriorate or collapse because they had an acute - and too quickly burnt-out - sense of social justice, which couldn't acknowledge the originating wellspring, which for Christians has always to be the story of a God who becomes human to elevate and animate the status of everyone's God-given humanity.

That's the Christian framework for social justice. If we Christians want younger (and not-so younger) followers to be passionate about it - and to share the commonalities as well as to respect the different slants that other faiths and world-views have on social justice - we have to enable them to access meaningfully their own story.

Mentoring their engagement with issues of social justice we must then see as a much higher priority.

Returning to a parish context in north London I sense the passion for social justice in the young people I've encountered of all faiths, as I did previously in the former mill towns of Lancashire and the townships of Cape Town. But I also sense that too many of their elders are overly occupied with issues of institutional management and maintenance. We need to adjust the balance here. Yes, we absolutely have to ensure the well being of the institutions of religion because their job is to play host the story if you like. We cannot get away from this. And in this regard too many people are 'playing' or 'dancing' right now whilst Rome burns. But we also need to enable much more mentoring to happen of the creativity, flair and responsiveness that young people (and many in the third age too) bring to our woeful treatment of the environment, our inability to share resources more equably, and the seeming inability of faiths to bring their collective insights to bear on the business of peace-making and peace-keeping.

Locally, nationally and globally we have to equip people to be citizens with not just a passion for social justice - many have this by instinct almost - but with clearer frameworks within which to think this through. Ignorance of own faiths or world-views makes cross-border engagement futile. Social justice depends on higher levels of religious literacy. The more frankly we know about our own faiths the less easy it will be for any of us to tolerate the injustices of the world. There are then questions of priority and energy here which none of us may surely avoid.

District Six Lament

I was hungry to live
but you let my soul die.

I was thirsty for love
but you caused me to cry.

I was strange to the Flats
where you sent me to roam.

I was naked and cold
when you bulldozed my home.

I was sick without work
with no money for food

I was prisoned and barred
and you called me no good.

It was you, politician,
who did it to me.

You revealed your true heart
by your heartless decree.

Yet I love you, I love you.
Our loves you have rent.

Oh forgive them, our Father.
My brothers, repent.

Harry Wiggett

from Collected Poems 1970-2006

© Graham Serretta - '36, Harrington Street, District 6'
With thanks

Note from our Keynote writer Chris Chivers: District Six in Cape Town, South Africa was until the late 1960s a vibrant multi-ethnic community with people of many faiths living side by side in Cape Town. The apartheid Government forcibly removed its citizens to an area known as the Cape Flats, treated it as slum-clearance area, during the 1970s so that only the churches and mosques still stand. Despite the injustice of their actions even the apartheid authorities wouldn't bulldoze places of worship. Despite the implicit cry for social justice in the face of such barbarism this poem also contains hints of the spirit of reconciliation that has created a new framework for social justice in post-apartheid South Africa. Its author, Fr Harry Wiggett is an Anglican priest who ministered to Nelson Mandela and other political prisoners on Robben Island and in Pollsmoor Prison.

Faith and Phobia in Modern Britain

Paper given, during interfaith week 2010, by Sudarshan Bhatia, President of the National Council of Hindu Temples UK at the Islamic Culture Centre London.

Recently the United Kingdom has witnessed an increase in anti-religious feeling and phobia. This environment of confrontation can harm efforts of the various faith communities to work towards creating a harmonious, cohesive and integrated society. It is time for faith communities to join together and respond to this prejudice.

Faith communities and religions make an outstanding contribution to society. However, many people see religion as a problem because of the connection between radicalism and terrorism. The actions of a very small minority have tainted all religions.

Harmony and fellowship between people of different faiths and religious beliefs is a necessary foundation for universal peace, and I believe everyone should work towards eliminating the increasing phobia and prejudice that exists towards faith - whether its source is religious, racial, nationalistic or political.

It's one thing to promote your own faith; it's another to spend your time and energy in criticizing other people's faith. Religious tolerance means that we have to tolerate all religions, but intolerant action is wrong no matter what the source. It is this kind of hateful action that encourages an atmosphere where vandalism, phobia, prejudice, and hate crimes can flourish. With the many different cultures and religions now present in this country, not to speak of the world, we cannot afford to tolerate such anti-religious rhetoric.

It is striking to see how easy it is to pass down prejudice, phobia, hatred and violence from generation to generation. Many of those who show hostility towards faith are children and young adults who have inherited this pattern of hatred and violence.

The media can play a very big role in helping to overturn this scenario - and yet they don't! In fact, the media portrays an over-

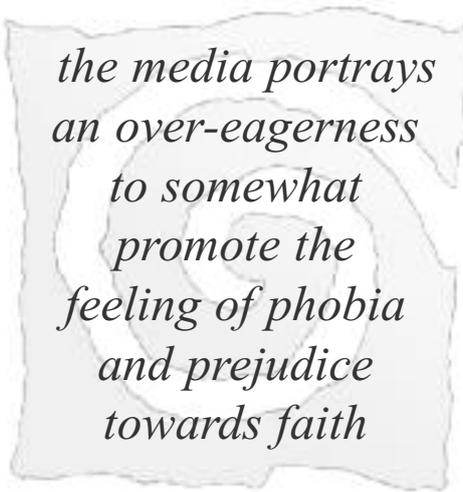
eagerness to somewhat promote the feeling of phobia and prejudice towards faith. This prejudice doesn't allow people to see the amazing things that faith communities are doing in the world.

The older generation has found a way to work for peace and tackle phobia and prejudice, but there's a lack of open dialogue to involve the youth in order to make the transition from prejudice to cooperation. Our response as faith communities is to ensure that there is dialogue between various faiths, politicians and youth, instead of silence, frustration and violence.

The youth are a powerful force in the world, and we need to be given an opportunity to educate them to choose between destruction and reconciliation, to write new stories for our communities and our families for years to come. We can begin to establish traditions that we can be proud of - that of interfaith cooperation, community cohesion, respect for one another's faith traditions, and peace.

Tolerance, compassion, forgiveness and respect for all - these are fundamentals of all faiths. Such virtues, when firmly established within the person, foster understanding and reduce religiously motivated violence, creating no room for phobia between faiths, or between society and religion.

The propagation of religious harmony is possible 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 in modern Britain. Such education will help a fourteen year old understand her friend's decision to don a burkha, or a sixty year old Hindu to appreciate his neighbour's religious beliefs even though the neighbour is not vegetarian.



*the media portrays
an over-eagerness
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and prejudice
towards faith*

One of the human values that hold the family and society together is the principle of reciprocity. It is derived from the human consensus that one should think and act in the same way as one would like to be considered and treated by others. "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you". To eradicate faith-related phobia we need to develop modern Britain as a society where people of different faiths, and even those of none, can come together to pursue their shared interests, enthusiasms and values. Such activities encompass everything from community centres to places of worship to collaborations on the web. In this way, the common tenets of the different religious scriptures and holy books that are followed in Britain will be the source of an outflow of a unified, creative energy among the different faith communities - something political parties or governments are unable to do.

Faith-based organisations, as well as voluntary and community organisations grounded in values such as social justice, solidarity, mutual respect and sustainability can engage in dialogue to share common interests and find solutions to rise above these faith phobias and reconcile differences between us. It is not wise to wait for politicians and their parties, businesses or anyone else to lead. We, the people and leaders of faith, must take the initiative to create the awareness, transparency, mutual respect and understanding of our different communities, by educating each other and the wider society in the common tenets of our respective faiths. Only this will lead to a harmonious Britain devoid of faith phobia.

One of the main reasons of phobia of another faith is that the follower of one religion not only fails to read about, know or comprehend his neighbour's religion, but knowledge about his own religion too is very limited. The differences of opinion that have arisen are the result of the influence of particular times and traditions, but in their outward form there is a basic similarity and commonality between religions.

For example, prayer and worship are an essential part of the day in every religion. The concept of places of pilgrimage is also common to all of the major faiths. We are directed to respect our parents, hence it is the need of the day that the teachers and heads of all faiths sit together and evolve a code by which followers of one faith respect the faith of others and desist from forcefully imposing their faith on others.



Phobia arises when the influence of religion is seen, in most cases wrongly, to paralyse the social development of those who follow it, leading to believers being accorded a segregated status in the wider community. Religion is then seen as something to be feared, appeased and accommodated, but never confronted or challenged. Such phobia is deepened when British society is seen to give in to demands for governance laws in the country that accommodate religious belief - laws that include, for example, time off work to observe non-traditional faith rites or holidays; special foods parallel to the regular menus; wearing clothes of a particular faith; businesses and banks governed exclusively by faith by - laws. All these things mark British society as a diversified, religious country - hence leading to a faith phobia among certain sections of our communities.

Our faith-transparency about what we teach and what we practice inside the religious institutions and in our homes propagates the message of tolerance, respect and love for all.

To reduce faith phobia, we propose a dialogue of reciprocity among the different faiths, with a programme of positive action, as follows:

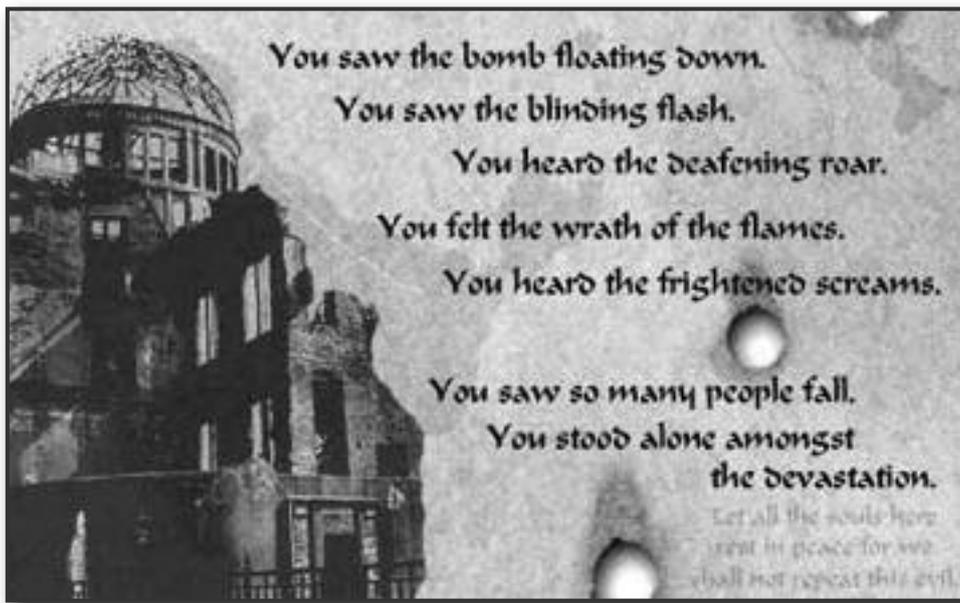
1. *Establish inter-religious visiting places by faith groups at the grassroot levels.*
2. *Establish an "All-faith Community Committee" to defuse disturbances arising from faith hatred.*
3. *Commitment is to faith only, not party politics.*
4. *Hold an all-faith festival once a year.*
5. *Promote the common tenets of understanding, respect and tolerance, as found in the holy books and scriptures of all faiths.*

The future begins now.

We believe in "Vasudhaive Kutumbkum" - the World is One Family. Let us work together to achieve this.

Hiroshima Day

6th August



Tadatoshi Akiba, three-term mayor of Hiroshima - one of two Japanese cities destroyed by atomic bombs dropped by the United States in World War II - has received a 2010 Ramon Magsaysay award for his work to get nuclear weapons abolished.

For Hiroshima Day 2010 Mayor Akiba wrote:

Sixty-five years ago, on the 6th August 1945, the victims of the atomic bomb experienced the end of the world. For the survivors the bombing was dehumanizing to the point of absolute evil, and they emerged with an iron will not to allow such a calamity to befall another human being ever again. From the nuclear fire emerged a philosophy of peace, breaking the chain of hatred and violence and backing a movement calling on the world to abolish nuclear arms and strive for world peace.

In the wake of U.S. President Barack Obama's declared goal of eliminating nuclear weapons, this movement is once again at

work, expanding in an attempt to change the world.

To eliminate nuclear arms. ... I call for ... a 2020 deadline for the abolition of nuclear arms. I call nations, cities and citizens of the world to cooperate in abolishing nuclear weapons.

From the
 nuclear fire
 emerged a
 philosophy of
 peace

The abolition of nuclear weapons would be a deed worthy of great note in human history. Hiroshima is considering a bid for the 2020 Summer Olympic Games as a way to commemorate the end of nuclear arms.

In the 21st century problems can be solved through the strength of cities and their people. From the 'Grameen Bank' (Bank for the Poor) lifting people of poverty, to the world-wide ban on land mines and the battle against global warming, we see the birth of a globalized

democracy.

From the bottom of my heart,

Footnote: Tadatoshi Akiba was just 3 years old when an atomic bomb hit his home in Hiroshima. A second atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki on the 9th August 1945. A commentator writes: 'A new shadow had fallen across the world....' cited: *The Home Front* by Arthur Marwick Thames & Hudson 1976

October Night

*October night and in the garden the dog
and I put the day to bed, our breath
like smoke-signals in the porch
light, invisible ink by the hedge.*

*Years turn fast on me now, autumns
so close together I can see harvest
in the fresh ploughed fields, and morning
in every sundown. I am auditing*

*possibilities: the library of eternities
written while I'm still drafting my own;
the news I don't have cancer frost-bright
as my love of home the days I feared*

*I might. Tonight, I revel in my research,
the gate-bolt scraping as the dog scares
the wind, the late marguerites dipping,
luminous in the rowan's shadow,*

*and the water in the verdigris stoop
reflecting reassurance. My breath
is my symbol, it is in all my elements,
in and out, I am signally alive.*

Symbol of Faith

All that is good

Jews all over the world light candles every Friday at sunset to welcome in the Sabbath. As I light my candles and say the blessing over them, I feel my connection to all other Jews through our shared history, culture and faith. In the light, I feel the peace of Shabbat descend as I allow this very special time of reflection, of renewal of my connection with my God and my faith.

In Judaism, as well as the two candles lit to welcome the Sabbath every Friday at sunset; and the candle lit and then extinguished to mark the going out of Sabbath on Saturday after dark, we have the *Ner Tamid* - the everlasting

light that shines in every synagogue; and which many people light in their homes on High Holy Days and on the anniversary of the death of loved ones.

The Jewish festival of lights - Chanukah - traditionally celebrates the Maccabees' recapture of the Temple in Jerusalem from the Greeks. When they came to rededicate the Temple, there was only enough oil to burn for one day, but miraculously, the oil lasted for 8 days, allowing fresh oil to be pressed and prepared to keep the *Ner Tamid*, the everlasting light in the Temple, burning. During the 8-day festival we light candles each evening.



We use a special 8-branched candelabra or Menorah and light one candle the first night, two the second and so on, as we recite blessings and sing songs to commemorate the miracle of the oil, and the faith of the people in God and in the future.

