

Issue 4 Spring 2009

Interact

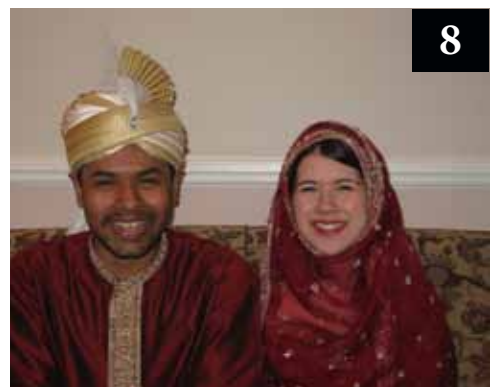
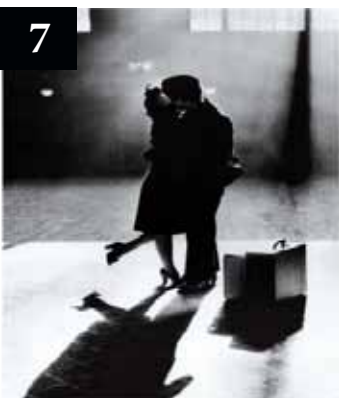
Celebrating the diversity of London's faith and culture

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND FAITH

ON CAMPUS

WHAT'S LOVE
GOT TO DO WITH IT

A CASE OF LIFE
AND DEATH



contents

Spring 2009

THIS ISSUE

- 7 What's Love Got To Do With It**
Lorraine Watson explains all about Valentine's Day
- 9 A Case of Life and Death**
Christian Perspective on Capital Punishment - through the ages
- 15 Images of God**
The role and origins of art in our understanding of faith
- 24 Fashion**
by *Gemma Owen*

REGULAR FEATURES

- 4 Editorial**
- 6 Calender**
- 8 Personal Stories: My Nikkah**
- 16 Recipes**
- 18 Religious Flashpoints**
- 15 Review**
- 20 Top Tips for the Student Worshiper**
- 22 On Campus**
- 26 Listings**

THEME

International Development & Faith

- 10 Building Blocks with Faith and Mortar**
Humanitarianism & conflict resolution in a multi-faith setting
- 12 Faiths Act Together**
Eliminating Malaria amongst the world's poor; make a commitment
- 13 Global Xchange**
Cat Fildes describes her VSO challenge

editorial

London is the most multicultural city in the world with every culture, nationality, and faith represented here. Each cultural tradition, whether derived from faith, ethnicity or nationality are all in their own way evolving and striving to maintain their heritage in a modern world. Interact aims to provide a platform for these cultures and this process, showing that culture provides a stage on which faith and ethnicities face no barriers for dialogue, understanding and interaction.

Interact is an ambitious project, a microcosm if you like, of the work to promote understanding, respect and cooperation between all faiths. It brings students from different backgrounds, to work together and produce this publication over a period of weeks (& months), in doing so many have developed their writing and design skills, whilst learning to appreciate each person's difference and respect another's unique faith heritage.

This issue we focus on faith in international development, the millennium development goals and how many are working across faith to alleviate poverty and promote justice through Faiths Act Together. Also included is all the regular features and a variety of articles to keep you entertained.

We hope you enjoy!



This magazine is distributed free to students at universities, colleges, community groups and places of worship across London.

To advertise in future issues of Interact or support us, please contact the Project manager on 02074824020.

Interfaith Action would like to thank the City Bridge Trust, Trust for London, Department for Communities & Local Government (Connecting Communities Plus) as well as all the individuals and organisations who contributed in some way to this issue of Interact magazine. While we are indebted to the assistance of these groups and our Board of Advisors, they bear no responsibility for the final contents of this magazine.
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This issue's editorial team

Editor

Francesca Colloca : 23, pulled everything together and worked tirelessly to provide all the 'fillers'; studying an MSc in Political Sociology at LSE.

Writer

Alice Radzyner : 21, believes more can be done on campus to promote understanding and respect – read more in her articles. She is studying for her MSc in European Political Economy at LSE.

Writer

Cat Fildes : 23, check out her story in her visit to Kenya and Ireland with VSO's Global Exchange.

Writer

Josh Allanigue : 23, asserted that one of his ambitions in life is to write a critique of Richard Dawkin's "The God Delusion" and finally prove beyond all doubt, that God exists. He is working on the project as we speak. Studying law at UCL.

Writer & Design Assistant

Lorraine Watson : 23, there's not much Lorraine doesn't know about magazine production and design, an invaluable member of the team; recent graduate.

Music, Reviews & Creative Writer

Sanja Vlaisavljevic : 20, filled a large hole in the team with her creativity and love for music.

Writer

Sarah Khalid : 23, with a degree in architecture and a love for interfaith, she is doing what she can to build bridges (both literal and figurative!). Read more in her articles on the environment and international development.

Designer

Laura Pernetti : 24, joined us at the last minute to help with design and layout.

Designer

Davinderpal Singh : 20, valuable member of the design team!

Designer

Meftune Caglar : 24, recent graduate with experience volunteering on previous issues of Interact, Mef is becoming our resident designer.

Photographer

Fatima Abbas : With experience volunteering with Interact before Fatima couldn't leave us alone, she's back to record the groups activities throughout the project.

Do you want to be on the next editorial team of Interact?
We are always looking for new writers, editors, columnists, designers, cartoonists and illustrators. Maybe you have a specific skill or passion that you can support the group with.

Calendar

of Religious Festivals

Hindu
Sikh
Buddhist
Christian
Pagan
Jewish
Shinto
Fasil
Baha'i
Muslim
Mulifaith
Jain

February

Sat	14th	St Valentine's Day
Sun	15th	Nirvana day
Mon	23rd	Mahashivratri - Hindu festival dedicated to Shiva
Tue	24th	Shrove Tuesday - Also called Pancake Day and Mardi Gras
Wed	25th	Ash Wednesday - Start of Lent for Western Christians

March

Mon	2nd	19 day fast (start) - During this period Baha'is go without food or drink from sunrise to sunset
		Clean Monday - Start of the "Great Lent" for Orthodox Christians
Tue	3rd	Hina-matsuri (Festival of Dolls) - Celebrates daughters in the family
Fri	6th	Women's World Day of Prayer
Mon	9th	Milad un Nabi (Birthday of Prophet Mohammed)
Tue	10th	Purim - Commemorates the time when Jewish people living in Persia were saved from extermination by the courage of a young Jewish woman called Esther
		Holi
Wed	11th	Hola Mohalla (Lunar Calendar) - Three day festival of military exercises and mock battles
Sat	14th	Milad un Nabi
Tue	17th	St Patrick's Day
Fri	20th	Spring Equinox- Easter - Celebrates the renewed life that Spring brings to the Earth
Sat	21st	Zoroastrian Jamshedi Noruz (New Year)
		Naw Ruz (New Year)
		Shubun-sai Equinox day
Wed	25th	Annunciation - Marks the angel Gabriel's message to the Virgin Mary that she would give birth to the incarnation of Christ
Thu	26th	Khordad Sal

April

Fri	3rd	Rama Navami - Birthday of Lord Rama, an incarnation of Vishnu and the hero of the Ramayana
Sun	5th	Palm Sunday - This marks the last Sunday of Lent
Tue	7th	Mahavira Jayanti - The birth anniversary of Lord Mahavira
Thu	9th	Hanuman Jayanti - This festival marks the birth of Hanuman, the Monkey God
		Passover (1st day)
		Theravada New Year - New Year festival for Theravada Buddhists
Fri	10th	Good Friday - Commemorates the execution of Jesus by crucifixion
Sun	12th	Easter Sunday - Resurrection of Jesus Christ
Mon	13th	Vaisakhi - The Sikh New Year Festival
Tue	14th	Birthday of Guru Nanak (Nanakshahi calendar)
		Hola Mohalla (Nanakshahi Calendar)
Sun	19th	Easter
Tue	21st	Ridvan - First day
		Yom Hashoah
Thu	23rd	St George's Day: patron saint of England

What's *Love* got to do with it?

That time of year has come once again. Red and pink love hearts are on shop displays, and people use chocolates, sweets, teddy bears and roses as expressions of their love. If you're single February 14th can be lonely and depressing. To cope, some singles boycott Valentine's day; a holiday that traditionally celebrates love. I want to explore the real meaning of Valentine's Day - what is love, and what's love got to do with it?