We place our Menorah on a window sill or near a door, so that it is not secret or hidden, but can be seen shared and enjoyed from outside, in the street, by people passing by. When I light my Shabbat candles each week and my Chanukah candles each evening during the festival, I feel how fortunate and privileged I am that I can do this safely, without fear. I think of all people - Jews in other times and in other places and people of other faiths throughout the world both in the past and, sadly, still in the present, who cannot practise their religion or enjoy symbols of their faith freely and publicly, or even privately, without fear of reprisals, harassment, persecution or even the risk of imprisonment, torture or death.

I believe that light stands as a symbol for all that is good in the world and all that guides us toward the highest human and spiritual ideals we can aspire to. According to Jewish faith, God told Jews that we are to be “a light unto the nations, to bring My salvation to the ends of the Earth”. As

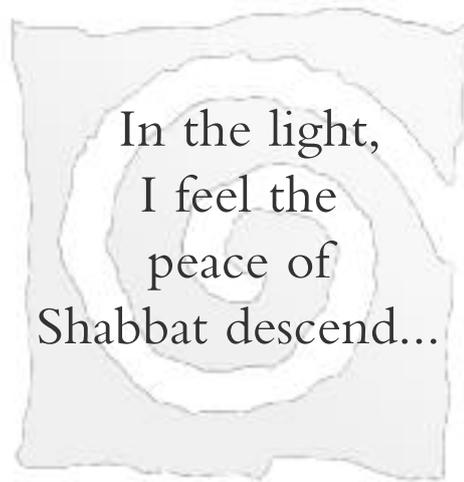
a Jew and as a human being, I believe it is my task, my life’s work and my honour to do all that I can to be a light in the world; to help ignite the light that will guide us all from

darkness to light, from ignorance to understanding, from fear and doubt and despair to hope and faith; and to kindle the light that will illuminate our world so that we are able to see ourselves, each other and our lives within the clear light of truth, justice, love, peace and greater understanding.

Light is an important symbol of faith for many religious traditions. People of many different faiths light candles or use light to mark special occasions and festivals, to celebrate or commemorate events from the past, to express their hope and faith for the

future. The light from a candle burns and sheds light on the surrounding darkness, enabling us to move forward and tread with confidence as we can see the way ahead lighted for us. Light casts out fear of the unknown and helps us to see each other and our path through life more clearly.

The first words God speaks in the creation story shared by Jews and Christians are “Let there be Light” - and the verse continues “And there was light. And God saw that the Light was Good”.



“Let there be light...
And there was light...
And God saw that the
Light was Good”

Resurrection

Witnessed

It is 1940 and with the eyes of a child I look at the centre of Bristol and see it as a blazing inferno following a twelve hour air raid of incendiary bombs on the night of Sunday 24th November. I watch my father as he weeps to see twenty years of his life's work utterly destroyed in our home 88 Redcliffe Street. Fire has the power to annihilate: I can smell the stench of acrid smoke as many buildings continue to smoulder.

A few days later I am walking around in a dazed state with my parents, trying to identify individual streets - almost impossible amidst all the rubble. Suddenly a man approached my father - who is a locksmith - saying "I need a key cut, lucky I met you". My father sighs, "But now I have no shop, no workbench, no tools". "What am I going to do then..." pleads the man. My father pauses, then raising his hands says "But God has left me my two hands, I will start again: congratulations you are my first customer"...my father moves from desperation to inspiration.

Now, some months later and still in Redcliffe, at the site of No. 7 Somerset Square, I am surrounded by piles of debris, damaged houses, devastation. I hear the thud of unsafe buildings as they crash to the ground; the air is thick with dust.

Our house has been totally destroyed by a direct hit from a high explosive bomb on the night of 11/12th April 1941 (Good Friday). Police come to check on survivors and inform us that some of our neighbours have been killed. We ourselves are rescued from the ruined shelters of St. Mary Redcliffe School.

All day Saturday we spend in a communal hall for the homeless and are eventually offered accommodation in the village of Queen Charlton where, hopefully, we may get some sleep. We arrive with only the clothing in which we stand; my mother, sister and I go to one house, my father and brother to another. On Easter Sunday we are walking along the lane towards my father's cottage when now we see him (albeit in a bedraggled state) coming towards us (also in a bedraggled

state), with open arms, joyfully declaring "We are alive, we are all alive". He had just walked the four miles to and from Keynsham to attend early Mass to give thanksgiving for life...once again my father moves from desperation to inspiration.

And so it is for Christians: Good Friday may lead to DESPERATION, but then on Easter Sunday, comes the RESURRECTION - my INSPIRATION - forever.

"We are alive, we are all alive"

Symbol of Faith



Cited: *Bristol in the 1940s* photograph & publication by Reece Winstone.

This photograph shows the heap of rubble that remained of my home in Somerset Square - No. 7 in a row of terraced houses numbered 1 - 10 - after a direct hit on the night 11/12th April 1941.

The Cosmic Cycle

Symbol of Faith



1. *Sarva Khal Vidam Brahma = All that we perceive in the universe is Brahman (Supreme Reality)*
2. *Satyameva Jayate = Ultimately the Truth prevails*
3. *Krinvanto Vishwamaryam = Make the world noble*
4. *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakum = The world is one family*

The emblem Swastik is derived from the Sanskrit word meaning auspicious or benedictory. This symbolic representation depicts the unending Cosmic Cycle in clockwise direction. If you revolve along the circumference of a circle clockwise, your right hand will be facing the centre inwardly. All Hindu ritualistic ceremonies or prayers start and end with moving clockwise around the deity or the sacred fire (Agni), inclining righteously with reverence to the centre of the Cosmic Universal Reality.

The diagrammatic Vedic Swastik has been the symbol for protection, love, hope and peace for hundreds of years. Swastik symbols have been found on coins, potteries and cave-frescoes in antiquity of ancient India, Asia Minor, China and Central America.

Tragically Swastika and Garuda (eagle - the vehicle of Vishnu) was adopted by Adolph Hitler to propagate supremacy of the Aryan Race and it subsequently ended up in symbolising all negative attributes - war, cruelty, anti-Semitism and the holocaust.

As you will see the Hindu Swastik is upright whilst the Nazi symbol is obliquely slanting - I perceive it as a falling idol that culminated in a historic global catastrophe. But the four Vedic Slogans representing the four limbs of Swastik have passed the test of time, space and mortality, universally and eternally on the Cosmic cycle.

“I perceive it as a falling idol that culminated in a historic global catastrophe.”



Esther...

Threaded with Grace

Every Jewish holiday of Purim (which this year occurs on the 19-20th of March) when we read the book of Esther in the Hebrew Scriptures I find myself pondering issues of beauty and power, and wondering who is the real heroine of the story.

In brief, the narrative of Esther is set in Persia and features much intrigue in the court of the King's Palace. Following the exile of his wife Vashti, King Ahasuerus holds a beauty pageant to choose a new wife, and Esther, hiding her Jewish identity at the suggestion of her uncle - Mordechai - is chosen. Mordechai learns that one of the King's advisors Haman wants to have all the Jews of the Empire put to death, and so Esther embarks on a subtle campaign to expose Haman to the King and ultimately the Jews are saved.

There are two possible heroines and female role models in the book of Esther - assuming we ignore Haman's wife who is shown, in the story, to have genocidal and manipulative tendencies. Esther is the most obvious choice; the beautiful young Jewess who hides her identity and is picked, in a contest of women who have been pampered and indulged for a year, to become the Queen of Persia. Thus she is allowed access to the King when her people need her most, making her ideally placed to avert a planned genocide of the Empire's Jews. Yet for many women today we have to acknowledge a different role model in the story - Vashti.

At the start of the story we briefly meet Vashti - The Queen of Persia - who is asked to appear before the King and his rather merry companions to display her beauty. Traditional Jewish interpreters (Midrash Esther Rabbah 3:14) even suggest that she is asked to appear naked! Whether her appearance was to be naked or not, she refuses to be put on display, and is subsequently banished from the Kingdom to set an example to other women; a warning to them not to disobey the demands of their husbands.

Not a happy little tale - but a fantastic example of a woman standing her ground and refusing to be objectified.

Esther wins her position as Queen through a beauty pageant, and could be seen as using her feminine charms to manipulate the King - albeit with good cause - but is this a good model to set? And is this really the Jewish idea of beauty and how it should be used?

Beauty is said to be in the eye of the beholder and each generation has had its ideal shape and perfect features, but today we seem to have created increasingly narrow approaches to our

bodies, and definitions of what it is to be beautiful. With increasing consumerism, eating disorders, obsession with beauty and so many people, especially the young, feeling bad about some aspect of their body, I am increasingly uncomfortable with the superficial level of interpretation we might find in the story of Esther. Of how beauty won the day, and of how it was at least a part of the bargaining tool of our heroine. But perhaps this reading of the story is mistaken!

It seems that it made the Rabbis of old as uncomfortable as it makes me. In the

Talmudic commentary on the book of Esther (generally dated to around 500 CE) it is suggested that actually, Esther was not all that beautiful, but was rather average looking.

'Rabbi ben Azzai says: "Esther wasn't tall, and wasn't small, she was medium, like a myrtle [her Hebrew name was Haddassah which means myrtle]". Rabbi Yehoshua then continues: "Esther was sallow [this could even be read literally as 'Esther was green!']" (Megillah 13a).

So how on earth did she conquer all the other Persian beauties? The text continues: **'she was threaded with grace, which stretched above her'**.

*for many women
today we have to
acknowledge a
different role
model in the story
- Vashti*

Now one of the funny things about the Book of Esther is that God does not seem to get a lot of coverage. In fact, he isn't mentioned once. But for the Rabbis, God was, of course, present, and Esther winning the beauty pageant is an example of his mysterious workings in the story. The fact that she triumphed over the other contestants despite her average looks and strange complexion shows God's hand in the narrative. They argue that Esther appeared beautiful to the King not just because God helped her, but because her inner beauty was so striking that it shone through for all to see!

“beauty is so much more than skin deep, and the goodness within us all shines out regardless - perhaps even as that part of each of us that is made in the image of God.”

In the Talmudic interpretation of the story we are being offered a very different image of Esther than that of the winner of Miss Persia. Not only do the Rabbis show God's power at work, but also Esther's own goodness shining through her fallow features, so that she was indeed beautiful: but in quite a different way from that suggested in a simple interpretation of the story.

What a wonderful message to take from the scheming, slaughtering, beauty-obsessed story of Purim; that beauty is so much more than skin deep, and the goodness within us all shines out regardless - perhaps even as that part of each of us that is made in the image of God. Esther couldn't have won the beauty contest even after a year of pampering, oiling, scenting and generally having what sounds like a wonderful time, if her innate goodness, grace and kindness - all perhaps seen as God shining through - hadn't beamed out of her and appealed so much to the King, who was then able to look beyond all the superficial beauty to Esther's true, internal beauty.

We can all shine, and I hope this Purim we are all able to look a little bit deeper at ourselves, and those around us, and not be caught up in the superficiality of how society would like us to look, but how our communities need us to act - with grace, goodness, and inner beauty.

Debbie Young-Somers is a Rabbi at The West London Synagogue of British Jews in central London, where she is responsible, among other things, for Interfaith Dialogue in the community.

I will *sing* for *you*



*I'll sing for you,
As you summon me from my sleep.
I'll sing for you,
As I lay awake.*

*You call out to me -
Very unexpectedly!
My heart muses at your call.
I'll sing for you,
My song of sadness.*

*Darkness gathers,
Birds fly to their nest,
Boats have come ashore,
But my heart has had no rest!*

*My sorrow soars for you.
I'll sing for you,
My song of sadness.*

*For you, a steady surge of tears
Mar my day's pursuits.*

*You touch me -
You fill my soul with your sweetness.
But then you fade away!
It seems, you dwell beyond
The veil of my anguish.*

*My sorrow soars for you,
So my song is for you.*

*My sorrow soars for you,
My song is for you.*

Rabindranath Tagore
Translation © **Shiban Akbar**

RACISM QUESTIONED...

“IT’S NOT JUST ABOUT BLACK AND WHITE MISS”:



minority ethnic schools) towards the many different cultures which exist in Britain today.

The writer worked collaboratively with the children in deciding how to collect information and this is explained in the final section of the book. Here she provides an insight into her research supporting her argument that the data is richer because the children themselves worked collaboratively with her in designing questions for the interviews with small groups of children. **One girl of Asian heritage said “So we are like dictionaries Miss you want to look things up in us.”**

My interviews were conducted in such a way that the children felt able to speak freely about different cultures and how to counter racism in their schools. Some children displayed anti racist sentiments, Terri a white girl noted **“Grandparents might think differently. In the olden days people seemed to be more racist. We’ve been brought up to know about different religions and we’re friendlier...children know more and are less racist than adults”.**

I charted children’s opinions into 4 categories, for example:

- **Category A:** anti racist with a high degree of knowledge about other cultures characterized by many Asian heritage children and a few white children for example Terri above.
- **Category B:** Many children, mainly from predominantly white schools, displayed anti racist views despite their paucity of knowledge of cultures different to their own,
- **Category C:** is particularly interesting because I found that a few children who were deemed to be knowledgeable about a variety of diverse cultures nevertheless expressed racist opinions. Sometimes these children instantly regretted their

The attitudes of primary school aged children towards cultural diversity is the subject of a new book by the University of Cumbria's Dr Sally Elton-Chalcraft. Entitled "It's not just about black and white: children's awareness of race" published by Trentham Books (2009), the book explores the thoughts of a range of 9 and 10 year olds (in two predominantly white and two

comments or behaviour, for example a girl of Caribbean heritage pulled at the corners of her eyes mimicking, to her mind, a Chinese person and then said “I shouldn’t have done that”. But one boy of Asian heritage, was described by children from a variety of different cultures, to be a “bully and a racist.”

- **Category D:** A minority of children expressed racist views and these children were in the main white boys from low socio economic backgrounds and showed little knowledge of other cultures. Many of them rehearsed the views they heard at home. This can be found in other work such as the seminal “Racism in children’s lives” Troyna and Hatcher (1992).

For example Max a white boy said:

“My dad's ermm a racist because he don't like no brown skinned people but he does like half caste cos there's a wrestler that's half caste De Roc

Sally: So how did you describe your dad, your Dad's a what?

Max: Err a racist he don't like brown skinned people but he does like half castes, 'cos he's just fine with half castes, 'cos he used to take the rip out of half castes but I said 'don't dad because it's a bit nasty but you can take the rip out of Hindus because I don't like them'. 'Cos it's Bin Laden he's like the boss of all the Hindus (pause) That's about all I know”.

This racist comment is especially offensive for a variety of reasons as Max misconceives Bin Laden as a Hindu and in so doing implies that, like him, all Hindus are terrorists. It would of course be

equally as prejudiced if he had called Bin Laden a Muslim, a detail which many Muslims dispute, because again there is the implication that all Muslims are terrorists. There is obviously much work to be done here!

However, generally the children provide vibrant, profound views, and often rather surprising ideas. I accompany these in the book with my own close observation of school life, and the views and practices of teachers. The following interchange shows children at one of the predominantly white schools talking about the literal colours of people's skins. Bart and Michelle are white, Kurt is dual heritage Caribbean and white:

Kurt: Yeah all the teachers are [white in this school]

Michelle: all the kids are

Kurt: I'm orange

A minority of children expressed racist views and these children were in the main white boys from low socio economic backgrounds

Sally: What did you say?

Kurt: I'm orange

Sally: You're orange?

Bart: Looks like brown

Kurt: I'm half caste

Michelle: And Shanice is [half caste [sic]]

Sally: What do you mean by half caste Kurt?

Kurt: 'Cos my mum - I think she's from Jamaican and erm and so that makes me half caste but I don't know what half caste means

Sally: Ok and what's your Dad?

Kurt: ...he's not from Jamaica - he's half ..he's quarter German...

Sometimes black children in white societies feel they have to name the colour of their outward appearance to show they have pigeonholed themselves in a so-called pecking order. In this instance Kurt did not conform, and I would suggest that he was endeavouring to create his own identity.

I synthesize theory with the findings from my research in the four schools and offer the reader an adaptation of 'types of multiculturalism' adapted from Kincheloe and Stenberg (1997). These types range from the superficial "conservative multiculturalists who are tokenist" to the "critical multiculturalists", the latter being the preferable approach for schools to adopt to ensure anti racism prevails.

1) Conservative multi culturalists (mono culturalism)

are 'tokenist'. They attempt to address multicultural issues but deep down, they believe in the superiority of Western (white), patriarchal culture.

2) Liberal multiculturalists are dedicated towards working to 'one race'. They attempt to gloss over differences in an attempt to make everyone equal and the 'same' ('they' are the 'same' as 'us' they just happen to be a different colour.)

3) Pluralist multiculturalism Pluralism becomes a supreme social virtue, diversity is pursued and exoticised. There is cultural 'tourism' where 'they' (as opposed to 'us') live in an exotic parallel world. Eg "Hanukkah is the Jewish Christmas" (an example of neo colonialism.)

4) Left essentialist multiculturalists are extreme in promoting the minority culture; to the extent that the dominant culture is seen as 'bad' and the marginalised as 'good'.

5) Critical multiculturalists believe in the promotion of an individual's consciousness as a social being. They promote an awareness (self reflection) of how and why his/her opinions and roles are shaped by dominant perspectives. They appreciate that there are differences within as well as between cultures.

Elton-Chalcraft 2009: 82) Adapted from Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997)

I conclude the book with some pointers for future practice that incorporate a critical multicultural stance. This includes: nurturing pride in each child's culture and encouraging respect for unfamiliar cultures; promoting anti-racist education for all children, particularly in predominantly white schools, and challenging cultures of dominance. Throughout the book I draw on the work of leaders in the field notably Connolly (2000), Dadzie (2000) Gaine (2005) and present practical ways forward, for example using Persona Dolls in Religious Education lessons (Elton-Chalcraft 2006). For example a Sikh doll, Jeetinder, is taken to visit a class and talks to the children about visiting the local playground on his journey into their school (thus a rapport is built up with the children). Next the Persona doll, Jeetinder, talks about Sikhism and the similarities and differences between the 5Ks, symbolic items worn by Sikhs, and what the children have learned about Christian symbols, and also the symbols that children may wear everyday, for example Brownie uniforms and football shirts. Finally Jeetinder expresses his dismay at the teasing he encounters about wearing his hair in a top knot and the children discuss racism and the unpleasantness of bullying in general. The lesson ends with the children helping Jeetinder prepare some information about Sikhism so that racism can be challenged and Jeetinder and the children feel empowered to stand up for themselves against bullies and racists.

The book is intended as an enlightening and enjoyable read for primary teachers and student teachers whilst providing what I believe to be important new grounded information for policy makers and school managers.

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Biographical note:

Sally Elton-Chalcraft joined St Martin's college now University of Cumbria, as a senior lecturer in 2002. She is the course leader for Religious Studies on the teacher education for primary schools programme. She is also minority ethnic recruitment and retention officer. She works on the Masters level courses at the university, and in 2008 her jointly edited research methods book was published (Elton-Chalcraft, S. Hansen, Twiselton, S. (editors) (2008) *Doing classroom research: a step-by-step guide for student teachers* Maidenhead: OUP.

Companions *in Christ*

There was no question that I wouldn't be going to see Pope Benedict when he came to Scotland. I wasn't excited at the prospect or caught up in any great promises or expectations, I simply felt that it was my duty to attend the Mass celebrated by the leader of the Catholic Church.

There was an interesting catalogue of negativity in the lead up to the event. The press condemned the visit. Glasgow City Council was criticised for creating a logistical nightmare. First came the list of rules and regulations: there will be no seats; you're not allowed to bring umbrellas. Then came the travel restrictions. "You have no option but to travel to the Mass on organised bus trips with your parish churches; no entry on the day without a ticket". It is a well-known psychological principle that choice is important to people. If the organisers wanted to put people off attending, by restricting their choices, they succeeded.

I was dumbfounded to hear that many of my friends - older women - would not be going: "Oh, it's too difficult, it'll be too long a day, I won't be able to stand for that length of time." These women are the body of the Catholic Church. They are daily communicants, whom I have long admired for their faith and dedication. It just didn't seem right that they weren't going.

On the day itself, we headed for the church and spirits were high when we arrived. We lined up to receive our official entry tickets - luminous green wrist bands. When we arrived in Glasgow the good humour amongst the pilgrims was palpable - a spirit of goodwill, a sense of occasion. People were laden with chairs, picnic baskets, banners and flags and their yellow papal backpacks. Hundreds of people, young and old made their way towards the park. I smiled at the merchandisers selling scarves, banners and flags - more commonly found at football matches. Business was booming.

Bellahouston Park was a stunning backdrop to embrace the thousands of pilgrims. The yellow banners and flags glistened and glittered in the luminous autumn sunlight adding a festive atmosphere to this special occasion.

I was delighted to see so many young faces - school children, teenagers, young parents with babies and toddlers. This was not the face of the Catholic Church that I'm used to. Our congregation is fairly ageing and there was something very heartening to be surrounded by youth. Cheers of "Subo, Subo, Subo.." filled the air as Susan Boyle appeared on stage. When she sang her heart out the audience joined in. She looked simply radiant.

Within the crowd, many people had radios pinned to their ears following the Pope's journey from East to West. There were regular updates: "That's him leaving Edinburgh now". It wasn't long before helicopters were hovering above the park, indicating that he was drawing closer.

A procession of Priests walked through the park as they made their way to the altar. Priest processions can be solemn occasions, but not today. Smiling, happy Priests waved to the crowds and joined in the sense of excitement that was unfolding.

The crowd erupted when the Pope Mobile appeared in the park. We cheered, we waved, we smiled and Pope Benedict waved and smiled back. The Police Pipe Band (or the Holy Spirit?) filled the air with "Amazing Grace".

50,000 cheering pilgrims turned the volume down and a quiet hush trickled through the park in silent preparation for the Mass. We transcended from celebratory joy to deep peaceful silence. We were gently led out of our silence as the choir sang "Grace to you and Peace". The park erupted into song once more as we joined in singing "Be thou my vision".



50,000 cheering pilgrims turned the volume down and a quiet hush trickled through the park in silent preparation for the Mass

The German Pope conducted the Mass in English, the Eucharistic prayer in Latin, and left us with a Gaelic blessing. His voice was quiet, his presence humble, his words inspiring.

“Be public examples of faith” he urged “Scotland needs good role models for a faithful future”. He encouraged us to “walk hand in hand with our fellow Christians in Scotland who are members of other Churches, to build a bright future for Scotland, based on our common Christian heritage”. He warned against the “glittering temptations that promise happiness, and turn out to be destructive or divisive”. He appealed to the young and prayed that they would “search for Christ and come to know him and love him and that this would be the key to freeing them from a superficial existence”.

‘Heart speaks to Heart’ was the key theme for the visit. Pope Benedict’s message reached my heart. I was uplifted by the occasion, moved by his presence and inspired by the thousands of companions in the park for whom faith in Christ matters.

Let’s credit Pope Benedict for a superb media u-turn. The headlines the following morning, proclaimed a very different message than before: “He came, he saw and he conquered”.



Photograph: Ann Turner



Photograph: Monica Smith

“Heart speaks to heart”

Pope Benedict’s Visit to England and Scotland September 2010

On 16th. September when Pope Benedict was flying to Glasgow, after he had faced the inevitable questioning by journalists travelling on his plane, perhaps he settled down to look through the text of his homily prepared for the celebration Mass to be held that evening. The Gospel chosen relates the sending out of the 72 disciples to preach to the neighbouring villages Jesus counsels them **“Remember, I am sending you off like lambs among wolves...”** We may speculate that Pope Benedict might have felt that he himself was about to share that fate! However that sentence actually begins with the words: **“Start off now”**, and so he did for four action-packed days which became significant for Christianity and all religions in our land.

The Pope took as his theme John Henry Newman’s motto **“Heart speaks to heart”** and he himself lived this message throughout his visit. The excellent television coverage, which began with the landing of the Alitalia plane in Edinburgh, reminded us from the start that this was a State Visit and so, greeted by the Duke of Edinburgh as well as by Church dignitaries, Benedict was driven to meet the Queen at Holyrood Palace. Many will remember the moving shots of Her Majesty and His Holiness walking together: two world leaders, respected as wisdom elders for our time, speaking to each other - surely as heart to heart.

Short as was the time spent in Scotland, it certainly set the tone: crowded streets, enthusiastic flag-waving children, skirling pipers continuing their welcome for long stretches, the attractive newly-designed “Papal Tartan” worn by as many as possible, including the Pope himself, gave the opportunity to display the warmth of welcome and the essence of scottishness.

The climax came in the Mass celebrated in Bellahouston Park, attended - despite prior prediction of empty seats - by 65,000 people, all intent on welcome and worship. It was the Feastday of St. Ninian the Celtic missionary who had brought so many Scots to Christianity and was highlighted in Benedict’s Homily as a model in our modern world. In this joyous atmosphere of song, prayer and blessing ended the first phase of the visit, described by the Archbishop of Glasgow as a ‘golden’ day.

Friday was an all-encompassing day for Pope Benedict that began early with meeting religious Sisters and Brothers in St. Mary’s University College Twickenham. The quiet prayerful session served as a good prelude to his busy active morning with a great number of school children drawn from all over the country. Once again Benedict adapted his manner easily to them and displayed openly that his heart was speaking to their eager and enthusiastic hearts. This was followed by his meeting with leaders of other faiths where he was welcomed in the name of them all by the Chief Rabbi, Lord Jonathan Sacks.

In the afternoon the Pope stepped outside the precincts of the Catholic Church and was engaged in what was perhaps the most critical and demanding section of his visit. History was indeed made as Benedict made a fraternal visit to the Archbishop of Canterbury at Lambeth Palace, before breaking all records by speaking to Civil Leaders in Westminster Hall. His address there deserves serious study by all involved in State and Church government.

Westminster Abbey, one of the Church of England’s most hallowed shrines, provided a fitting place for the climax of the day: Evening Prayer which included an address from both leaders. To those present as well as the many more watching on television, this was ecumenism at its best, expressed and celebrated by those who commit themselves seriously to the desired unity of our Christian Churches. In his final prayer, Pope Benedict touched on his theme once more **“Lord, bring the hearts of believers together in your praise and in common sorrow for their sins. Heal the divisions among Christians that we may rejoice in the perfect unity of your Church and move together as one to the eternal life in your kingdom.”**

Saturday may be described as a family party day, which began with private meetings with the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister and the acting Leader of the Opposition. The principal event of the morning was the celebration of Mass in Westminster Cathedral. During his homily Benedict not only spoke openly of his sorrow and shame about the scandal of the abuse of children by members of the clergy, but also of the situation for Christians in our secular world **“One of the greatest challenges facing us today, is how to speak convincingly of the wisdom and liberating power of God’s word to a world which all too often sees the Gospel as a constriction of human freedom instead of the truth which liberates our minds and enlightens our efforts to live wisely and well.”**

As he left the Cathedral at the end of the Mass, the Pope was greeted by 2,500 young people representing almost every parish in England and Wales. Their spokesman compared the meeting to a family reunion, and declared their ambition to become “the saints of the third millennium”. In the afternoon, Benedict moved to the other end of the age range by visiting St. Peter’s Residence for Older People where he openly shared his personal experience of being “a brother who knows well the joys and struggles that come with age”. His gentle relaxed manner during this visit revealed how much he felt at home with the residents. Meanwhile in another part of Central London a planned march and rally of the ‘Protest the Pope’ Group was taking place. Thankfully we live in a country that values freedom of speech but the strident language and lurid posters presented by this group seemed somehow out of place when they were surrounded by joyful crowds gathering in their tens of thousands on their way to Hyde Park to welcome the man himself.

The climax of this eventful day was the Prayer Vigil celebration, where 80,000 came together to greet the Pope and to pray together on the eve of the beatification of John Henry (Cardinal) Newman which was to take place in Birmingham the next morning. Beatification is a major step on the way to sainthood, and Benedict, who has studied Newman's thought since his student days, had decided to involve himself in this process where Newman had lived, worked and suffered and become a significant figure in the English Victorian Church, - both Anglican and Catholic.

'The party' had been going on for a number of hours before the Pope actually arrived with different Church agencies and institutions making their contributions; compared by Carl Boardman, and including items by The Priests, the growing crowd had participated with energy, endurance and enthusiasm. This was the time for families with members ranging from grandparents to toddlers who had travelled in parish bus-loads from all over the country. The organisation was excellent, the weather favourable and the excitement mounting as Benedict arrived in the popemobile, seemingly tireless and ready for another long and beautiful liturgy. Dwelling in his homily on the life and goodness of Newman, he concluded by declaring **"Christ has need of families to remind the world of the dignity of human love and the beauty of family life. He needs men and women who devote themselves to the noble task of education, tending the young and forming them in the ways of the Gospel"**.

There followed the Catholic service of Benediction preceded by Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament in which the Eucharistic host is placed in a monstrance on the altar for veneration and adoration by the congregation. This was one of the most impressive moments of the whole visit: total unbroken reverent prayerful silence of 80,000 which lasted a full eight minutes.

An early start on Sunday morning - for the Pope to go by helicopter from Wimbledon to Birmingham and for the congregation from parishes, some beginning their journeys soon after midnight, and arriving in the least favourable weather of the visit. No dampened spirits however as the Pope entered Crofton Park for the Mass of Beatification, to be welcomed by Archbishop Bernard Longley and the 60,000 assembled. This was perhaps the most Catholic of the ceremonies, and one rarely, if ever, seen hitherto in our country. At the beginning of the Mass, Pope Benedict declared that John Henry Newman **"will henceforth be invoked as Blessed"**. A large illuminated portrait was dramatically unveiled and the Mass continued, movingly, with the Gospel being read by the American Deacon whose cure had been recognised in the process of Beatification.