Saint Valentine was a Roman Priest who continued to marry couples, defying the marriage ban under Roman Emperor Claudius II. Valentine was martyred on 14th February 270 AD and Valentine's Day became a Christian holiday in 496 AD. French ministers on 14th February in 1400 competed to find the best poems among them and the tradition of sending poems, cards and love letters to lovers on this day has continued for centuries. People still choose to use a card to pour out their deepest heartfelt emotions for their sweethearts. Annually millions of cards are sent on Valentine's Day, since commercial cards were introduced in the early 19th century. Love is a universal language everyone around the world understands. Love is the theme of countless songs, books, poems and films. Love is a powerful emotion many people spend their entire lives trying to find the love that makes their hearts race. Everyone's ideas and definition of love is different, so what is love?

The Bible defines real love as patient & kind. Love does not envy or boast. It isn't proud, rude, selfish or easily angered, it doesn't record wrongs. Love does not like evil but is glad about the truth. Love always protects, trusts, hopes and perseveres because love conquers all.

LOVE IS....

Love has to speak from the heart and not the mind

Love is always delighted to meet you and always sad to say goodbye

Love kisses you to sleep and kisses you again when you wake up

Love seeks the best for others at all times

Love humbles itself and uplifts others

Love does not seek to punish but to teach

Love says I always smile, but realizes that there are times when it shouldn't

Love keeps no record of wrongs,* but never forgets

Love doesn't say "salvation is only for us" but says "salvation is for all"

Love makes mistakes but seeks to learn from them, until the day it is complete

Love says "you first" and "let me carry that for you"

Love says "have everything you will ever need" and "just leave enough for me"

Love does not indulge in falsehood but rejoices in the truth

Love says "remember when you've helped me?" here is my thank you "times a thousand"

Love does not look at outward appearance but the content of character

Love says "there are many roads to take, but let me guide you"

Love is the end of history, the enemy of misery

Love has to be with the weak, because only then has love a chance to speak

Love never gives up, Love conquers all, love says "with me, nothing is impossible"

Josh Alliangue

The Bible encourages Christians to love their neighbours as themselves and as God has loved them.

Love is often described as strong like a fire; its flames cannot be distinguished or satisfied, regardless of how much water is put on the flames it will continue to burn. It is priceless and an emotion humans need to survive. Love isn't just about romance but there are so many aspects to it.

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Love isn't a substance that a person can see, it's something you feel, it has the power to bind two people together like a rope, who aren't related to stay committed to each other in a life long relationship called marriage. It causes actions of affection between parents and children; it's out of love why people often kiss, hug and buy each other gifts. So for singletons this Valentine's day don't get depressed thinking of the special one you don't have, embrace the reason for the day and appreciate the loved ones you have, learn to love them so you can love your future Valentine better.



♥ Love History

The word love originated from the Greek language and can be interpreted into four words with slightly different meanings. Love in English tries to express all these different types of love in one word that can lead to confusion and embarrassing situations at times.

- *Agape* is generous, selfless, and unconditional love;
- *Phileo* is love someone has for their friend and is also known as brotherly love;
- *Eros* describes sexual, passionate love
- *Storge* describes the affectionate love of child-to-parent.

personal stories

My Nikkah

by Cat Fildes

I never thought I would get married at 23, but last September, after a year of travelling and volunteering, my long-term boyfriend and I decided that, as newly practising Muslims, we shouldn't be together unless we were married. We wanted to have an Islamic ceremony as soon as possible. Try telling that to non-religious parents!

We did tell them, and a few months later had a low-key nikkah (Islamic marriage) in my father-in-law's house. An Islamic marriage ceremony can take place anywhere, and only needs two male Muslim witnesses – it doesn't even require an imam. We thought that an imam should be there, however, so he could give a speech on why marriage was important in Islam.

Our close family attended, and the ceremony began when the imam arrived, after the midday prayer. We split into two rooms – women in one, men in the other – although this was for convenience as well as religious reasons. The marriage can take place in one room. But women tend to be separated from men so as to make sure that they have not been forced into the marriage. The imam came to me first: he introduced himself, recited two or three verses from the Qur'an, and then asked me three times: Catherine, do you agree to marry Manzur? (Yes) He then recited a du'a or supplication to Allah for a happy and prosperous marriage. After which, amid smiles and relief in my room, he repeated the same in Manzur's room.



Newlyweds: Cat and Manzur at their Nikkah

The imam gave a speech on what marriage means in Islam. No romance – physical or emotional – should take place outside of marriage in Islam. Once you decide to marry, you make a commitment, before Allah and before other witnesses, to be faithful to each other in this life and the next. Whilst divorce is not prohibited in Islam, it is the most hated activity which Allah has allowed.

Our responsibilities are obviously to be good to one another, to care for each other, to respect our family ties, but more specifically: the husband has a responsibility to provide financially for the wife and family (although the wife can work as well); the wife has a responsibility to oversee the upbringing of the children. But these guidelines depend on circumstance and the negotiations that take place within the marriage. After the speech, we then signed a contract, which is legal under Islamic (sharia) law. As the sharia is not recognised in British law, we will have a separate civil ceremony soon, to make our marriage legal in this country. Cue applause, laughter, incessant photos and lots of curry...

A Poem

by Azeekat Akande (aged 16)

Mama why do they stop and stare?
We are only walking to buy some bread.
But they despise us and fear
Don't I too have a right to be fed?

Mama why do they call you such horrid names?
I know that you are truthful and kind.
Definitely you are above such trivial games
Yet they still suspect you have something to hide?

Mama what does it mean to be oppressed?
People say that's how we live, you and I,
Based on the naïve judgement of how we are dressed.
Don't they see that this is just a lie?

Mama is it okay to refuse to conform?
You don't give in, standing tall and strong.
Despite the fact that others view you as out of the norm
How can you be so sure that you're not wrong?

Mama will people ever listen to me?
Because for some all it takes is one look
To determine not to take people seriously.
Is all this because of our choice of Holy Book?

Mama why do they use it as an excuse?
A piece of cloth shouldn't restrict conversation.
They act as if it is a noose
But don't they know that it is a sign of liberation.

Mama what does it mean to be beautiful?
A lot of people think that you're not.
But would the earth remain so precious and bountiful
If all its gems were left uncovered, to rot?

Mama do you know you are beautiful?
I do.

A CASE OF LIFE AND DEATH

Lorraine Watson explores the historical and religious use of capital punishment and looks at arguments for and against the death penalty in our society in the 21st century.

On the early hours of Friday, a late night court assembles for a last minute case. The defendant is accused of blasphemy, the two witnesses disagree but the defendant Jesus Christ of Nazareth is sentenced to death by crucifixion. A long, painful and agonising death awaits Jesus and he is carried away by Roman soldiers to meet his fate.

Two thousands years later the same storyline is repeated in many countries around the world, where governments use capital punishment against citizens for a range of different crimes. In 2007 over 1200 people were executed in 24 countries. Capital punishment is both a political and religious issue that affect citizens of many faiths and morals with long historical origins.

The concept of capital punishment originates from the Old Testament laws of the Bible where for crimes such as homicide, idolatry, sorcery, adultery, blasphemy and Sabbath day violations were severely punished using the death penalty. In Leviticus and Deuteronomy, God provided the Israelites with rules that were a moral code of conduct to govern the nation of Israel by. God also gave the Israelites authority to punish those who broke those laws. It was the method of enforcing God's commandments, and carrying out justice.

Many countries still used the Bible as a blueprint to govern their citizens and enforce laws. The reasons why some countries still use the death penalty are because they feel it's a deterrent; it will make someone think twice about the consequences of committing a crime. It's a form of performing justice because God said in Exodus 'an eye for an eye' and a way of bringing law and order to society. Capital punishment prevents the criminal from reoffending and it allows the victim's family to have closure. In some countries it is said to cost less to execute a criminal, in comparison to

providing them with provisions for the remainder of their life spent in prison. An argument supporting capital punishment is that once a person has committed crimes punishable by death they've forfeited their human right to live, especially if the criminal took the life of another human being.

Anti capital punishment campaigns by Amnesty International argue that capital punishment is not a deterrent, keeping criminals in prison prevents them from reoffending. It also violates an individual's right to live and lowers the value of a person's life because capital punishment is cruel, inhumane and degrading. Another alarming fact remains that many innocent people have been executed for crimes they didn't commit, and capital punishment is also used to suppress political opposition in some countries. Amnesty International argues 'the death penalty is discriminatory and is often used disproportionately against the poor, minorities and members of racial, ethnic and religious communities.' In 2007, China executed more people in the world using capital punishment. Amnesty International argues that 'major religions emphasize mercy, compassion and forgiveness in their teachings.' There are other alternatives to the death penalty: imprisonment and rehabilitation, which are about reforming criminals.

When a woman was caught committing adultery and the Jewish elders wanted to stone her, they first asked Jesus what they should do, and Jesus said 'He that is without sin cast the first stone'. All her accusers realised that in their own lives they were also guilty of sinning against God. They were unfit to judge her whereas Jesus who lived a sinless life was in the position where he could have condemned her to death. Jesus showed mercy and compassion and told her to sin no more. The Bible says Jesus' mission was to save souls, not judge.

The New Testament is based on Jesus Christ teachings he commanded that we love our enemies and forgive them. Bishop T.H. Baxter of Church of God World Fellowship explains '[Jesus] has not spoken anything at all, neither the apostle themselves spoken anything about killing somebody because that person kill somebody else who is close to us. So only under Old Testament scriptures, if a person purposely slays somebody else then that person's life would be taken from them. So under the New Testament scripture it doesn't matter what sins you've committed we can be forgiven.'

The Bible says everyone is guilty of sinning against God, yet God extends grace and mercy to us because he's kind. God is the only one who can judge and God carries out justice which a person

day of judgement on the entire world to give everyone a chance to repent of their sins.

On Good Friday Jesus Christ was executed with two thieves on his left and right side. One mocked him while the other asked for forgiveness. Jesus promised the repentant thief that he would be with him in paradise. Christians celebrate Easter because they believe Jesus Christ used his life to pay humanity's punishment of death for their sins against God. Jesus' death reconciled humans with God so they wouldn't have to die and suffer the punishment of spending the rest of eternity in hell. The UK abolished the death penalty in 1964. In the 21st century two thirds of the world's countries have either abolished in law or practice the use of capital punishment. Myra Hindley was one of Britain's most prolific murderers was jailed for life on May 6th 1966. During her life sentence she later became a devout Roman Catholic in prison and was described as a "good woman" whilst studying for an Open University degree in humanities.

England is a country whose entire history, politics, culture and society were structured on Christian principles which have been its dominant and official religion for centuries. The church and state are separate but interlinked, they both have a say and influence in each other's affairs. The Queen is the head of the Anglican Church and the monarchy's role is to defend the Christian faith. The Queen is also involved with Parliament because she signs the laws once they've been agreed and passed by both the House of Commons and the House of Lords. Anglican bishops have the privilege of 26 seats in the House of Lords, which is apart of the Parliamentary body. Religion is what people use to navigate their lives and is what their morals are based upon and has a role included in political decisions. The House of Lords give advice on bills being considered as laws, unlike the House of Commons which is the most

powerful part of Parliament; members are elected who represent the citizens and are responsible for creating laws.

Over the recent years, politics has decreased the role of God, where religious morals were once obligated into the laws that were created. As the world over time has become more secular, the church and state have separated. The church represents God whilst the Government represents people and acts on their behalf even if their laws are in conflict with Biblical laws.

“Religion does what the state can't do”

Laws today have been created based on equality and ideals of trying to promote harmony amongst all disadvantaged and discriminated groups within society. This was evident when the government introduced the civil partnerships bill, which was objected by Christian groups, but was approved because of the human rights act.

Capital punishment has been used throughout history as a way to punish criminals and is a complex issue. Whether you agree or disagree with capital punishment, both views have been looked at. Religion does what the state can't do; religion is more effective at creating law abiding people, whilst the state can't prevent people breaking their laws. The government do still have the God-given authority and responsibility to use measures to keep law and order.

I'm personally not in favour of capital punishment, I feel it's not society's job to be an executioner as we individually and collectively at some point in our lives haven't lived according to God's laws, so we're unfit to condemn a person to death.

TAKING LIBERTIES

A review of the British Library Exhibition



As we enter a dark spotlight cavern on the ground floor of the British Library, angry voices emanate from the walls, almost embarrassing Magna Carta curling sleepily in the corner. The 900-year struggle for Britain's freedoms and rights, the exhibition claims. If this is a bit simplified (no country, not even the UK, progresses easily from autocracy to democracy), the British Library tries to break up the chronological feel by punctuating the walls with videos where the debate over monarchy, imprisonment, and religion is shown to be as relevant today as it was in the sixteenth century. And just in case that doesn't wake you up, there are interactive voting panels scattered throughout the exhibition, the results of which you can see at the end.

Whilst I commend the attempts to make this exhibition lively (in the gloomy basement), the British Library could have done more. Why does this have no international focus? Whilst the good-old Brits were fighting heroically for their "freedoms" (and this word is vague at the best of times), we were colonising most of the rest of the world. Whilst these same Brits are fighting for secular freedom of speech – a video shows white middle-class men from the Humanist society and PEN, quoting Salman Rushdie as an authority on why religion is stupid – is there any acknowledgement that Britain is one of the most diverse societies in the world?

THE PAST AND PRESENT

Music Review

There are more than 1.3 Muslims alone. This diversity brings with it new concepts of freedom (the freedom to pray, to wear hijab and not be abused on the street...), not just freedom of speech.

The celebratory feel is inspiring only to a point. We have not had a linear development as regards our freedoms, and some would say that this new surveillance society governed by the Internet, web-cams, inescapable advertisements, identity cards and PIN numbers – let alone the invasions of several other countries to make them and us more insecure – have reduced our freedoms substantially. Can children play outside after 5pm anymore? Is this the culmination of a 900 year struggle?

Let's look at our impact on the countries around us, and on our sense of security, before we simplistically celebrate the twenty-first century.

By Cat Fildes



The long expected Fabriclive 44 by Commix released on 2nd February has provided its followers with some of the best mixes, playing from the past to the present.

Commix, who released their last album "Call to Mind" in November 2007 have once again proven their skills in exploring the world of drum and bass. "Call to Mind", supported by Metalheadz, has been said to be one of Commix's lesser works in that it contained a wavier and more techno-like sound. Personally, "Call to Mind" proved that Commix could do it all: produce a compilation from original beats and new-wave synths to ambient drums and jazzier melodies and finally even old school beats that remind us all what drum and bass once was.

Fabriclive 44 conveys mixtures of sounds starting with a sound similar to Commix's previous album "Call to Mind" with a soft and jazzy sound, however the coming drop in the 5th song, "The Causeway" by Data, sets a different tone to the entire album. Commix introduces the old school legends such as Photek and Rufiage Crew who are seen as the founders of intelligent drum and bass and gives Fabriclive 44 a twist long awaited.

For the drum and bass lovers, the past and the present, Fabriclive 44 will provide you with all the latest drum and bass beats and it will allow you to once again indulge in the old school jungle sounds and breaking beats that have been long missed.

So... if you are a drum and bass lover and still have not acquired a copy, I advise you to get out and get it... It will drum-beat your mind away!

by Sanja Vlajsavljevic

“Listening to this mix, we hear what drum & bass was when it started out—we hope to enlighten people about where it came from”
- Commix

This issue our feature focuses on **Faith & International Development**, the millennium development goals and how many are working across faith divides to alleviate poverty and promote justice.

Building Blocks with Faith and Mortar

A glance at Multi-Faith Humanitarian work, by Sarah Khalid

Two men, who could have been enemies, sat in front of a crowd waiting for the audience to settle. They had come from the Philippines and were tired surely, but that didn't seem to dim their smiles. They had made the long journey to talk about the multi-faith action that has proven to alleviate poverty and reduce conflict in the Philippines.

The speakers, Maguid Maruhom and Jose Luis Clemente, began with giving insight into a four hundred year old independence struggle between the "Moros" people of the island of Mindanao. The struggles of these people began between the Spanish, then the Americans, and now, the Philippines' state. Recently, the signing of a peace agreement (twelve years in the making) fell through between the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the Government of the Philippines, fueling even greater conflict. The conflicts over the years have left many in poverty, displaced, and without homes, in an environment of fear and distrust.

Maruhom is the director of Ummah Fi Salam (Community for Peace), a Muslim faith-based organisation, while Clemente heads the Socio-Pastoral Institute (SPI), a Roman Catholic training institution. Both groups are dedicated to using the intrinsic values of their faiths to help build bridges, strengthen communication, and help empower religious leaders and citizens alike to create safer and just communities.

With funding from Christian Aid, both groups have partnered together to defend human rights and help achieve peace in

Mindanao. They have implemented a programme that has brought and continues to bring, positive change. As Clemente describes, the reason for their successes is because they bring spirituality into the heart of the solution; for many, spiritual values transcend secular ones and are thus greater drivers of change. Using an existing inter-faith council that once operated at a high-level with only Bishops, Priests and Imams etc.; the programme brought the council to the community so the voices and the issues of the population would be heard. This has served a significant role in helping to raise the voices and concerns of the public to a government level. Secondly, it was found that local religious leaders were regarded as crucial to the community, and were being sought out for advice on all aspects of life. Yet, many of these religious leaders were not adept to deal with non-religious matters. So, the programme provides training targeted at these influential individu-

"...for many, spiritual values transcend secular ones and are thus greater drivers of change."

als. Third, the programme provides the essentials of community development – health and education (i.e. literacy and sanitation campaigns), microfinance, infrastructure development and measures to prevent human rights violations. Most of these were gained through the inter-faith council. The improvements in the community that have since followed,

as both Maruhom and Clemente testify, were driven by the spiritual dimension of the people.