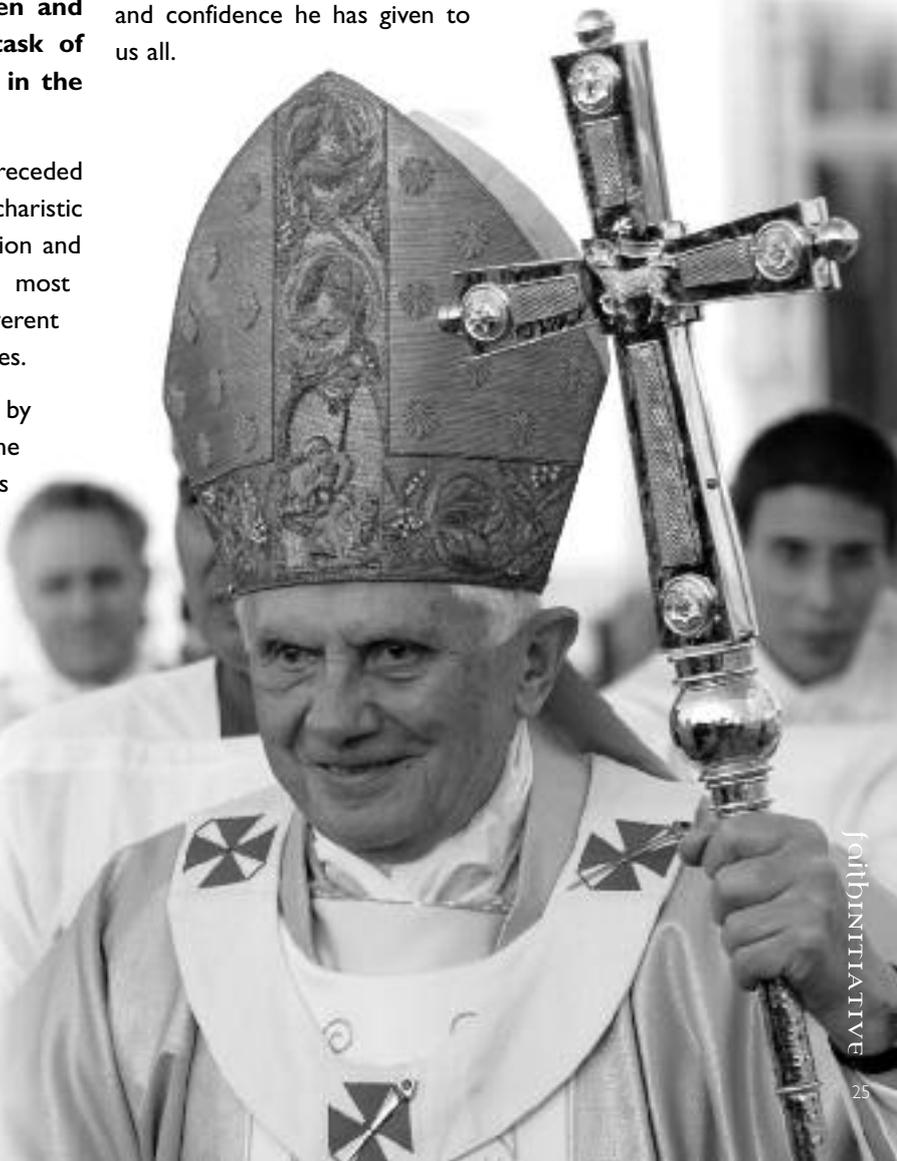
Later in the morning history was recalled for Benedict as he visited Newman's Oratory and talked with the members of the community that he founded. Focus on the present life of the Church in England was doubtless the subject of his meeting with the Bishops of the UK, and its future with the gathering of students for the priesthood later in the afternoon.

As the visit drew to a close at the airport, the dual threads of State and Church were evident once again. The Prime Minister concluded his farewell speech by quoting the Pope's theme of 'heart speaking to heart': **"It is a fitting tribute to the words you have spoken and the sentiments that you leave behind"**.

In his parting words Benedict revealed again the wishes of his heart, remembering his experience of meeting other religious leaders

"Sharing some thoughts with them about the contribution the religions can offer to the development of a healthy and pluralistic society".

Any speculations on returning journeys? The disciples rejoiced on theirs, as did Pope Benedict for he told us so in his Audience the following Wednesday. What about his listeners? Surely Christians as well as others can feel heartened by the new hope and confidence he has given to us all.



OF Art

Thoughts about.....

We are second year pupils (ages 12-13) at Hermitage Academy in Helensburgh. In our Religious Studies class we have been studying 'Ultimate Questions' such as 'why is there suffering?' 'Is there life after death?' and 'Is there a God?'. We have been looking at lots of different answers to these questions and we would like to share our own views on these questions with you. We all have very different views and have written some of them down so you can know what we think. We have tried to answer these questions as truthfully as we can and we hope you enjoy reading our following thoughts.

Stacey and Fionna

MY THOUGHTS ON WHETHER WE HAVE A SOUL OR NOT

I believe we do have souls, as well as a destiny. Our souls are possibly all connected - it's as if your soul decides who you will know forever. - Meryn

I do not think we have a soul because there is no place in the body for it. - Alistair

I think we have a soul because human beings need something to power their body and mind...we need an energy to power us like a battery... - Laura K

I think we do have a soul because when people die we don't just have a broken heart we also have a broken soul... - Lizzie

If we didn't have a soul I don't think you could live and show emotions. We'd be like robots... - Caris

Our soul is a second life - if our body dies, our soul will live on to complete the journey. - Callum

MY THOUGHTS ON GOD

I think God is real because when I cry or am angry I feel God is touching me and making me feel better. I pray to him at night. - Chloe

I don't believe in God because if there was, why is there suffering. - Chris

God is a tricky one. There is no concrete evidence that God is real. I also think some people believe in him for comfort, so they have someone to believe in and someone to watch over them so they know they're not alone. - Stacey

I really want to believe in God. I have been going to church recently, but then I go home and my dad and brother don't believe and tell me why and it really confuses me. - Fionna

I think there is a God, he just watches over us and helps in small things. - Christopher

God is a religious phenomenon that originated from the bible. Many people claim they have witnessed him but they are not listened too. But I believe that these people have some sort of religious significance. - Dominic



Kyra and Chloe - Water bugs and dragonflies The question most commonly asked by the children - Lorna Douglas

MY THOUGHTS ON LIFE AFTER DEATH

I think that our lives will be judged and then we will go to a place to clean our souls. However I do not believe that God would send anyone to hell. - Caitlin

I think after we die we, or our spirits, go to the clouds and when there are shapes in the clouds it is how you died or something meaningful. - Alistair

I think life after death is real because some people have memory of their past life. - Natasha

I believe there is life after death and that your soul goes into another living thing, such as a new born baby. - Sean

I think there is life after death, cause it gives me hope... - Fionna

I think there is life after death and it depends on where you want to go and how strong you want to go there. - Rachel

I think that we don't go to heaven but stay in the hearts of those we love and know. - Jasmine

MY THOUGHTS ON WHY THERE IS SUFFERING

Because humans cause it all mostly we destroy everything in our path. - Konor and Mark

I think suffering is the way of life, it is unfair but it's the way life goes I suppose. - Caspin

I think there is suffering to teach us about pain, and if there was no suffering we would feel no joy. - Alistair

I think there is suffering because God is trying to test us and see if we can stop it. - Christopher

I think that there is suffering because it is a test and you learn from it. - Abigail

We create our own pain and suffering. - Jasmine

MY THOUGHTS ON WHY WE ARE HERE

I think we are here because we are needed. - Ellen

I think we are here to bring something to the planet. You have a duty to fulfil. You have to figure out that duty. - Jack

There doesn't have to be a reason for us to be here. - Scott T

We are here just like the Universe is here. We are here naturally. - Mary

I think we are here on a test to see if we can live with God. - Liana

I think we are here on earth to fulfil a purpose, what that purpose is I don't know, but I have this feeling that we are here to do something important, and once we have completed that, better and greater things will happen. - Laura J



Rhys - Adam and Eve



Laura and Eilidh - Love matters



Natasha - Tree of Suffering

A very modern malaise...

“ There is a perverse form of contemporary violence (and that is) activism and overwork....The rush and pressure of modern life are a form of violence. To allow oneself to be carried away by a multitude of conflicting concerns, to surrender to too many demands, to commit oneself to too many projects..... is to succumb to violence. The frenzy of activism neutralizes our work for peace. It destroys the fruitfulness of our won work, because it kills the root of inner wisdom which makes work fruitful.”

Thomas Merton (1915-1968)

How often are we truly alone with ourselves for any prolonged period of time? How often do we enter into a space of stilled silence? How often do we find sufficient time in order to think and reflect upon our lives? One of the biggest problems we face in our economically driven world is that of over activity - the desire to be constantly striving and achieving. Rushing around, trying to speed up this moment in order to enter the next, never quite knowing that underlying all this energy is anxiety - a deep anxiety that grips us by the collar and won't let us go.

The modern malaise that currently blights the lives of so many of us is that of workaholism - the compulsive addiction to work. Throughout western societies, and beyond, it is running rampant through the population with no signs of abating. In Japan they label it *karoshi*, 'death by overwork.' In the Netherlands they have identified what is known as 'leisure illness' where workers become physically ill at weekends and on leave as they desperately try to wind down and relax from the work situation. In America and Europe the pattern is very similar with workers feeling stressed and over burdened with the demands of the working week. Unfortunately work is often seen as a respectable 'addiction' and therefore not to be discouraged. But it is not just in a work environment that our addictiveness to over-activity finds expression. In much of what we do, in our 24 / 7 world we become driven and over-preoccupied with filling up our lives with busyness and as a result our physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing suffers.

Workaholism, and the attendant quest to constantly engage with endless activity are socially unchallenged addictions that must be confronted otherwise we run the risk of being distracted, led away from the fundamental life issues and questions that need to be addressed. Our journey in life, the real quest that we must

undertake is that of finding out who we really are so that we can start to define our purpose in life. This, at one level may seem naïve, even absurd to some but I would argue that it lies at the very core of our existence waiting to be addressed. Nothing could be more wasted in our lives than spending time being someone else. Projecting an image of the self onto others which is inauthentic and flawed whilst our true self still lays buried deep within in us. So deep it remains hidden, dormant, but waiting, ever ready to be engaged and nurtured providing we create the right conditions for its awakening.

“ Go to your cell
and learn everything.”

Brother Moses - Desert Father

Nothing external to ourselves can 'give us' awakening; it's simply isn't there. So all we can ever really do is turn within, and with deep presence start to explore, under the right conditions, the fundamental questions that need our attention. But what are these conditions that we must engage with and can they really serve our needs?

Contemplation, a state of wakefulness to the world around us, relies on a simplicity of lifestyle that has, at its heart, a deep presence of stillness, solitude and silence within it. And it is our engagement with these conditions that will gently lead us on a journey where we become more mindful, more aware, leading to profound insights and eventual awakening. This spiritual process can be simply expressed thus:

SIMPLICITY, SOLITUDE, STILLNESS and SILENCE leads to CONTEMPLATION which opens us up to MINDFULNESS, AWARENESS, INSIGHT and AWAKENING.

Gentle perseverance is the key to awakening and the deeper we go into contemplation the richer the harvest we reap. To others it may appear 'misplaced,' 'selfish,' or 'wasteful.' Some may say that it leads to 'trickery' and even 'delusion.' But in truth, providing the circumstances are right in supporting our practice then only a much fuller person can emerge. One that becomes aware of new truths not old falsehoods. One that has a much broader vision, that sees and experiences a feeling of unity, a oneness with all living creation.

We must not get mistaken over what is big and what is small in life. What is important and what is unimportant. What is it that we should undertake in order to grow more as individuals and what is it we must avoid, that which holds us back in the trap of self-diminishment?

Self-awakening knows no bounds and does not belong to any one, single school of thought. Krishnamurti once said that: "Truth was a pathless landscape," and what he meant by this surely is that no philosophy, ideology or theology has a monopoly on truth. Arguably all traditions contain profound wisdom, from which we can learn and grow, but not one can be exclusively 'right.' The insight journey we undertake to explore and reconcile the lives we lead is unique to each of us. No one can undertake the journey for us. It is a solitary pursuit that demands much of us in terms of patience - making ourselves available to the mystery of existence, the uncertain and the unexpected, the not known. Waiting quietly, silently, deeply - not attaching to any expectations, desires or projected outcomes around what might be. Shutting down the machinery of noise and activity, making ourselves open and available like a dry, parched meadow ready to receive fresh, spring rain.

ACTIVE CONTEMPLATION

Awakening into a new vision - an insight that could shape our entire future - can erupt almost anywhere, at anytime. It need not be the exclusive preserve of a solitary bhikkhu / monk seeking 'enlightenment' through deep meditation. It need not be experienced in a remote monastery on the side of a mountain. It can happen to each and every one of us, in varying degrees, in differing locations. Whether we are strolling in the countryside, hoeing the garden, writing a poem, reading a meaningful book, painting a canvas or simply staring into a blazing, winter fire; all can induce feelings of introspection which can offer up profound, collected thoughts and reflections that, in the normal course of our busy lives, go largely undetected. All can start to map out a deep inner wisdom which is much more relevant and precious to our self-development and growth than all the technological advances available to us in our postmodern world.

Contemplation is not an evasion or denial of reality on the contrary it's a direct confrontation with it. It actually helps us to shine a searchlight on the truth - the 'what is,' unblemished and untarnished, in full view. And through our exposure to this comes a better vision of who we are and our place in the world. It helps

us grow in faithfulness to gain insight on the deepest, truest parts that beat repeatedly at the core of our being and cannot be ignored. But in order to make strong progress here we have to accept that the artificial, false self must die or rather diminish to a level of unimportance so that our new life can enter.....

The conditions of contemplation (simplicity, solitude, stillness and silence) do not alienate us from reality, they do not disconnect us from our brothers and sisters and they never exclude us - push us out of the reach from our collective location in the order of shared things. Quite the opposite, they help liberate us through new visions of bonding, they allow us to escape from the illusion of separateness and therefore the poverty of real alienation and loneliness.

Contemplation is a by-product of closing down from the busy activity of our quasi-neurotic world. It helps us to penetrate into the realization of our true identity. It's a surrendering of yesterday (all that has gone on before) and a surrendering of tomorrow (all that we fear may happen) for the precious moment of a fully aware, fully relaxed, fully present NOW.

“ If you could get rid of
yourself just for once, the secret
of secrets would open to you.
The face of the unknown, hidden
beyond the universe, would
appear on the mirror of your
perception.”

Rumi



The angel reveals the future to the father of the Virgin Mary...Detail from The Dream of Joachim, by Giotto (c.1266-1337), in the Scrovegni Chapel, Padua, Italy.

Angels

Messengers of light

THE ANGELIC ORDER

A belief in angels is shared by the three great monotheistic faiths of Judaism, Christianity and Islam yet the main source for development of this tradition lies in the Zoroastrian religion of ancient Persia. Zoroastrians conceive the universe as being divided between good and evil, and a hierarchy of spiritual guardians protect living beings and natural phenomena. The Jewish community became familiar with this world-view when they were in Exile in Babylon 586-539 BCE. God, or Yahweh, is known as 'Lord of hosts' - a host being an angelic army which fights evil and also performs other functions in the cosmos - guarding places and people, communicating the will of God and revealing God's word.

The Hebrew Scriptures contain important sources of angel lore, notably the books of Genesis and Isaiah. The vision of celestial beings described in the book of Ezekiel, which includes references to the mysterious 'thrones', is often interpreted as a vision of angels.