It was no easy task though. To gain the trust of the community and open them up to inter-faith dialogue proved to be a difficult, two-year journey. However, once the relationship was developed on a heart-to-heart and spiritual basis, the desire to improve the community and quality of life for all followed.

To measure the success of the programme, key indicators were established. So far, they have been able to organize core female leaders, increase the participation of Muslim and Christian leaders, protect 800 fisherfolk families, stop demolition, secure land tenure, build two communities from scratch, and can see that previous margin members of society are now talking to the government. It is a critical collaboration that, without the spiritual backdrop, could have taken much longer than it has. However, as Clemente iterated, faith alone is the first step, but it must be paired with skillful method. The programme between Ummah Fi Salaam and SPI helps tie the two together.

Historically, although advancements in human rights have been relatively slow, they have come about because people have demanded it. Progress has been hindered because society seems to suffer from a cynicism; youth and adults alike have a "it's a lost cause" mentality, and fail to get involved. Being willfully ignorant is almost the easy way of dealing with issues; there is no paradigm shift, no emotional attachment, no challenge

to preconceived notions and habits and no pressure to change. Yet, we complain. It is time to realize that it depends on us, driven by a common goal or inspiration, to change things for the better. Faith and faith agencies, like Ummah Fi Salam and the SPI, help us find that drive to improve our daily lives and the lives of others. With growing collaborations across the globe, a conference was held to highlight these initiatives. The Keeping Faith in Development conference inaugurated by the Woolf Institute of Abrahamic faiths in Cambridge in early December 2008, was based on the collaboration between World Jewish Relief, Christian Aid and Islamic Relief. Being the first of its kind, It focused on what faith agencies have done and how they can continue to work together to help alleviate poverty and prevent and remedy social injustices. The charities work with all in need, despite religious belief (or lack of) and refrain from preaching and converting.

The sentiments of the conference are echoed by each leader of the agencies involved:

“Global poverty is not a Christian issue, but a human one, and ending it is not simply a Christian obligation, but a universal one. This conference is an opportunity to celebrate what different faiths have already done together to bring about an end to poverty and injustice and to look forward to what we might do together in the future.” Daleep Mukarji, Director at Christian Aid.

“Central to all faiths, not least the Abrahamic traditions, is the duty to stand by one’s neighbours, regardless of race, colour or creed. This conference will offer a welcome chance to strengthen the growing interfaith partnership which is working to end the poverty of so many of our neighbours across the world.” Saleh Saeed, Chief Executive of Islamic Relief Worldwide.

“World Jewish Relief is honoured to stand with other faith-based agencies working to combat poverty around the world. At this critical juncture in countering vulnerability, faith agencies have a vital role to play – we should celebrate this.” Paul Anticoni, Chief Executive of World Jewish Relief.

The Millennium Development Goals

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are eight international development goals directed at eradicating extreme poverty and meeting the needs of the poor by 2015. Several United Nations member states and international organizations have come together in their commitment to help make these goals a reality.

The MDGs are as follows;

- End poverty and hunger
- Universal education
- Gender equality
- Child health
- Maternal health
- Combat HIV/AIDS
- Environmental sustainability
- Global partnership

Currently, the implementations of the goals have been met with mixed success; some countries such as India and China are on track for achieving many of the goals, while others such as the regions of Sub-Saharan Africa have yet to make significant changes.

Find out more about the Millennium Development goals at www.un.org/millenniumgoals



FaithsAct
TOGETHER

Act now
against
Malaria.

Find out how you can make
a difference. Go to:
www.faithsacttogether.org

Tony Blair
Faith Foundation

Faiths Act Together Tony Blair Calls for Action

On 5th February Tony Blair issued a call to action to encourage people of faith around the world to act together to show the power of “a million good deeds done every day” in the name of religion.

“For billions of people, faith motivates, galvanises, compels and inspires, not to exclude but to embrace; not to provoke conflict but to try to do good. This is faith in action,” he said, speaking at the National Prayer Breakfast in Washington DC. “You can see it in the arousing of the world’s conscience to the plight of Africa, a cause we in positions of political power tried to answer, but which was driven by people of faith.”

The Tony Blair Faith Foundation is now stepping up its campaign to raise funds and awareness to eliminate millions of unnecessary deaths from malaria – giving people a practical way of demonstrating

how faith can heal rather than divide the world. Faiths Act Together (www.faithsacttogether.org), is a locally driven campaign urging faith-based activity around its “Story of a Bed Net” film to encourage shared ideas, discussion and actions to tackle deaths from malaria. Up to 500 million people suffer from malaria and up to one million people die unnecessarily from the disease annually.

“For billions of people, faith motivates, galvanises, compels and inspires, not to exclude but to embrace; not to provoke conflict but to try to do good. This is faith in action.”

In Africa, malaria kills one child every 30 seconds.

Tony Blair said: “A million deaths a year from malaria is wholly preventable. We want 2009 to be the year that people of faith become the change makers against malaria and take direct action to tackle this preventable disease.

“We have already received hundreds of requests from people around the world asking how to get involved and what action they can take. We all know the problems associated with conflict between religions but there is another, more positive story too.”

Up to 500 million people suffer from malaria and up to one million people die unnecessarily from the disease annually. In Africa, malaria kills one child every 30 seconds.

In order to achieve these aims, the Foundation is asking people like you to take two simple steps:

STEP ONE: To get together with others and use their short film “The Story of a Bed Net” to raise awareness and funds to combat deaths from malaria. Just \$10 will buy one insecticide-treated bed net. That net can protect an entire household from malaria.

You can do this in your neighbourhoods or places of worship; on your campuses or in your sports teams; or simply with a few friends. There are lots of ways to get involved. Ideas and simple step-by-step guides are available on their website www.faithsacttogether.org

STEP TWO: Tell them about it. Once you’ve shown the film, email the Foundation with a few words and a photo of the event, which will be posted on The Global Movement Map on their website. Your work will inspire others around the globe.

For more information, check out the campaign at www.faithsacttogether.org or contact Hannah Wallace at Hannah.wallace@tonyblairfaithfoundation.org.uk

“We want 2009 to be the year that people of faith become the change makers against malaria and take direct action to tackle this preventable disease.”

Global Exchange

Cat Fildes describes her journey and experience as a participant on VSO’s Global Exchange Programme for 16-25 year olds, last year.

The wind whipped round me as I felt my first Northern Irish fog. Three months later, the dense London crowds shocked me back into home life. Two days after that, however, I was juggling a sweating suitcase and left-over plane food as I walked out of humid Mombasa airport for the first time. And finally, three months ago, I returned home and was once again greeted by the London crowds, disoriented and melancholy that I had lost the peace of the madrassa, the smiles of Mombasa’s residents.

This was not a typical gap-year. For a start, the reader should replace ‘I’ with ‘we’, because Global XChange is a team of eighteen volunteers, nine from Kenya and nine from the UK, who lived and volunteered together from March 2008 to September 2008. Three months in Northern Ireland (Newry), three months in Kenya (Mombasa). I shared a bedroom with Khola Ahmed for the whole six months, and was surprised when I found it hard to sleep on my own after the project had ended.

I look back on the first three months, and I realise how under-prepared I was – emotionally, spiritually and mentally. The introductory week in Northern

Ireland, where all eighteen of us stayed together in a drafty hostel (the Kenyans, shocked by the cold, often wore two or three Puffa jackets during the day, with a hat, scarf and blanket wrapped round them), involved training sessions about cultural difference and how to overcome it. I often scoffed at this training as non-academic, and hated the team-building activities. You see, I’d just graduated from Cambridge and judged everyone else on their academic intelligence. I was frustrated that no-one else felt the same: not even the two programme supervisors.

After that week, we were placed into pairs – one Kenyan, one UK – for the next six months. Pairs would be allocated a host-home, and would volunteer in the community in a different pair. Weekly training days were held, where a pair of volunteers would facilitate a day’s worth of training sessions on a global problem, such as HIV/Aids or Fair Trade. So: I was paired with Khola; we lived in Rostrevor on the East coast of Northern Ireland; I worked at a community TV and radio station, filming documentaries with Zuhura (another Kenyan girl); Khola and I organised a day’s training on ‘religion’, by visiting the various religious centres of Belfast.

When I say I was under-prepared, I mean I was sceptical about everything. I didn’t take part in the socials, and instead went to bed early, read books when I was awake, rang home every night, went for long solitary walks in the Rostrevor hills.

By the end of the three months, we had a debriefing in Belfast before the next stage took place in Mombasa. What had we achieved? Each volunteer went through their successes. They seemed so much greater than mine: I just said that I’d found some “inner peace” amongst the noise of the team, amongst the crowded host home where I had no personal space. We then sat and meditated on our experience so far. How much were we contributing to the team? Were we taking all opportunities given to us? I started to realise that the ‘GX’ team was more important than the volunteer work – that, actually, this experience was about working in a cross-cultural team, and about making an impact through the team.

The crux came when, on the outbound flight to Mombasa, the UK programme supervisor suddenly became exasperated at my unwillingness to participate. You’ve had so many opportunities, Cat. You’re just about to board a

free flight to Mombasa, and live there for three months. How many other people can do this? You've had food, an allowance, training, social activities for three months so far: when are you going to start giving something back?

When we arrived in Mombasa, I was determined to be optimistic about it all. A new phase to the programme, a new community, a new start. The team dynamics changed with the warm weather – those who had been confident quietened down, and new leaders came to the front.

I lived in a large Muslim family, and worked for MEWA (Muslim Education and Welfare Association), who were trying to set up an employment bureau. Unemployment is so high in Mombasa, and there were very few jobs available: rarely advertised, job opportunities would go to a member of family or a friend of the manager. So if your father wasn't the CEO of Habib Bank or Kenya Ferry Services or the like, then you'd find problems getting a job – even with an immaculate CV. We were given CV's which listed business degrees, masters qualifications, years worth of voluntary work experience, all jobless.

Thus most Mombasans between eighteen and twenty-five are full-time, 9-5, volunteers: they do the same amount of work as the employed, the only difference is that they don't get paid. Voluntary experience is a way to be independent of your family (you may get a small allowance for food each week), and you may get contacts, you will probably meet many others in your situation. So Eb and I were working together to set up an employment bureau for these youths.

I realised how different the concept of volunteering was in Kenya compared to the UK. I was grumpy and sceptical about the Global XChange project, but these youths would kill for an opportunity like this, endorsed by VSO and the British Council. In fact, the Kenyans on Global XChange had been in the same position as these unemployed youths, and were probably going to resume the unpaid work after the project had ended. I, however, was looking forward to doing a masters degree when I returned, with the knowledge that I'd probably get a job afterwards: the Kenyan

youths had much fewer prospects, and almost no hope.

The other profound impact Mombasa had upon me was the Muslim environment. In the family home, I would return to the peaceful kitchen after a day's work at MEWA (Khola would often return before me and be in our bedroom, listening to Celine Dion). I would sit on the floor, next to a cancerous aunt who chanted the 99 names of Allah in Arabic over and over. We would speak quietly of how the day had been, always with the words "alhamdulillah" (praise to Allah) or "inshaallah" (if Allah wills it, then it is so). I would practice my Swahili over the bubbling maharagui and viazi (beans and potatoes). When I found my inner peace in Northern Ireland, here I found unimaginable tranquillity, as I had never experienced before.

This helped me to be a better team member: knowing that I had found my centre, my peace. I was quieter, less frustrated in team discussions. I made an effort to be actively learning during the training days, and began to be genuinely curious rather than sceptical.

On the plane home, I thought back over the six months. What a change: I'd learnt to value others for themselves, and not for any arbitrary benchmark such as "academic intelligence". I'd learnt to stop competing with others, and be part of a team instead. I felt happy for the first time, and peaceful, and less lonely. And instead of feeling culture shock when I arrived home, I felt an even greater happiness that I could show my change to my family. Alhamdulillah, the change is still apparent, three months on.

Safe Garden Project

Since September 2008 Interfaith Action have been delivering their Safe Garden Project, funded by the Enfield Stronger & Safer Community Partnership (supported by Age Concern Enfield). The project provides volunteers to assist elderly residents with their gardening on a weekly or fortnightly basis. Working in pairs the volunteers (aged 16-25) help residents with tasks including cutting grass, weeding, pruning, general tidying and painting gates and fences.

The aim of the project is to promote good relations between people from different faiths and cultures; increase understanding and respect between young people and elderly residents (inter-generational); reduce anti-social behaviour and crime; specifically burglary and vandalism often targeted at elderly or disabled residents with overgrown gardens (improving community safety and cohesion).

To date they have 19 volunteers registered, including a group of students from Enfield College working towards their Level 3 certificate. As part of this they will complete up to 50 hours on the project. The project has 10 elderly or people registered for support, and has also helped 2 community organisations with their overgrown gardens.=



Photograph courtesy of Cat Fildes

Images of God

Lorraine Watson uncovers the origins of Christian art and looks at the role it has played in the Christian world and how paintings have shaped beliefs of Jesus Christ in society.

The origins of Christian art developed from the 5th century, during Roman Empire, it was well established by the 6th century, of the Byzantine Empire in the Mediterranean. The iconic image of Christ developed from Byzantium art has evolved and been used as a template in other portraits of Christ throughout history.

Different Christian denominations interpret the Bible differently. The interpretation of these Biblical texts has shaped how different Christian denominations have evolved their doctrines and practices concerning Christian worship. A debate about whether images of Christ were acceptable was debated until eventually splitting the early Roman and Orthodox churches of the 8th century.

Those supporting icon veneration argued that the person that the icon represents is being worshipped not the image; and there are no scriptures specifically forbidding the depiction of Christ. Others disagree seeing icons as idolatry referring to the Old Testament forbidding anyone making images or statues of god(s) to worship.

God made this rule to prevent idolatry and the consequences practicing it had. Idolatry eventually led people away from God because it changes the unseen God into images made to look like man and animals. An idolater is spiritually corrupted because they trust and worship something other than God; and idolatry was so serious in Old Testament times that it was punished by death. In disregarding this rule these artists have taken Jesus who is seen by Christians as the perfect man and as the Apostle Paul in Romans wrote have dishonored his



Michelangelo di Lodovico Buonarroti Simoni.

name by transforming him into a corrupt man who looks like them. In my opinion, artists have not and cannot capture Jesus' power, honour or authority as the son of God. The Bible symbolically describes Jesus' hair and eyes as white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire which are mentioned a few times in both the Old and New Testament.

Some churches have approved of these icons of Christ having allowed these paintings to hang on their walls and painted on stained glass windows. These icons have been embedded in our minds, meaning many people revere the painting which is intended to represent the person. I was taught and believed for a long time that Jesus really looked like one of the paintings, I accepted this icon as the person and wasn't fully aware that these icons were not actual portrayals of Christ; In my early teens it was brought to my attention that none of the painters who drew Christ were alive during his life on earth. Now as I look at the world's most iconic portrait of Christ, I'm convinced Jesus didn't look like how he was depicted. In Leonardo Di Vinci's painting *The Last Supper* I assume Di Vinci painted Jesus according to what he thought he may have looked, but it still seems that these artists' were portraying themselves.

These icons have European characteristics and features; it is more likely that as a Middle Eastern Jew, Jesus looked much more 'middle eastern' than 'white European', as he is most iconically portrayed.

Because of this archetype, many people's perception of Jesus has been based on their views from this image rather than on what the Bible says about him. During the civil rights movement Black Muslims rejected Jesus because they considered him 'The white man's God'. To change groups of people's opinion of Jesus, others have changed his appearance to resemble another race i.e. Jesus has been portrayed as a Black man with dreadlocks or an afro. I feel we need to focus on the man Jesus and not what he looks like. Because we do not know his principles or him personally we end up misunderstanding what Jesus is about and how his teachings can help people in their lives.

They say a picture is worth a thousand words. Our concept and attitudes of Christ have been shaped by the artists' visual interpretation of Christ and reinforced by what we've been taught and grown up with. This archetype of Christ is kept alive through religious paintings, films and books. We know more about Christ as an image and have kept intact with it our assumptions and pre-conceived ideas of him.

Christian art has played an important part of people's lives but now its time to move beyond that and go deeper. We need to discover Jesus for ourselves based on biblical fact and not on an artist's representation from centuries ago. As a Christian I believe what is important is that Jesus exists and that anyone who wants to can have a relationship with him as I do.

Recipes

Feeling Ambitious?