Christianity inherited much from Judaic tradition, and in the New Testament of the Bible angels attend many significant events, such as the birth of Christ and the Resurrection. By the time of the Apostle Paul there had arisen a cult in angels, a following that he condemned. However, references to angels in both the Old and the New Testament are actually rather vague and somewhat ambiguous.

A fifth-century text, purportedly by Dionysius the Areopagite, a disciple of Paul, was the first attempt to categorize the various angels mentioned in the Bible, such as the Seraphim, Cherubim, and even the mysterious Thrones. This work, *Celestial Hierarchies*, which defines nine choirs of angels grouped into three orders, or hierarchies, is still the prime source of Christian angel lore.

Dionysius warned against taking visions such as Ezekiel's too literally. "Angels", he said "are not golden beings or shining men flashing like lightning, but intermediaries between God and mankind more likely to appear in visions or dreams than as physical manifestations. They are seen when they need to be seen - and often by many people at once - but they have no bodily existence".

ANGELS OF CREATION

Since everything we know about angels is based on visionary experiences, we have to rely on inspired writers and prophets for our information, and they do not always agree on the details. Some say angels were created before time and space, some with the stars, and others on the Sixth Day of Creation.

According to Thomas Traherne, a metaphysical poet of the seventeenth century, angels are 'spirits of light' who were brought into being when God created light. The heavens, which until then had been devoid of inhabitants, were, he wrote 'in an instant filled with innumerable hosts of glorious angels, which were the morning stars and sons of God'.

Angels are commonly associated with light and, in the same way, Dionysius considered the Seraphim, Cherubim and Thrones of his first order of angels to be akin to fire. The Seraphim, who have three pairs of red wings, reflect the radiance of God and the fire of love, and their function is to praise and glorify God.

The Cherubim, who have a single pair of blue wings, reflect divine knowledge, or wisdom. They are thought to be derived

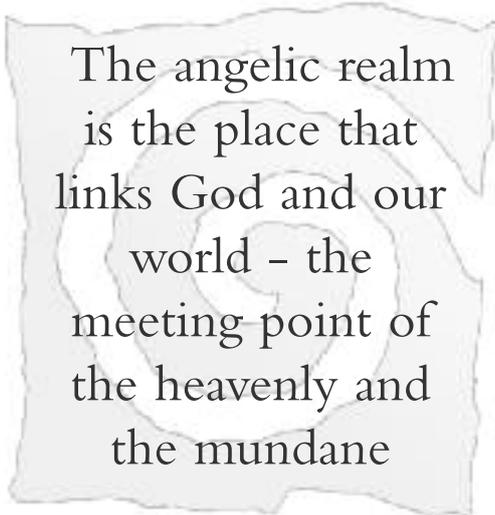
from the Ka-ri-bu, the monstrous guardians of Babylonian temples and palaces, and are first mentioned in Genesis, as guardians of the Tree of Life, east of Eden. It is ironic that, of all the angels, it is the Cherubim who have been sentimentalized as chubby baby angels.

The prophet Ezekiel described the Thrones, the seat of God, as 'fiery wheels with eyes', while the apocryphal writer Enoch described seeing 'a lofty throne' apparently made of crystal, with wheels like the shining sun. Dionysius interpreted Thrones as signifying steadfastness.

HEAVENLY MESSENGERS

It is no coincidence that both the Greek and Hebrew words for angel - *angelos* and *mal-akh* - mean 'messenger'. The angelic realm is the place that links God and our world - the meeting point of the heavenly and the mundane - and angels act as intermediaries, delivering messages between the two.

The messages that they deliver to mankind are from God, not from the angels themselves. Likewise, angels also carry the prayers of mankind to Heaven, and, according to medieval narrative, this was the particular function of the Archangel Gabriel. Gabriel, above all other angels, is associated with the revelation of divine will: it was Gabriel who dictated the Koran to Muhammed, brought news of the impending birth of John the Baptist to Zacharias, and appeared to Mary, the mother of Jesus.



The angelic realm
is the place that
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the mundane

All the major events in the life of Christ were attended by angels, but one of the most touching is the angel of the Lord announcing Christ's Nativity to the shepherds as they tended their sheep in the hills of Bethlehem. Described only in St. Luke, this scene has been the inspiration for many carols and Christmas cards and may explain why many angels of medieval and Renaissance art seem to have a heraldic function, some even blowing trumpets.

Messages of a more lowly kind - the everyday promptings and reminders needed by mankind, and the warnings and the changes of direction - are brought by the Angels of the ninth choir of Dionysius, who are closest to us, and whose specific function is to communicate with us.

'...footprints on the sands of time.'

In the years preceding her death in 2008 Glasgow-born Jewish artist Hannah Frank saw a dramatic resurgence of interest in the art she produced over her 75 year career. Her aim was, in the words of the poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, to 'leave footprints on the sands of time' - and this she achieved.

Hannah was the first of four children born to Charles and Miriam Frank. At the end of the 19th century many Jews fled from persecution in Russia and came to Britain. Charles Frank, from Lithuania, was one of these. He settled in Glasgow, married Miriam Lipetz - daughter of another immigrant family - and opened a camera shop in the Saltmarket on the day Hannah was born, August 23rd 1908.

Hannah was born in the Gorbals, but as the shop prospered and became a well-known Glasgow landmark, the family moved south to the smarter Govanhill area where they bought a substantial house in Dixon Avenue. She declared at an early age that she wanted to be an artist. Her father's friend, artist John Quinton Pringle, who never gave up his chemists' supplies shop in the Saltmarket despite being a Royal Academician, suggested that, like him, she should study for a career as well as pursue her artistic leanings.

She followed his advice, studying Latin and English at Glasgow University while taking evening classes at the Glasgow School of Art. Hannah's mother asked Baillie Drummond, a neighbour, to intervene in her application to the School of Art, as it was unusual for Jewish women to be accepted there at the time.

Hannah began, in the 1920s, to produce her hallmark black and white drawings, with their elongated structures, medieval romanticism and melancholy air. From the 1930s the Bible provided inspiration. Two drawings, 'In Thoughts from the visions of the night', 1930, and 'Now When Job's Three Friends', 1932, were inspired by the Book of Job while 'Adam and Eve', 1930, shows the pair fleeing the garden of Eden.

Poetry also played a huge role in Hannah's life. From 1927, while an undergraduate, her poems were published in the Glasgow University Magazine (GUM). The first, 'Slow They Glide', under her pseudonym 'Al Aaraaf', was soon followed by 'Where Hast Tarried'. She did a series of illustrations for the 'Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam', for 'Isabella, or The Pot of Basil' by Keats and for Coleridge's 'Christabel. Shelley's melancholic poetry inspired



several of her drawings while the first stanza of Arthur O' Shaughnessy's 'Ode' from 1874, known by its first line, 'We are the music makers', gave us Hannah's illustration 'On Whom the Pale Moon Gleams' (1929).

After graduating in 1930 with an MA in English and Latin Hannah undertook teacher training at Jordanhill College, Glasgow. She taught mainly at Campbellfield School in the east end of the city and incorporated her love of poetry in her teaching. A diary entry from 16 December 1930 tells us: "I taught Miss Paton's class onomatopoeia, and ended up with reading them most of Poe's 'Bells'." Well into her nineties Hannah was still able to declaim Robert Burns; 'To a Mouse' or her own composition 'In Faery' with an expressive, passionate voice.

She continued with her studies at the Glasgow School of Art, widening her interests to include wood engraving for which she was awarded the James McBey Prize but drawing remained her passion throughout the 1930s, drawings which are characterised by a dark, brooding quality. 'Flight' from 1939, for example, has a troubled, paranoid quality about it.



Dance

On her marriage to Lionel Levy in 1939 Hannah gave up teaching but continued to work as an artist. The pair had met at a Glasgow University Jewish Student Society ramble, and became founder members of the Glasgow Friends of the Hebrew University. Lionel came from a very religious background and had won prizes for Hebrew

scholarship at Glasgow Hebrew College and Glasgow University.

At this time Hannah's drawings became exuberant, filled with light, using much white space. The drawing 'Sun' from 1943 is typical as are 'Spring Frieze', 1945, 'Woman with Birds' 1947, 'the joyous 'Dance', and 'Dream', both 1952. It was also in 1952 that Hannah moved away from drawing and turned to sculpture, working with Benno Schotz at the Glasgow School of Art. Sydney Goodsir Smith, reviewing an exhibition at the RSA in 1965, wrote: "Hannah Frank's voluptuous 'Reclining Woman' is classical in her ease of pose and perfect calm, a lovely wee thing."

She continued to sculpt until she was in her early nineties. Her drawings and sculptures have been exhibited in Jewish and non-Jewish galleries throughout her life both in the UK and the USA. In 2008 an exhibition marking her hundredth birthday was held at Glasgow University Chapel. She made a surprise appearance at the preview and received a standing ovation from 200 guests. To celebrate the exhibition Glasgow University's Graduate School of Arts and Humanities and the Department of Theology and Religious Studies hosted a two-day symposium on art, religion, and identity.

Hannah and Lionel spent their last years in Westacres, a Jewish care home in Newton Mearns, where Hannah's art was on show in the public areas and admired by residents and visitors alike. Lionel Levy passed away in 2003 and Hannah herself died at Westacres on 18 December 2008, just four months after her 100th birthday. In 2009 she became the first person in the history of Glasgow University to be awarded a Posthumous Honorary Doctorate.

The Hannah Frank and Lionel Levy extensive collection of diaries, letters and personal papers is now held at the Scottish Jewish Archives Centre and Hannah Frank's work is in permanent collections at The Hunterian Gallery, Lancaster University, the Ben Uri London Jewish Museum of Art, the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Glasgow City Museums, and the Glasgow School of Art. Hannah Frank is buried in Cathcart Jewish Cemetery, Glasgow.



Further information:

'Hannah Frank, A Glasgow Artist, Drawings and Sculpture'. Second edition, 2004. Revised and updated by Fiona Frank. Scottish Jewish Archives Centre

'Hannah Frank: Footsteps on the Sands of Time - a 100th Birthday Gallimaufry', 2008. Eds Fiona Frank, Judith Coyle. Kennedy & Boyd in association with the Scottish Jewish Archives Centre.

'Hannah Frank, the Spark Divine, DVD. Film by Sarah Thomas with support from the Hadassah Brandeis Institute, Brandeis University, Boston, USA.

See all of Hannah Frank's haunting black and white drawings, and later sculptures, on the website: <http://www.hannahfrank.org.uk>



Head Undated c1971

Egypt's Agonies

From a young age I have believed
In the God of the Hebrews
Scorning the slender gold and ivory figures
Emerald clad, beautiful, weak.

Our rivers bled crimson
Our earth crawled and starved
Where was their power now? Their splendour
Did not give us our light back
When our skies turned black.

Our king, his dazzle darkened
Sat as a statue, resolved.
Cursed by a plague of pride, determination,
Stupidity
As his land wept.

We heard the murmurs, warnings of the Tenth,
The worst.
How I clung to my brother,
As I cried in vain for blood!

That night it swept through, crept
Softly in the dark,
While in my dream I saw the bloody doorframes,
Glistening, raw witnesses.

The God of the Hebrews
Turned my brother to ice.
When my country was torn by savage screams and
Gaping wounds of agony,
He took His people home.



In 2010 the first ever Hannah Frank Poetry Competition attracted around 550 entries. Commended in the 16-18 category was a poem from Rhona McKellar, from the Isle of Harris, who was inspired by Hannah's 1928 picture **'Then to the rolling heavens I cried'**. Rhona says: "For a while I had been thinking about the story of the tenth and final plague - the death of all first-born in Egypt. Hannah's picture seemed to fit the theme. Presenting the story from the point of view of an Egyptian was a good way to emphasise the tragedy of the tenth plague, a devastating story of pride and deep sadness."



A seed sown

Faith and Social Justice

Many times I think how lucky I am to be born into the Sikh religion and in a devout practising Sikh family. The essence of social justice is embedded in my religion and its three fundamental principles, given and personally adopted in practice by its first Guru, Guru Nanak Dev ji:

*KIRAT KARNAA
TO EARN AN HONEST LIVING,
NAAM JAPNAA
TO MEDITATE ON GOD'S NAME
VAND CHHAKNAA
TO SHARE ONE'S GOOD FORTUNE*

In other words the giving of knowledge, wealth and time as a servant to those in need, irrespective of their caste, creed, gender, faith, race or geographical situation, and thanking them for giving you the opportunity to serve them.

Growing up in my family I had ample opportunities to see these principles of social justice being applied in practice by my parents and grandparents, and to be guided and instructed to apply them in my daily life. For example my grandfather would make sure I got up early in the morning every Sunday to be on time to attend *diwan* the weekly congregation at the *Gurudwara* the Sikh place of worship. At the *Gurudwara* he would make sure that I sat next to him while he played the *tabla*, an asian drum, with his brother who sang *Shabads* (similar to hymns) with harmonium. My father accompanied them with symbols and I was instructed to turn the pages from the *Gutka*, the book of *Shabads* when my grandfather told me to - I could not read and write at this stage as I had not yet started school.

I cannot recall exactly how I felt then about this ritual but I feel now that my grandfather used a very sensible and appropriate way for me to learn the discipline of the Gurdwara. I remember that I had begun to associate with the lines of the *Shabads* at which the pages needed to be turned, and had learnt a few letters of Gurmukhi Punjabi

before I joined school. My mother, grandmother, elder brother and two younger brothers all attended the Sunday diwan and took leading roles in the community service. I just watched them and, as with any child, I copied them.

My father always enjoyed the company of the holy people, preachers, missionaries and saints from any religion. Whenever a person promoting their religion and faith came to our village, he would invite them to our house to have at least one meal with us. As and when someone visited our household our duty was to serve them the meal with great respect and humility. After the meal my father would request the person to share some words of wisdom with us to help us progress further in our spiritual and social development. This way we all had many opportunities to listen to the sermons and religious discourses from many different religions and faiths. I sense that somewhere through servicing these holy people and listening to their sermons and their attitude to life, I was attracted to the concept, principles and values of social justice: the seed for my interest in community service and working with vulnerable people was sown. As I grew older I became more and more involved in community and religious activities, working with so called disadvantaged people and now these people are an integral part of my life.

My migration to the UK in late 1970s came at the time of recession and the demise of the textile industry. With little guidance on how to settle in this society and with numerous negative and de-motivating messages from people around me, I found myself turning to my religion for security and support as I struggled to establish myself in this new environment. Against all the odds I achieved unusual success in various facets of my life that set an example for some and became a source of envy for others, but my belief in my faith and principles of social justice became stronger and I have never looked back. I seek opportunities to initiate, as well as take part in existing religious and community services and projects, and always feel enriched by the experience. I know that a lot needs to be done but every little contribution helps, and with God's grace I am able to make mine.

“I felt tears fall on my hands and I saw that they were rolling down his face.”

For over twenty-five years I have worked with offenders in various prisons. I have met people of many different types, but one example seems particularly appropriate to share with you here. I met with this person at my Sikh service sessions in a category B prison and worked with him for about eight months. On his first visit to the service he was very restless, questioned and challenged but rejected everything I or anyone else in the group said. He claimed that the service in the prison he had been transferred from was better and that I didn't know my job. He only wanted to know when the next religious festival would be celebrated, so that he could have his festive meal. The process continued for three to four weeks and everyone in the group including myself was feeling frustrated.