Roast Leg of Lamb Mint Sauce: a Jewish Seder Specialty



Ingredients:

20 garlic cloves, peeled
1/2 c. red wine vinegar
2 tbsp. thyme
1 1/2 c. water
one 9-10 lb leg of lamb
1 medium onion, coarsely chopped
2 c. dry white wine
2 tpb. extra virgin olive oil
4 bay leaves
salt & freshly ground pepper
1/2 c. white wine vinegar
1/2 c. finely chopped mint
1 tbsp. unsalted butter or olive oil

In a blender, puree 10 garlic cloves with red vinegar, thyme & 1/2 c. of water. Put lamb in a roasting pan and pour the marinade over it. Cover and refrigerate overnight.

Preheat the oven to 325 degrees. Spread the onion and remaining garlic cloves under the leg of lamb. Add the wine to the pan and rub the lamb with olive oil. Top with the bay leaves and season with salt & pepper. Roast the lamb for about 4 1/2 hours or until an instant-read thermometer inserted in the thickest part of the meat reads 160 degrees. If the pan begins to look dry while cooking, add 1/2 c. water. Transfer lamb to a carving board.

In a small saucepan, combine the remaining 1/2 c. water with white wine vinegar, mint, butter or olive oil, and a pinch of salt and bring to a boil. Simmer over moderate heat until the broth resembles mint tea, about 3 minutes. Carve the lamb and serve with the mint broth. Serve along with sides of your choice; some roasted potatoes with garlic and rosemary or some boiled carrots will work nicely.

Keeping it Simple?

Pancakes: Sweet or Savoury

Ingredients:

110g of plain flour
1 egg
milk
knob of butter, melted

Whisk the egg into the flour and slowly add the milk, stirring constantly. Add enough milk to have a loose (but not runny) mixture. Add the melted butter (this prevents the pancakes from sticking to the pan).

Heat your frying pan and add butter (pour away any excess). Add one ladle or 2 serving spoons of mixture to the pan; make sure it spreads out over the bottom of the frying pan. Watch until small bubbles appear all over, (and give the pan small shakes encouraging it not to stick) - it is ready to flip! It usually takes about one min on each side.

Blueberries & Maple syrup – simply add a handful of blueberries to 4 large spoons of maple syrup and heat slowly in a saucepan.

The pancakes can also be a savoury snack with for example cheese.



Having a Party? Artichoke and Roasted Red Pepper Dip: The Perfect Starter

This dish is sure to warm and impress your guests. Perfectly served with biscuits or crusty bread. Makes about 24 servings and will be ready in 45 minutes.

Ingredients:

2 tablespoons butter
1 leek, diced
1 (390g) tin artichoke hearts, drained and chopped
200g (7 oz) jarred roasted red peppers, drained and chopped
110g (4 oz) freshly grated Parmesan
3 tablespoons mayonnaise

Preheat your oven to 180 C.

Melt the butter in a saucepan over medium heat. Sauté the leek until its tender. Stir in the artichoke hearts, roasted red peppers, Parmesan and mayonnaise. Transfer to a baking dish.

Bake for 30 minutes in preheated oven, or until bubbly and lightly browned. Your starter is ready!



Have a sweet tooth? Gujia: A classic Indian treat

Gujia is a fried pastry filled with aromatic nuts mixture. Made all over India and varying slightly from region to region, Gujia is traditionally made for the holidays of Diwali and Holi and is a must have treat for all! They can be stored in an air-tight container for up to a month. This recipe makes about 20-24 gujia.

Ingredients:

<p>Filling: 1/2 cup whipping cream 1 cup milk powder 1/4 cup coconut powder 1/4 cup sliced almonds 1/2 teaspoon cardamom powder 2 tablespoon sugar</p> <p>Also needed: 1 tablespoon all purpose flour 2 tablespoon water Oil to fry</p>	<p>Crust: 1 cup all purpose flour 1 tablespoon sooji (semolina flour) 2 tablespoons oil 1/3 cup lukewarm water or as needed</p> <p>Garnish: 1/2 cup sugar 1/4 Water 2 tablespoons sliced almonds and pistachios</p>
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Begin with the crust. Mix the flour, sooji, oil and water together to make soft dough (add more water as needed). Knead the dough for about two minutes until the dough becomes smooth and pliable. Set the dough aside and cover it with a damp cloth.

Let the dough rest for at least ten minutes.

Next make the filling. Mix the cream and milk powder in a frying pan on medium heat. Cook until mixture starts leaving the sides of the frying pan and becomes close to soft runny dough. Stir continuously so the mixture does not burn on the bottom of the pan. Turn off the heat and add coconut, almonds, sugar, and cardamom powder. Be sure to mix it all together well. After cooling, the mixture will become just moist. Keep it to the side.

Now you can actually make the gujias. Mix 2 tablespoons of water with 1 tablespoon of flour to make a paste. Set it aside. Knead the dough again for a minute. Divide the dough into about 20 equal parts and roll into balls with the palms of your hands. With a rolling pin roll each ball into about 4-inch diameter circles. Dip your finger in the flour paste and spread it around the rim of the rolled dough, but just on the half the circle.

Take the rolled dough in your palm and put about 1 1/2 tablespoons of the filling mixture in the centre and fold it into a semi-circle. Now press the edges together with your fingers. Make sure the edges are completely sealed otherwise they will open while frying and oil will get in and filling will come out. Continue filling the rest of the gujia in the same manner.

TOP TIPS

for the student worshiper...

Where to find information about prayer services or faith groups

- 1 Check with your Student Union or Student Services Centre. They are likely to have loads of information about services/groups on campus, and maybe even some in the university neighbourhood.
- 2 Search engines like Google and Yahoo are your friends. They're usually your best bet for finding a prayer service/faith group near your home.
- 3 Visit your local council. They have a lot of information about local groups and their meeting times/locations. Not only that, but they probably have an events listing of with loads of fun things to do in your neighbourhood!



Knowing your rights on campus

- 4 You have the freedom to speak, organise, debate and air views, and the freedom from harm, harassment, and unlawful discrimination.
- 5 Students have the right to observe and manifest their beliefs in a reasonable manner (that is, unless these observations restrict the freedoms of others).
- 6 The Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006 amended the Public Order Act 1986 to create criminal offences involving stirring up hatred against persons on religious grounds. Someone who encourages others to discriminate can be held accountable.
- 7 Students are free and encouraged to establish faith based societies, recognised by their Students' Union, with the object of practising and promoting any religion as part of their educational and social experience and development at the college or university.
- 8 The 1994 Act requires that the procedure for recognition of societies and the allocation of resources or privileges by the Students' Union such as access to publicity, premises and financial support should be fair, set down in writing and freely accessible to all students.

9 Institutions should ensure that examinations and other formal assessment procedures do not take place on a formal day of observance. If this is not possible, then suitable alternate arrangements must be made. Any individual so affected should submit a request to the Academic Registry for alternative arrangements to be made as soon as possible after the examination timetable is released. (Guidelines for Students' Unions and Christian Unions 2007)

Have certain food restrictions?

Only eat halal or kosher?

Vegetarian?

Most campus catering facilities will already offer a range of menu choices. These should always be clearly labeled so that staff and students can make choices with certainty. Staff should be given training so that they understand the implications of faith in relation to dietary requirements and the importance of segregating certain food products.

Religious **flash** points across the globe

“While religions are often blamed for society’s ills, we know that it is rather the manipulation of religion, contrary to its fundamental beliefs, that is used to carry out so many forms of violence.”
Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, head of the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue, Vatican City

Profile : India

As we witnessed this past year bring more violence and religious strife to India, Interact Magazine decided to take a closer look at the country; briefly examining the recent history of relations between certain ethnic and religious groups in order to better understand some of the conflict we see in the news. The world’s attention was captured by the ferocious assault on Mumbai, and our condolences and sympathy go out to the victims and families of the attacks. But for this edition of ‘Religious Flashpoints’ other parts of India are our points of interest.

India is the world’s largest democracy, second most populous country, and is one of the world’s most important economies. It is a country of vibrant cultural heritage and breathtaking landscapes. Despite its rising status as a leading world political and economic player, however, it is still tackling widespread and deeply rooted social problems in many of its states and territories.

India’s ethnic and religious makeup is incredibly unique: Over 800 million Indians (80.5%) are Hindu. Muslims comprise 13.4% of the population, Peoples of different Tribes comprise 8.2%, Christians comprise 2.3%, Sikhs make up 1.9%, and Buddhists less than 1%.

August-September 2008 State of Orissa, India

The murder of a local Hindu leader sparked a violent killing spree against Christians as they were blamed for his death. Approximately 35 Christians were killed; thousands more fled their homes and churches were raided and set a fire.



India does not have a long history of attacks on Christians, and relations between Hindus and Christians have generally been peaceful. However, intolerance has risen in the past two decades with a revival of Hindu nationalism and its new agenda to fight Christian missionaries who work with mostly poor tribes in the region. Some Hindu groups claim that the Christians are forcing or bribing people to convert to Christianity, particularly those in the lowest Hindu caste looking to escape the caste system. Hindu nationalist groups had denied their involvement in this specific incident.

-Information from Reuters and Associated Press



State of Assam, India October 2008

The State of Assam in North-eastern India is an incredibly diverse area; with 39 million people and 350 different ethnic groups living slightly separated from the rest of India. In October 2008, members of Assam’s largest tribe, the Bodo (pronounced Boro), fought bitterly with local Muslims. 53 people died and 150,000 people sought shelter in camps. The motives behind the attacks are disputed. Many blame anti-immigrant sentiment, which runs deep in Assamese politics. The state’s border with overcrowded Bangladesh is difficult to police and illegal immigrants from Bangladesh may number as many as 2 million. Some talk about the tensions between the Bodo and the Indian Muslims living in the area, who settled before the 1971 creation of Bangladesh. In this case the dispute may be related to larger political ambitions of the Bodo, who wish to have greater autonomy in the government.

-Information from The Economist Online

What about the central government?

Freedom of religion in India is a fundamental right guaranteed by the Constitution and the preamble of the Constitution states it to be a secular state. Some contest that the government of India has not done enough to curb these societal attacks: while intervention by the Supreme Court and the National Human Rights Commission in certain past cases of violence is positive, the police still fail to adequately quell recent violence promptly.

On Campus

Noticing that 65% of LSE students are international, you would imagine countless different people meeting daily at the cafeteria, at the library, at social events, sharing projects, study groups or interests and hobbies. Avoiding daily communication is virtually impossible. No wonder, that the LSE's director Howard Davies attracted the freshers' attention at the induction by calling out random countries to prove that at least one of the students present in the lecture theatre came from there. He proudly told us, that students would learn more from each other than from the staff and the library.

I wanted to find out more about the interaction between students from different religious and cultural backgrounds on campus, and I contacted societies at campus and national-level, specific religious societies, as well as interfaith groups. In sum, all of them agreed that some sort of dialogue is necessary and important. But what is dialogue? And what is its aim?

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 'dialogue' is in first instance a conversation or written exchange between two or more persons. In this sense, all my interviewees considered a 'conversation' or an 'exchange' of ideas important between students from different religious backgrounds, and were at least willing to engage in inter-faith activities. But what's the deal? Although everyone agrees that dialogue is important in the modern world, what do various groups mean by dialogue, and what do they consider its purpose to be?

The answers to my questions show a general agreement that dialogue between students is important because not only does one learn more about others' faiths, beliefs, values and customs, but it also helps to understand 'one's own religion'. In this sense, the national Student Christian

Movement, the LSE Jewish Society as well as the LSE Christian Union all agree with the LSE Islamic society's view that "good campus relations can only be brought about by uniting through our differences". Yet, for those who give 'dialogue' a deeper meaning, the matter may become more complicated.

“ Good campus relations can only be brought about by uniting through our differences ”

The LSE Christian Union's chair for instance answered the question of why dialogue is important to them by stressing that the society was ready to tell other students more about the Bible and to share their faith with others: 'The hope that I have in the Bible and the eternal consequences of believing/not believing in Jesus are serious issues, so I strive to make the most of every opportunity that I have to dialogue with students holding other beliefs'. But should dialogue really be about convincing others?

International students in London should rather interact and get to know each other in order to experience tolerance and peace from below. As the national Student Christian Movement pointed out, dialogue is a way for 'tackling misunderstandings and combating prejudice', which could be the key to tolerance through interaction. Students from different religious and cultural backgrounds can actually benefit from London's internationalism and leave aside what they may have heard in

the past. You may think this is idealistic and naive. Well, on one level you are wrong. Various university societies actively engage in interfaith dialogue and organize joint events. For instance, the LSE Jewish and Islamic societies have organized a joint event to discuss Jewish-Muslim relations with prominent speakers.

They also plan to organize an interfaith charity event in the near future. Some national societies go beyond discussion: 'What is more important, however, is that inter-faith initiatives are not simply about talking, but progress towards working together,' claims the representative of the Union of Jewish Student in the interview. Unfortunately, there is an element that hinders dialogue. Politics. Where contemporary political conflicts persist, dialogue often turns out to be challenging. The Union of Jewish Students also explains that, 'the effort is rather sporadic.' The Student Christian Movement seems to agree: much effort still needs to be done for dialogue not to be reduced to a 'specialism for the few'.

In order for this to change, still more action is needed. In the words of the University College London (UCL) Interfaith society: 'Forget about converting anyone or forcing your beliefs on people. Interfaith dialogue is all about increasing awareness, encouraging understanding and instilling respect into the younger generation to pave the way for a peaceful future.'

by Alice Radzyner

Imperial Interfaith Group

Who? Students and Chaplaincy

What? Discussion sessions interspersed with visits to places of interest

When? Usually Wednesday afternoon/lunchtimes; for an hour; check with the Chaplain for upcoming events

Why? Since 2000, the aim is to promote understanding of different faiths, about how they approach certain issues, and why.

“I’m a PhD student at Imperial and last year I was the vice president of the Islamic Society where I was introduced to Imperial’s Interfaith forum. Facilitated by Imperial’s Chaplain, Andrew Wilson, it consists mainly of discussions with the obligatory tea and biscuits, interspersed with visits to places of interest (for example last year we had a guided tour of spiritual objects in the V&A).

The forum is very informal; anybody is invited to come along but there is a mailing list which you can request to be added to which tells you about upcoming activities. Andrew asks for suggestions of topic titles/visits which are then discussed and finalised by the members.

When it comes to the discussions, Andrew usually introduces the topic and then asks people from different and then asks people from different faiths to give their own understanding, allowing other members to ask questions as we go along. The aim is to promote understanding of different faiths, about how they approach certain issues, and why.



Soumaya gives *Interact Magazine* a glimpse of the Imperial Interfaith Group

Last year we came up with our own set of guidelines, for example “Never say my religion says this but I believe that” which ensures not comparing a people to an ideology, or speaking on behalf of other people who may have a different interpretation. I always try to adhere to these rules even in my own personal life, and I believe so many problems in the world would be avoided if people had a more lenient view of difference of opinion!

Four discussions were organised last term, on violence, finance, gender inequality and the environment. It was very interesting that for the gender inequality discussion, we strayed from the faith context and concentrated more on the cultural aspect, like for example the role of men and women in society in general.

We all came to the conclusion that we are all equal but very different also, though we couldn’t come to a consensus on whether some roles, like child rearing, were more suited for women than men. As for the Environment session, it was a case of everyone agreeing with each other really, that it is a God-given duty for all of us to care after the earth!”

More Info

If you are interested in leading interfaith activities at your university why not join Interfaith Action’s Student Ambassador Scheme, where you’ll gain training and support to run events, projects and really implement change on campus.

Interfaith Action invites you to attend our first Student Faith Forum, which we hope will develop into the first Student Interfaith Network and regular forum for dialogue and interfaith events. Interfaith Action delivers a programme supporting students at universities across London to set up interfaith groups on campus, for dialogue and community action (volunteering) projects.

To find our more e-mail:
info@interact-uk.org.uk

Fashionable Faith

In a society driven by consumption and celebrity fascination, it is no wonder that Fashion and Sport are two of the most successful industries worldwide. *Gemma Owen* this issue's Fashion Editor explore more...

Every year fashion shows take place across the globe giving established and forthcoming designers the chance to showcase their creations for the approaching seasons which guarantee to include glamour, fame, style and surprise. When these shows take place, people take notice, predictions are made, designs are adapted and the whole world is affected.

It has become apparent in recent years that an industry which has also taken a distinct interest in the world of fashion is that of sport. Big brand names such as Adidas, Nike and Puma have played an essential part in designing practical and effective sportswear for athletes, football players and gymnasts for many years. Nowadays it is not only sports players who choose to wear sport clothing. The fashion scene has seen many top designers collaborate with sport brands to produce a range of ready to wear clothing that appeal to many.

Feeling Comfortable

The Victoria and Albert Museum recently explored the two industries through a collection of classic sportswear in their Fashion V Sport exhibition. The exhibition invited visitors to take a journey through four areas; Dare, Display, Play and Desire to explore the way fashion and sport have worked together.

If one of your new year's resolutions is to get back into shape you can relax in the knowledge that style can still be found in sportswear. Stella McCartney has been working with leading sports brand Adidas since 2004 and is continuing to produce clothing to this day. Stella aims to 'redefine and challenge traditional sport silhouettes' through her designs.

Her new winter sports collection for women includes ski jackets and a range of stylish hats, gloves and socks.



Her designs also include dance, yoga, running and golf wear in a range of feminine colours.