To make the matter worse, during one of the services he asked me for time out to go to the toilet but disappeared somewhere in the prison wing. I reported him missing to the prison officer on duty who was able to locate him and bring him back to the service. He didn't like me reporting him missing and threatened that I should not have done it. I explained to him my responsibilities as a religious minister and also his as a participant in the service, but he wasn't interested. He said that he would have to stop coming to the service.

For some reason he kept coming and we celebrated Guru Nanak Dev Ji's birthday. He enjoyed his festive meal and claimed that it was because of him that we had celebrated the festival. We all laughed and let him feel that way. He now began to settle a little bit. Occasionally he would apologise for his behaviour but would say that people around him just annoy him. I asked him if he had ever thought that he could be doing the same by his disruptive behaviour. He would just smile and try to change the subject. I felt that he was making progress, albeit very slowly.

One week he didn't come to the service and the other inmates told me that he had assaulted two prison officers and had been put into the isolation unit. He was now a 'three officer case', meaning he would be guarded by three prison officers whenever he had to come out of his cell.

For two more weeks I heard nothing but then to my surprise he asked to see me. I visited the isolation unit. I was asked to wait until he was taken out of his cell and locked in another room where I could see him behind the screen. He started with his usual spiel that it was the prison officers' fault, they did not listen to him and annoyed him, he didn't even hit them, only he threw a chair at them and one of them was injured. It was clear to me that he had

no realisation of the seriousness of what he had done and how his behaviour put himself and others a risk. I started analysing the situation with him and highlighting how his behaviour had escalated the situation, placed him in this unit and harmed the prison officers. I also talked to him about the long-term consequences of his action for his prison

sentence. Surprisingly, the man who could not stand still for a minute and listen to a single word without posing a challenge was listening to me and listening carefully. It was not less than a miracle that I had spent nearly half an hour with him. Before I left he requested that I visit him every week, which I did. With each visit I saw the signs of progress and a greater calmness in his behaviour.

We celebrated the festival of Vaisakhi in the prison. I had to hold a separate service for him due to him being in the isolation unit. As I was about to leave he asked the prison officers whether he could hug me - this was not allowed to ensure my safety - but I requested that he be allowed to shake my hand. As he shook my hand and firmly clasped it with both his hands, I felt tears fall on my hands and I saw that they were rolling down his face. Were these the tears of being accepted and listened to, I wondered! I continued to work with him for few more weeks before he was transferred to another prison. First thing he did after reaching there was to request to see the Sikh minister, which happened to be me. That day there were tears in my eyes - tears of joy!



No faith without action

“We need to work with our neighbours from different backgrounds to realise true justice in society.”

My faith journey has been one of great activity, discovery and work. I have been a disaffected teenager ditching my Catholic heritage to seek alternative spirituality, I have been a religious tourist courting the teachings of other mainstream faiths; I have been an anxious agnostic, discovered interfaith dialogue and have finally reclaimed my Catholic identity. The one thing that has remained constant throughout this journey has been a very close connection to the living world, to people and communities, to good causes and to active work for the good. For me, if spirituality is not expressed in some worldly way, it is of no use to anyone.

Once, before life was categorised and compartmentalised, people did not think of religion as a mere ‘part’ of their lives. It was not an affiliation or a club, a bonus subscription added onto life. It was one and whole with the rest of their lives. This shift in conceptualisation of faith, which perhaps has hastened the growing fixation with secularism in western society, has gone some way in divorcing faith from life and from the world, even for those of faith and who are active in the spirituality of their religion. The only link that remains for some between their faith and the world they live in is the need to ferry more people from that physical world to the spiritual life, which can be so far removed from the physical world that it almost appears to demand total rejection of material things. There is another side to faith. It is the part that demands justice and peace, fairness and equality and action to make it happen. It demands real work in the real world, the world I believe was created on which to build a Heavenly Kingdom.

if spirituality is not expressed in some worldly way, it is of no use to anyone

Christianity does demand a certain rejection of the material world insofar as it advocates trying to free ourselves of material wants and desires and focusing on the spiritual – “man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from God” - but this should not mean neglecting our duty to the physical world we inhabit. Embracing the spiritual goes hand in hand with embracing our duty to build God’s Kingdom on Earth, a just, equal and peaceful society.

The Christian doctrine of the Incarnation has implications. Christ did not appear, we believe, as a ghostly ethereal being but as the simplest of men. Jesus as man came from a background of poverty and manual labour - a demographic He also drew many of his followers from - and engaged with the least of society. There is, I feel, great dignity and Christ-likeness to be found in the world of work and in poverty. This is why faith has often led people to embrace lives of poverty - particularly in monastic orders - or devote themselves to hands-on work in communities. The poverty of Christ compels us to seek God amongst the poor and see that their needs are met. If we ignore this duty, we turn our backs to God Himself and we believe that this, even more than our Churchmanship, will be the yardstick used on us when we come before Him.

Christian Aid’s motto is “We believe in life before death”: it is one I embrace wholeheartedly. There are plenty of references in Christian scripture as to how we need to act towards our fellow citizens of the world, and it is made very clear, I think, that if we fail to show the care and compassion we are expected to show, then it will not be shown us when we come before the Throne of God.

I have occasionally participated in activities and campaigns organised by Christian Aid, and was fortunate to travel with them to Copenhagen for the Climate Change summit last year. I went as part of a Christian-Muslim youth delegation, but Christian Aid was kind enough to let us hitch a lift on the Eurostar with them, and on the coach ride from Brussels to Copenhagen. Environmentalism has been an important embodiment of my commitment to justice, since my faith teaches me that I am a custodian of the Earth and am commanded to look after it. I cannot sit back and let it suffer or I am ignoring part of my faith.

As with campaigning on environmental issues, there are many ways that the Christian values of justice and peace can be manifested in practical action. It is in such practical action that I find myself feeling most connected to my faith and to God, which I think is very apt considering Christianity teaches that God is very much alive in the world and that we must go out and meet Him.

My involvement with the Young Christian Workers (YCW) - for which I am currently Treasurer - has been a very important way for me to engage with this teaching on a useful and enriching level. The YCW is a Catholic Movement of formation for young adults – particularly those in the world of work - training them to be leaders and agents of transformation in their lives and the lives of others. By reviewing situations and issues we encounter in our daily lives, and reflecting on them with the help of our faith, we can take informed and meaningful action to transform those situations. This is the work of the YCW and many of the actions taken by members are associated with social justice. Dignity, equality, the living wage, solidarity with young people in the workplace and participation in national coalitions and campaigns; these are some of the things I have engaged with during my time with YCW. Indeed, one of the first campaigns I was involved with as part of the YCW was “Get Fair”, the lobby for eradicating poverty in the UK.

I have also been moved to work within areas of diversity. My interfaith work reflects my commitment to the idea embodied in the parable of the Good Samaritan - that we need to work with our neighbours from different backgrounds to realise true justice in society. My involvement in interfaith work has been perhaps the most important thing in my journey so far. It helped me ground myself in my own faith and gave me a creative output for my ideas and my work.

I am currently the youth coordinator for the United Religions Initiative (URI), an interfaith NGO based in the US. It is fitting that I find myself working professionally in the field that contributed so much to who I am, and where I am today. My enthusiasm for diversity has also led me to volunteer with the Welsh Refugee Council and other refugee agencies and community

organisations in the past.

I have recently moved to East London, which is a very diverse area with many challenges and problems. I am really looking forward to engaging with work going on here, to build bridges across the community in order to tackle some of the problems we face.

I have found myself working with young people more and more throughout my journey, my peers and those younger than me. I now take a lot of responsibility in developing and training young people in leadership, skills and engagement with action. Young people, I believe, are more than just a constituency to be engaged with in order to bring enthusiasm to a cause. Unfortunately this is often the perspective taken by the big campaigns and causes. I am certain that involvement must serve the needs of the young people, their needs for development as human beings, and growth in responsibility. It must make them feel included. Isolation is one of the key problems associated with many of the issues we are trying to tackle in the first place, and I have found in my work that young people join campaigns and get involved, not because they believe in the cause but because they want to be part of something and feel valued. They want to make a difference. In the end, despite the promptings of my religion, this is a major part of why I do what I do as well. And that's worth remembering.



PERCEIVED RIGHTS OR DIVINE RIGHT

The Status of Women in Islam

A few months ago I read some most disturbing articles about the treatment of Muslim women in the Chechen Republic, as well as a whole series by Robert Fisk of *The Independent* newspaper about honour killings. I am unfortunately most aware of the horrible and dastardly crimes committed against women in Muslim countries as well as in Europe, the USA and Australia in our time. However, I cannot emphasise strongly enough that these crimes against women have nothing to do with Islamic teaching: Islam is a religion of tolerance and peace.

The Prophet's goodness towards women and his love for them is well-documented in the Qur'an, in *Hadiths* and in traditional sources. The cliché of veiled women with no rights, who are not permitted to leave the house or exercise a profession, is far removed from the status that the Holy Prophet gave to the women of his time. He improved their lives dramatically during a period when women had no rights at all: in fact they endured a similar status to that of slaves. At the time of 'ignorance' or *jahiliyah*, when paganism was widely practised in the Arabian Peninsula, infanticide was the most usual form of population control, and girl babies were often buried alive at birth. Men could marry as many women as they wished and upon the death of a husband, a wife could be 'inherited' by her husband's male relatives. The husband's father, brother or son could then marry her and, moreover, if she was rich her assets passed automatically to her male relatives as well. Indeed money was the main reason for such marriages. But in accordance with the revelations received by the Prophet Muhammad, these unjust traditions were changed by him.

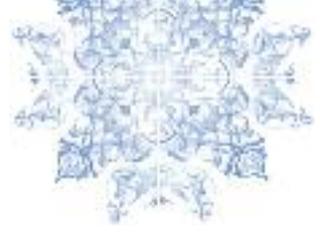
Thus, women and girls could no longer be forced into marriage, or treated as chattels. In fact their dignity was restored to them. They were allowed to work, to inherit and keep their property.

If their male relatives or spouses became indebted the female members of the family were not obliged to contribute to the household either. Similarly, if a rich woman married a poor man, she was not obliged to provide for him. By contrast, in the Anglo-Saxon world women's fortunes and property automatically passed to their spouses upon marriage, and this continued in the late nineteenth century: in Europe women did not achieve the right to possess property until the beginning of the twentieth century.

The Prophet Muhammad (may peace and blessings be upon him) was so progressive with his reforms - he even made arrangements for the education of women - that some of his companions spoke out openly against his policy of raising women's status, and of treating them so kindly. Unfortunately, these reforms were not carried further after the Holy Prophet's death. Sadly the old, patriarchal attitudes took over and the situation has remained relatively static until today. Indeed, in many cases the status of women has taken a backward step in accordance with the way in which the Qur'an is interpreted in a particular period, or to the role in which tradition plays in society. There will always be men who seek power over women, who explain the Qur'an according to their perceived rights, bringing in new rules to denigrate and oppress.



*There is no
compulsion in
religion*



In my opinion it behoves a woman to be the possessor of an enquiring mind and to find out about her rights. Muslims are enjoined to 'Seek knowledge, even if you have to go as far as China'¹: this means Muslim women as well as Muslim men. It was also made incumbent upon those who were educated to help teach those less fortunate than themselves.

The great Persian poet and mystic, Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi, so revered in the West today, said the following about the relationship between the sexes, based on sayings of the Prophet Muhammad:

'If you rule your wife outwardly, yet inwardly you are ruled by her whom you desire,

This is characteristic of Man: in other animals love is lacking and that shows inferiority.

The Prophet said that woman prevails over the wise, while Ignorant men prevail over her; for in them the fierceness of the animal is immanent.

Love and tenderness are human qualities, anger and lust are animal qualities.

Woman is a ray of God: she is not the earthly beloved.

She is creative: you might say she is not created.

Rumi

Another great Muslim theologian and saint, Muhyiuddin Ibn al'Arabi went even further, stating that 'the most perfect vision of God is enjoyed by those who contemplate Him in woman'.²

In Europe at present, due to the influx of workers from Muslim countries such as Turkey and North Africa in the 1950's and 60's, there is much talk of young women and girls of the second and third generations being sent back to their countries of origin to be married off by their parents.

"There will always be men who seek power over women, who explain the Qur'an according to their perceived rights, bringing in new rules to denigrate and oppress"

This practice is certainly taking place, and even though some may not be forced physically, it is almost certain that they are being coerced until they consent. Girls who have been educated at European schools and who consider the Western way of life as their own find this custom impossible to accept. It has, however, nothing to do with Islamic teaching, but is rather founded on local tradition. According to Islamic law, women cannot be forced to marry anyone without their consent. Indeed, during the marriage ceremony each partner is asked whether he or she accepts to marry the other. "There is no compulsion in religion".³

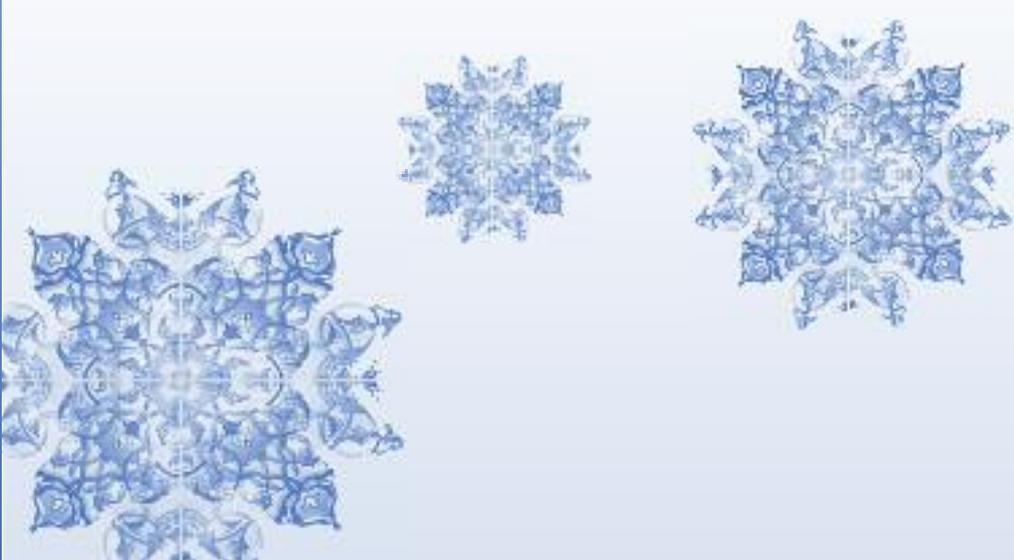
Nowhere, however, is there a greater significance of the status of women than in the practice of so-called honour killings. This appalling custom of 'restoring the family honour' by killing a beloved daughter or sister is firmly rooted in tribal culture. It is indicative of the status of women as possessions, and the highly valued prestige of men within their community - perhaps the men who perpetrate such crimes, and often claim to be religious, should ask themselves what the true meaning of 'honour' is.