Customized

Japanese designer, Mihara Yasuhiro, previously collaborated with Puma to create My-14 and My-23 trainers. The team worked together to create a high concept line of trainers based on the traditional design. One innovative creation by Yasuhiro was a pair of red trainers which had a sole that appears to be dripping in chocolate, making them a desirable collector's item.

The V&A's exhibition also explored sportswear as a form of street wear.

In today's society sportswear is worn worldwide and the tracksuit has come to be associated with hip hop artists, break dancers and sport stars, making it a high fashion item.

For many, sportswear can help to convey a sense of individuality through the way outfits are put together and pieces are customised. Nike is offering trainer fanatics the chance to explore their creativity through new ID studios that can be found across Britain in London,



Stella McCartney's
new line of chic
Adidas sportswear

Manchester and Liverpool. The studios allow customers to choose the materials, colours, style and size of their shoe to ensure that their designs are entirely personal. Nike guarantees that their studio will allow consumers to discover an experience that will change style forever.

A Story

The exhibition also explores designers who are known for customising sports clothes to create unique designs, like Aitor Throup. The up and coming British designer created a collection of clothes called 'When football hooligans become Hindu Gods'. The designer based his creation on a story about football hooligans who accidentally kill a Hindu boy in a racist attack. The hooligans then believe that they must honour the Hindu Gods in order to gain forgiveness for the evil act they have committed. Throup conveyed this story through modifying a range of everyday wear worn by football fans, such as tracksuits, so that they represented images of Hindu Gods.

“When football hooligans become Hindu Gods”



Designer Aitor Throup was inspired by a Hindu boy killed in a racist attack.



A Passion for Fashion

Innovative designer, Rabia Z has taken the world by storm since creating clothing lines of elegant formal outfits, casual clothing and sportswear designed to conform to female Muslim clothing regulations. Her designs have not only been showcased at fashion shows worldwide making her a recognised name in the fashion industry but also won her awards.

With an Emirati and Afghani background, Rabia designs with the modern Muslim woman in mind. She aims to cater to the needs of forward thinking women who have a passion for fashion and like to dress with modesty. She believes that modest clothing is not only a comfortable way to dress but should be embraced as a true form of beauty and elegance.

Her ready-to-wear stylish designs involve use of a range of materials that help her create innovative designs that aim to appeal to women. She believes that women don't have to show skin to be beautiful; "Women can look beautiful and be covered at the same time. I want my designs to build bridges between



Rabia Z has created a line for muslim women to feel comfortable and beautiful



practicing and non practicing Muslims.”

Proving her business woman status, Rabia Z has been able to explore all elements of modern fashion. She has released a clothing line of sports wear that aims to provide women with a range of clothing that is comfortable yet practical for gym work outs.

“From my own experiences I managed to identify a definite gap in the market for female Muslim sport clothes.” She was therefore delighted when a partnership with leading sports brand Adidas presented her with an opportunity to explore her collection with more ease.

Together with the label, Rabia was able to create a line of sports inspired clothing combining her own unique style of hats, bags and shoes with the sports brand. Doing this has helped her to collect a following of Muslim and non Muslim women.

Gemma Owen volunteered with Interact last Autumn and is studying for a degree at Southampton Solent University, in Writing, Fashion & Culture .



Listings

February:

The Sound and the Fury: The Power of Public Speaking

3 February – 30 September 2009



The British Library is home to every conceivable variety of human speech, from spoken poetry, prose and drama, through transcribed and quoted speeches in the press, to the oral testimony of ordinary people from all walks of life. This display presents the spoken word in perhaps its most forceful guise: that of public speaking.

The essence of the art of oratory is the art of persuasion, of converting an audience to a strongly held personal belief, and the recordings and images presented here document every shade of the political and social spectrum: from Florence Nightingale Gladstone and Lloyd George in the earliest years of recorded sound, to some of the most iconic, intriguing and amusing speeches of recent decades.

In the Entrance Hall, British Library;
Free

Exploration, propagation and curation: Gertrude Bell and Freya Stark in Arabia

Thursday 12 February, 6.30pm

Avril Maddrell, University of the West of England, examines how two women's travel and knowledge of Arabia meshed with British state interests between 1914 and 1945.

BP Lecture Theatre, British Museum

Baghdad High

Friday 13 February, 6.30pm

Four school students (one Kurdish, one Christian, one Shia and one from a mixed Sunni/Shia background) are handed digital cameras to record their senior year of high school in one of the most war-ravaged cities in the world. In Arabic and Kurdish with English subtitles.

Stevenson Lecture Theatre, British Museum; £3, concessions £2

Student Faith Forum

organised by Interfaith Action

24th February, 5pm - 7pm

Are you studying at a university and interested in student interfaith activities on and off campus? If yes, then this event is for you!

Interfaith Action invites you to attend it's first Student Faith Forum, which we hope will develop into the first Interfaith Student Network and regular forum for dialogue and interfaith events.

We want you (students) to lead us in our work at universities by sharing your experience, ideas and concerns for interfaith on campus. What and how should we be doing on campus, do you have ideas for projects or events – it is important to develop projects and events that students want to be involved in, so please come along and share your ideas. Contact Kat on info@interact-uk.org.uk for more information or register your attendance.

From Jerusalem to Babylon: new thoughts on the Babylonian exile

Thursday 26 February, 6.30pm

Exhibition curator Irving Finkel, British Museum, draws on the exhibits to present new ideas and information about the Jewish Exile.

BP Lecture Theatre, British Museum

March:

Kalabash, A Celebration of African Culture

19 Feb, 19 March, 16 April

Held monthly at The Salmon and Compass, is a vibrant celebration of African culture. Each night focuses on one African nation, promoting awareness by screening insightful socio-political documentaries upstairs, while downstairs an eclectic crowd move to African grooves.

Each Kalabash event features cutting-edge documentaries and films which are followed by question-and-answer sessions with experts or the film's producers. On the ground floor, live music and dance from the country in question entertain the punters and guest DJs spin Afro grooves from the continent and Diaspora, never failing to fill the dance-floor.

The events aim to encourage recognition of the rich diversity between African nations, to celebrate cultural heritage and explore socio-political situations.

The Salmon and Compass, Angel; Free, small donations welcome



Detail of a Lion from Babylon's Processional Way. On loan from the Musée du Louvre, Paris. © Photo RMN / Franck Raou

Taking Liberties Exhibition

Until Sunday 1 March 2009

The exhibit takes a look at the history of civil liberty in the United Kingdom: It covers everything from the Magna Carta to CCTV. The content is truly extensive, here you will learn about the Civil War, the Suffragette movement, the Human Rights Act, and philosophical concepts of freedom from classic British authors like Hobbes, Mill, and Paine. The exhibition also has many interactive elements, and is assured to keep you stimulated throughout your visit.

British Library, Free entry

Leadership Training

3rd March, 4pm - 7pm

You're invited to come to an afternoon of leadership training led by the Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC) in association with Interfaith Action. You will discover:

- practical skills on promoting cooperation between different religious communities
- ideas on maintaining unique identities while living side-by-side
- understanding pluralism
- how to organise interfaith activities on campus, and
- storytelling as a tool for dialogue

Contact info@interact-uk.org.uk for more details! Places are strictly limited and are allocated on a first come, first serve basis!

O2 Arena's bubble Exhibition Space British Music Experience

Opens 9 March 2009

Perfect for anyone who's interested in British music and culture, as the O2 brings state-of-the-art special effects, iconic memorabilia, interactive elements and much, much more. Tickets will gain you entry to an exhibition that showcases quite what a profound influence British music has had on popular culture throughout the twentieth century and beyond.

£10-15 book tickets online



St Patrick's Day Festival 2009

15th March

A free family day out to experience all things Irish - food, dance, crafts, culture and music.

Trafalgar Square



Pictures taken from British Museum website



Enough is Enough

15th March, 6pm

MUJU begins 2009 with an evening of high impact drama, in collaboration with human rights theatre company, 'Ice and Fire'. MUJU will present an original and newly devised piece, inspired by recent events in the Middle East, alongside a performance of Ice & Fire's 'Rendition Monologues'.

Tricycle Theatre, London

April:

Darwin, Big Idea Exhibition

Until 19 April 2009

Darwin is the biggest ever exhibition about Charles Darwin. It celebrates Darwin's ideas and their impact for his 200th birthday in 2009. Discover the man and the revolutionary theory that changed our understanding of the world. See incredible, revealing and rare exhibits, some on display for the first time.

Natural History Museum;
£9, book tickets online

Do you have an event you want to advertise for the summer?

Whether big or small we want to hear about it to include in our next issue.

So get in touch :
advertise@interact-uk.org.uk

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