It is certainly not honourable to kill - and especially to kill a member of one's own family. Honour is to comport oneself according to divine laws set down in all holy books, no matter what the tradition.

¹ Hadith, reported by Anas, compiled by Ahmed Ibn Hanbal

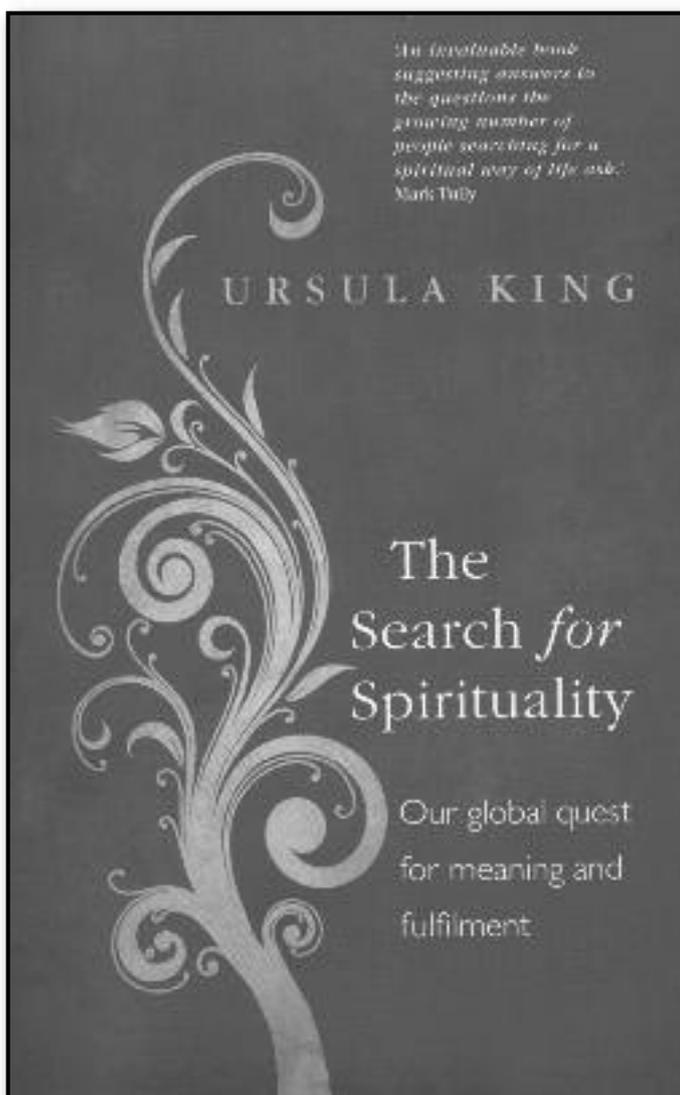
² Rumi Poet and Mystic, R.A. Nicholson, P. 44

³ Holy Qur'an, 2:256



The Search for Spirituality

Extract from: *The Search for Spirituality* by Ursula King, Pub. Canterbury Press 2009



Spirituality and Interfaith Dialogue

Encounter and dialogue are fundamental to human life. To speak and be spoken to, ask questions and receive answers, share experiences and ideas, is an integral part of being human. In this sense dialogue is as old as humanity itself, a basic ingredient of all social fabric and activities. In a more specific sense dialogue among different religious believers has developed as interreligious or interfaith dialogue. This can happen in quite a spontaneous way, in ordinary day-to-day meetings of people from different backgrounds who encounter each other at work, through travel or leisure activities, through their children or neighbors. Numerous experiences can bring people closer together to share their joys and pains, disclose some of their religious or spiritual worldviews, and reveal some of their deepest beliefs.

The contemporary awareness of diversity, whether ethnic, social, racial, or religious, is now so much greater than in the past because our world has shrunk so much; the forces of globalization have brought different societies, cultures, and religions so much closer into contact with each other. It can be confusing, even painful, to realize how profoundly different major religious and secular worldviews are, and what a myriad of different religions and spiritualities exist, whether in traditional, contemporary, or alternative forms. What is the deeper meaning of the extraordinary diversity of religious beliefs and spiritualities in the contemporary world? Only through ongoing conversations can we find the answer to this question. Since the late twentieth century interreligious dialogue has come to be more widely practiced and accepted, and that includes dialogue between different spiritualities.

The Need for Dialogue

There is much talk about dialogue between civilizations and cultures, but such dialogue must include dialogue between religions at the heart of cultures. It can no longer be a question whether dialogue between different religious, secular, and spiritual worldviews is possible, because it is absolutely necessary if humankind is to achieve greater peace and justice. There exists now a “dialogical imperative” to promote dialogue above all else - among cultures and civilizations, among religious and secular people, among women and men, among rich and poor - not least to avoid the growth of more violence and hatred and to redeem the shadow side of our different religious histories. Only then can all of humankind develop new ways of living together and redeem the immense failings of the past in not living up to the spiritual truths of our core religious truths and visions.

To accept and work with each other requires the often difficult acceptance of profound differences. It also means practicing attentive listening to others, healing differences, and helping each other into mutually enriching growth. Dialogue is about listening to voices of difference, discovering different experiences, different ways of knowing, thinking, feeling, and acting. The human being has an inborn intentionality for communication and relationships, but how often is this potential actualized and really put into practice? We can rejoice in the fact that the possibilities of developing helpful relationships have grown exponentially in today’s world, so that we can cultivate genuine, mutually enriching dialogue if we put our mind and will to it.

True dialogue is an art that has to be learned. It has to be nurtured at the grassroots level whenever possible. But the requirements for dialogue between people of different faiths go far beyond those of ordinary day-to-day conversation and human contact. Numerically speaking, the believers of different faiths who are actively engaged in the process of dialoguing are still relatively few. But there is no doubt that interfaith dialogue has grown considerably since the late twentieth century, and steadily continues to grow.

Interfaith Spirituality

Among the numerous forms of spirituality emerging at present, the practice of interfaith dialogue has led to particularly vibrant spiritual insights. This interfaith spirituality is often neither perceived nor mentioned by those who divide spirituality sharply from religion, or look at spirituality only from inside one religious tradition. The creative dynamic and new energy that are irrupting from the worldwide encounter of religions at so many different levels are often completely ignored in contemporary debates on spirituality. It thus remains far too little recognized except by those directly involved in practicing it.

Interfaith spirituality is a very recent development, though. We have only just begun to move toward this new form of spirituality. At present we can only discern its direction and dynamic, rather than have a complete picture of this newly emerging spiritual path forged by dialogical encounter.

Each of the world faiths possesses a rich spiritual heritage that is being discovered with renewed interest today. We not only have better access to the rich spiritual resources of Christianity, but also to those of Buddhism and Hinduism, Judaism and Islam, Daoism and Confucianism, not to forget African spirituality, as well as that of indigenous and native peoples, and of numerous new religious movements. The recognition of this diversity leads away from Western Christian dominance and exclusiveness in the articulation of spiritual matters. A spiritually significant international interfaith meeting, and a publicly highly visible act, was the interfaith prayer meeting in Assisi in 1986, when Pope John Paul II invited religious leaders from all over the world to pray together for peace. The only regrettable aspect was the complete absence of any female religious figures, as if spirituality were still the exclusive domain of men. At local and regional levels in different parts of the world, in interfaith meetings of different groups, there exists a more equitable gender balance. Sometimes women are even more active and visible in these local gatherings than men.

Besides actually meeting together, the general availability and access to each other’s religious texts and sacred writings is of prime importance in developing a new interfaith spirituality. Given our multiple means of communication, we can now study the sacred sources of many different religious and cultural traditions. But these scriptures, sutras, and commentaries are not so much studied from an insider’s perspective, where sacred writings are foundational for one’s beliefs and lifestyle, than they are drawn upon as globally available spiritual resources that have become accessible to outsiders as well as insiders. Thus we can approach them as precious spiritual wells from which we can all drink and quench our thirst, and which will nourish a new, more holistic spirituality.

Spiritual experiences and practices that emerge within and outside of interreligious dialogue are still comparatively rare phenomena, although an ever-growing number of people are now experiencing the vital energy of these confluent streams of different spiritual traditions. Immersed in a new venture, they are exploring a “spirituality across borders”; they are discovering new paths through a deep personal engagement not only with their own faith, but also with that of others. Sharing other people’s spiritual worlds and practices can lead to new experiences, but also to new questions and uncertainties.

The Sri Lankan theologian Wesley Ariarajah considers the development of “dialogue and spirituality” one of the pressing issues of interfaith relations. He probingly asks, “Can we pray together?” In other words, can people of different faiths and none come together for interfaith worship, for the sharing of spiritual practices drawn from different faiths? Although such coming together for prayer occurred at the highest level at the Assisi meeting, for example, it is at present still hotly debated and can provide a source for controversy and difficulties at the local level.

A new spirituality nourished by interfaith dialogue has perhaps been furthest developed in the dialogue between Christians and Buddhists. A wide variety of Buddhist teachings and practices, particularly the different forms of Buddhist meditation, have deeply influenced numerous Christians, and Hinduism, too, has exercised wide attraction.

A New Interspiritual Age

A refreshing challenge to the understanding of interfaith spirituality is provided by the Indian theologian Samuel Rayan. He describes spirituality as linked to “openness” and “responseability”. By response-ability he does not mean accountability, but rather the ability to respond to the many different dimensions of reality, to different things, events, and people. This includes the ability to respond to the realities of other faiths, to their spiritual horizons and insights. We have to cultivate a deep inner awareness to develop such openness. Only then can we discover the mysteries, meanings and revelatory moments of other faiths. In all of them the power of the Spirit breaks through again and again, transforming the continuing stream of our historical brokenness and becoming.

In Rayan’s view, the “more open we are, the more spiritual” we are. “The more realities to which we are open, the greater the spirituality; the greater the depths and the profounder the meanings of reality to which we are open, the more authentic the spirituality.” The interfaith approach to spirituality is itself very open - open to new experiments and experiences, open to learning and listening, open to the promise of the future and to greater growth. Rayan’s perspective is a very fruitful definition of spirituality, since it highlights spirituality as a dynamic process full of further potential.

Encountering people of other faiths and getting seriously engaged in interfaith dialogue opens up a magnificent opportunity to take spiritual otherness seriously. Interfaith dialogue reveals not only the pluralism of cultures and faiths, but the pluralism of spiritualities themselves. That can be a difficult but also strengthening, deeply enriching, and transforming discovery. It opens up new lands of mind and soul, and can reveal the gracious traces and touches of the Spirit in ever so many unexpected ways.

The American Catholic lay monk Brother Wayne Teasdale (1945–2004), who was initiated by Bede Griffiths in India and actively participated in interfaith dialogue for many years, spoke of a new “interspiritual age” in relation to discovering a universal spirituality in the world’s religions. He promoted this idea of “interspirituality” since the 1993 Chicago Parliament of the World’s Religions, and understood it as the sharing of ultimate experiences across traditions. He described interspirituality as “the assimilation of insights, values, and spiritual practices from the various religions and their application to one’s own inner life and development.” This is very much an encounter at the level of religious experience, especially mystical experience, which is an invaluable resource for transforming human awareness and for purifying human will and intention.

Yet it is not enough on its own, for it can be misunderstood as too exclusively focused on the individual. To develop spirituality globally, radically transforming changes have to occur at the level of the individual, but they also have to be worked out at a structural level by changing our educational, economic, political, and financial institutions. In Teilhard de Chardin’s view we not only need interfaith dialogue, but also a new mysticism, above all a new mysticism of action that can transform the world. On closer examination this seems also part of the “universal communal spirituality” which Wayne Teasdale describes in his book *The Mystic Heart*. It is a spirituality that can emerge when people from different faith traditions discover the mystic heart of the world together, and share their deepest spiritual experiences and visions.

The spiritual probing of religious pluralism and the drinking from each other’s spiritual wells may be today’s great spiritual event, full of significance for human well-being, and for the future of humanity on earth. The further evolution of religion and spirituality can occur only if more dialogical thinking is developed in practice. If religious and spiritual leaders were less concerned with positions of power and influence, and more attentive to the spiritual well-being of their members, and if ordinary believers followed the spiritual message at the heart of their tradition, then the world might become a different place where all human beings could truly flourish. Alas, we are still a long way from realizing this vision, and much work remains to be done to develop a genuine interfaith spirituality that can inspire a harmonious personal and social life in our global world.

More and more people are beginning to recognize slowly that interfaith dialogue is the spiritual journey of our time, out of which a new spirituality will be born. Teasdale described the characteristic features of such a spirituality as contemplative, interspiritual and intermystical, socially engaged, environmentally responsible, holistic, engaged with a wide range of cultural media, cosmically open, and aiming for an integration of the spiritual journey with the natural world, and an openness to the cosmic community. This is an impressive list but, as Teasdale himself recognized, it will require institutions and structures to carry, express, and support the creation of a new interspiritual age. He mentioned the Catholic Church as one matrix of interfaith encounter, but also proposed a “universal order of sannyasa” or renunciation, and emphasized the important role of the spiritual teacher or guide. The universal order of sannyasa is understood as an interspiritual order of monastics or contemplatives open to people from all faiths or none, who are united in their desire to seek a deeper, more meaningful life. This spiritually pluralistic orientation is shared by the new Interfaith Seminary with locations in both New York and London. It has been set up to train interfaith ministers and spiritual counselors to serve the spiritual needs of people from all backgrounds, whether religious or secular.

Interfaith perspectives are growing. There is not only much talk and reflection about interfaith spirituality, interfaith pilgrims, and an interfaith seminary, but even of an interreligious ashram for monastics, founded in 2003 near Rishikesh in the Himalayas with the help of the Abhishiktananda Society. Dialogue among people of different faiths can help to open up and transform religious traditions. It can bring about a spiritual renewal. But it is important to recognize that creative dialogue about spirituality is not and cannot remain restricted to people of religious adherence.

It must embrace the secular world to make a difference to all the peoples of this planet. There are signs that this already occurs with much vigor in many areas of contemporary culture. This is evident from current debates on human development, psychology, education, health, and many other aspects of the arts, humanities, and sciences. It is within these secular fields that many people now seek and find solace, inspiration, and wisdom for living.

Extract from: *The Search for Spirituality* by Ursula King,
Published by Canterbury Press, Norwich (2009) pp 57-77





Photo: Revd. Professor Andrew Linzey

Issue 22 of this magazine (December 2009) featured an extract from a book entitled: *Why Animal Suffering Matters* by Revd. Professor Andrew Linzey (2009 OUP). We are delighted to report that Andrew has since been presented with one of the highest awards offered by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals - THE LORD ERSKINE SILVER AWARD. Our congratulations and best wishes go to him.

Reporting the award on its website the RSPCA stated:

Andrew has pioneered a pro-animal attitude in the Church of England and organised a conference that focused on the links between cruelty to animals and violence to humans.

Revd. Professor Andrew Linzey is founder and Director of the Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics (www.oxfordanimaletics.com) and a member of the Faculty of Theology in the University of Oxford.

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VOLUNTARY EDITORIAL ASSISTANCE REQUIRED

We publish this magazine twice a year but it takes months to collate all the materials for each issue. We have to establish themes, source articles, investigate topical issues, discuss areas of concern for members of religious communities, keep an eye open for poetry, inspiring artwork, new books and often draw on features in newspapers, on the radio, television or on the internet to keep the content of the magazine interesting and relevant to our readers of all faiths. We distribute the magazine to schools, colleges, chaplaincies, libraries, interfaith groups and religious communities throughout the UK.

Unfortunately we are always short of funds and any monies raised always goes into the publication and distribution of the magazine. All work carried out on the magazine is voluntary, and whilst we cannot afford to pay for any assistance we would

welcome offers on a voluntary basis.

If you have an interest in maintaining the standard of Faith Initiative, and contributing to its on-going success, Lorna Douglas and I would be delighted to hear from you.

Heather Wells

Editor

hf_wells@yahoo.co.uk

Please see our website for further information:

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Centuries of Men

An old Abbey on a cold winter's night, snow
falling. Centuries of men

wrapped in rough brown cloth
are singing. I wipe tears

from eyes in a white face, ancient, my own. Voices
echo out through the garden, across icy fields,
to the river. Trees
shiver their last leaves, birds hold their breath.

I've been coming here for years, seen the river
cut rock into sand
and run it out to the sea. The men keep singing
Domine, Domine. Amongst the trees

by the river, a deer stops. His black eye
holds light.

He stands and listens, hears
seeds turn in the black earth, water

running by, and, over us all,
the wide arc of the sky,
the endless stars.



GOD'S BETTER BEAUTY, GRACE

*To what serves mortal beauty ' dangerous; does set danc-
ing bloodthe O-seal-that-so ' feature, flung prouder form
Than Purcell tune lets tread to? ' See: it does this: keeps warm
Men's wits to the things that are; ' what good meanswhere a glance
Master more may than gaze, ' gaze out of countenance.
Those lovely lads once, wet-fresh ' windfalls of war's storm,
How then should Gregory, a father, ' have gleaned else from swarm-
ed Rome? But God to a nation ' dealt that day's dear chance.
To man, that needs would worship ' block or barren stone,
Our law says: Love what are ' love's worthiest, were all known;
World loveliestmen's selves. Self ' flashes off frame and face.
What do then? how meet beauty? ' Merely meet it; own,
Home at heart, heaven's sweet gift, ' then leave, let that alone.
Yea, wish that though, wish all, ' God's better beauty, grace.*

Gerard Manley Hopkins

In his poem 'To What serves Mortal Beauty?' Gerard Manley Hopkins exhorts his readers to appreciate the beauty of the world, but then ends by telling them to let it alone and wish for 'God's better beauty, grace'. He had hymned the world's beauty in many of his poems and seen it as a reflection of God, most famously in 'God's Grandeur', which begins:

*The world is charged with the grandeur of God,
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;*

But in the poem in question he is going a step further. He bears witness to the power of 'mortal beauty', which may be dangerous at times, but also beneficial, as when the beauty of the young Angles in Rome's slave market was glimpsed by the future Pope Gregory I inspiring him later to send St Augustine of Canterbury to evangelize England, so that 'God to a nation dealt that day's dear chance'. So we should acknowledge 'heaven's sweet gift' of beauty, but go on to wish for something better, grace.

In fact in this short poem Hopkins was expressing a very traditional theme. St Clement of Alexandria (c.150-215), for example, quotes the Biblical text Exodus 31:2-5, which relates how the Spirit of God came on the craftsman Bezalel, so that he

was endowed with wisdom, understanding, knowledge, and skill in every kind of craft, and says that this shows artistic skill is from God (Miscellanies 1:4). But then he goes on to take two steps that influenced much subsequent discussion of beauty by Christian writers: he says that God or Christ is the true beauty, and that on earth the best kind of beauty is spiritual beauty. Of Christ he says 'our Saviour is beautiful, to be loved by those who desire true beauty, for he was "the true light"'; and he says that spiritual beauty is brought about through the agency of the Holy Spirit, and it appears 'when the soul is adorned by the Holy Spirit and inspired by its lustre - righteousness, reason, courage, temperance, love of good and modesty, which is matched by nothing with pleasant colour'.

This is only one of many such accounts one could quote, but it is sufficient to explain what Hopkins means in his poem. We still do, I think, admire moral beauty. Although the phrase 'a lovely person' has become a bit stale now and the traditional phrase 'the beauty of holiness' has become unfamiliar, we recognise sweetness of character or moral deformity, and wonder at those who not only lead good lives, but seem to do so with joy, and without strain or struggle.

I came across a very striking expression of such an admiration in a recent essay by Clive James on the White Rose Group, a collection of Christian students at the University of Munich during World War II, who produced and distributed leaflets attacking Nazi crimes and calling for a change of government in Germany. Three of their leaders were arrested, tried hastily, and executed immediately in 1943; and James says of one of them, Sophie Scholl (21 years old), 'she radiated a moral beauty that left even her Gestapo interrogators self-consciously shuffling their papers....' (Cultural Amnesia: Notes in the Margin of My Time, p.708)

But why talk of grace here? Because when people surpass themselves morally, this is regarded by Christians as partly caused by a special presence of God to which they, especially saints, respond. Human nature is weak and has a propensity to sin, so that we are not as we should be, or perhaps would like to be; but God's grace may heal and energise us. Parables like those of the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son depict people surpassing themselves so that they act with extraordinary generosity or forgiveness, and one can find plenty of other similar examples in the lives of saints or in works of literature.

Of course what I have sketched out is but a small fragment broken off the enormously complex theology of grace. The latter has taken several centuries to evolve: it has its origins in both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, and it developed in controversies between some of the early Fathers of the Church and heretics, and later in the sacramental theology of the Church in the Middle Ages. The controversies of the Reformation and subsequent disputes in the Roman Catholic Church about grace, nature, and freewill brought further development. But this theology often appears very arid and abstract, so that many people find it difficult to see where it 'touches down' in human lives and experience. Often grace seems to be presented as a kind of mysterious invisible stuff (of which there are several varieties) which we somehow absorb, especially through the sacraments; or else as a kind of second storey built on top of

an already existent lower storey, nature – an analogy which the theologian Karl Rahner (1904-84) often attacked in his attempts to produce a deeper, richer, and more relevant theology of grace.

What I have said about moral beauty suggests one way of making the theology of grace 'touch down', and it does so by giving a concrete example of how 'grace perfects nature', as the traditional maxim had it. But a second way in which modern theologians have tried to illuminate the doctrine is by appealing to the idea of healing. Thus towards the end of his Grammar of Assent John Henry Newman claimed that the real cause of Christianity's success in the Roman Empire was 'the Image of Him who fulfils the one great need of human nature, the Healer of its wounds, the Physician of the soul...'

This too is a traditional idea. Of course the Gospels recount many healing miracles performed by Jesus, and present him as a comforter (though also as a disturber of those who are too comfortable!). But one is surprised to find how many of the early Fathers of the Church describe him as a 'physician', almost as if it was a title as apposite as more familiar ones like 'saviour' or 'redeemer'. In one of his sermons, for instance, St Augustine says 'Let us live in a manner befitting the grace we have received....A great physician has come to us and forgiven all our sins'; and in his commentary on the Book of Job St Gregory the Great says that the saints should ignore their own bodily wounds and heal the inner wounds in others 'with compassion restoring to health their sickly fellow-citizens.' Many contemporary writers on pastoral theology or counselling have followed up these early writers by linking their own work with modern psychiatry and drawing on its discoveries.

Thus healing and beautifying may be two ways in which grace affects human lives and experience (both of them regarded by some as a restoration of an original wholeness). They are only, as I have said, a fragment of a very complex theology. But they point us to

profound and moving aspects of life, and may also serve to link this theology to the teaching of some non-Christian religions and to supposedly 'secular' areas of study and care.

*She radiated a
moral beauty that
left even her Gestapo
interrogators
self-consciously
shuffling their papers*



Rembrandt: The Prodigal Son

Spectrum of Joy

The Bahá'í faith has impacted on my artistic practice so intimately that it has now become impossible to know where one starts and the other ends. Sometimes the inspiration is direct but often the spirit is expressed unconsciously.

I became a Bahá'í 19 years ago and have been profoundly touched by the beauty and simplicity of the writings. They pervade the way that I see the world - through eyes full of hope and optimism mixed with a tinge of mysticism. The Word of God provides me with a philosophy based on divine revelation, and a knowledge that goes far beyond my limited conception. I express my faith through my art: the artwork is the end product, and the process of creativity is devotion that feeds my soul, bringing beauty, joy and meaning to my life.

I studied printed textiles at degree level and it was during this period of that I discovered how colour and abstract qualities can refer beyond themselves towards a transcendental beauty. This happens at the moment when all the elements of a composition connect - an unforced but essential part of the whole. Unity is the key motif of the Baha'i revelation, it teaches that we are on the brink of the age of the oneness of mankind. I work on the principle that the world of matter is an outer expression or facsimile of the inner kingdom of the spirit. I use symbolism derived from the most essential physical elements because they are universal motifs that point from the diversity back to the oneness.

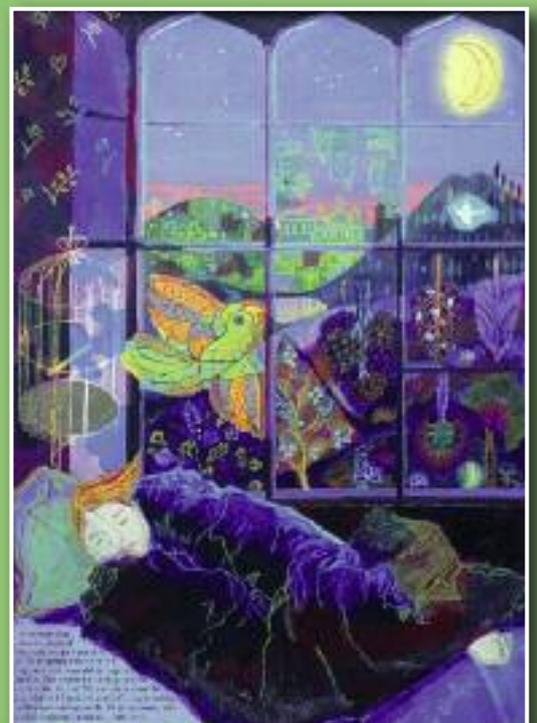
Air - Freedom of the spirit is expressed through flight. For example in Spirit Released the parrot flying out of the cage symbolizes the soul released from the body during sleep or transition to the next world.

Water - Abdu'l-Bahá says that our souls are as waves on the sea of the spirit; although each individual is a distinct wave the ocean is one, all are united.

Earth - The motif of an enclosed garden is used to represent the inner dimension. This is beyond description so the viewer is positioned above the garden looking down and the paintings hint at the beauty contained within.

Fire - Light is a metaphor for the burning away of the self and the spiritual journey from the dark towards the light. For these paintings I scrunch up the paper and then re-stretch it so that when it is lifted out of the water the thickly applied sunrays of fluorescent paint dissolve and pour over the composition, reflecting the chance patterns of nature.

*“...the process
of creativity is
devotion that
feeds my soul”*



Spirit Released



Created for Happiness

A few years ago I became involved in a Tranquility Zone project based within a counselling Centre. The arts were employed as a bridge to facilitate the entering in and out of periods of silent meditation. Music, spiritual readings and the interior environment were used to emphasize the mood of each theme. When I started to formulate an illustrated book of these meditations I had to move beyond representational motifs into purely abstract and decorative compositions to express concepts and emotions such as happiness and the nature of the soul. This has led to the series of designs that I am working on at the moment incorporating the writings of Abdu'l-Bahá to commemorate the centenary of his visit to my hometown of Bristol.

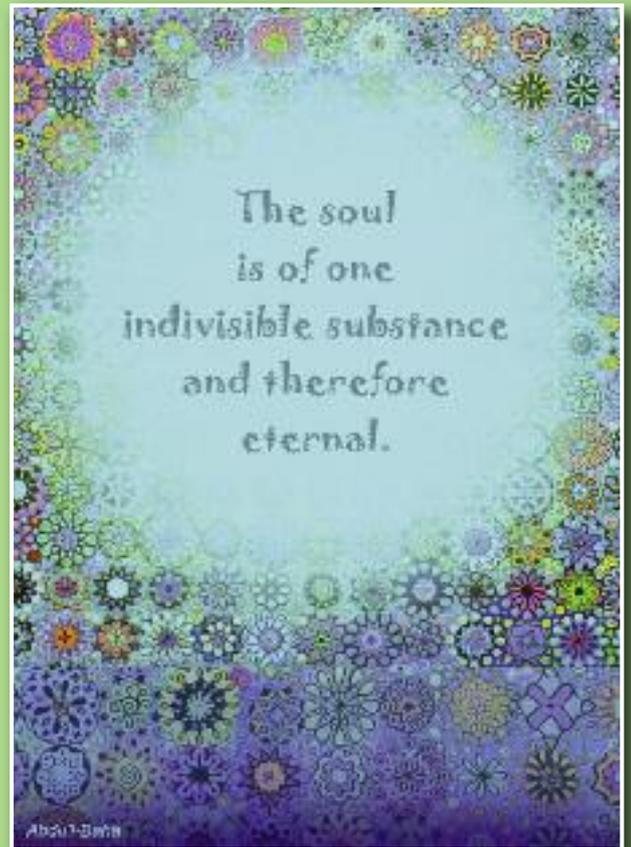
Despite the cheerful optimism of my bright colours and decorative motifs, I endeavour to include silence within my artwork. Compositions utilize space, emptiness and peace to create mystery or offset the more distinctive motifs. There is also an imaginative space that exists between the visual symbol and its metaphorical meaning. I am aware of the power of the scale that exists in the original pieces of art and use space to create a sense of presence as materials are allowed to speak of their own existential reality. It is this relationship with the silence that moves me on now. I pray that I may progress towards a place of waiting, less doing and more being and listening, where my direction will unfold in greater harmony with the inspiration of the moment.

If it be Thy pleasure make me to grow as a tender herb in the meadows of Thy grace, that the gentle winds of Thy will may stir me up and bend me into conformity with Thy pleasure, in such wise that my movement and my stillness may be wholly directed by Thee.

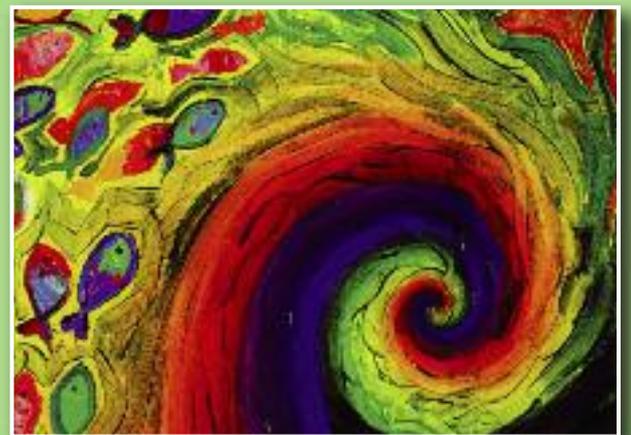
Bahá'u'lláh

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Eternal Soul



Sea of the Spirit



Sundance