

MODERN CHURCH ANNUAL CONFERENCE

in association with the

World Congress of Faiths

13th – 16th July 2015

Seeking the Sacred:

Christianity in dialogue with other religions and the world

PROGRAMME AND INFORMATION ABOUT SPEAKERS AND WORKSHOPS

Chair: Rev Canon Dr Alan Race

Chaplain: Rev Bonnie Evans-Hills

Held at:

High Leigh Conference Centre

Lord Street

Hoddesdon

EN11 8SG

PROGRAMME

Monday 13 July

3.30 pm	Tea
4.00 pm	Welcome, Introduction & Overview <i>Canon Dr Alan Race</i>
5.45 pm	Welcome Reception
6.30 pm	Dinner
8.00 pm	'The Meaning and Experience of Dialogue' <i>Justine Huxley</i>
9.30 pm	Evening prayer - Perfect Love

Tuesday 14 July

8.00 am	Morning Prayer - Crossing Thresholds
8.30 am	Breakfast
9.15 am	'Revelation and Scripture in Abrahamic Faiths' <i>Dr Ataullah Siddiqui</i> <i>Rabbi Jonathan Wittenberg</i> <i>Rev Georgiana Heskins</i>
11.00 am	Coffee
11.30 am	'How Buddhism has affected my faith' <i>Dr Elizabeth Harris</i>
1.00 pm	Lunch
2.15 pm	AGM of Modern Church
4.00 pm	Tea
5.00 pm	Shared Worship & Eucharist
6.30 pm	Dinner

- 8.00 pm Gurus, Prophets and Messiahs:
a Sikh-Christian dialogue
Dr Nikky Kaur Singh, Rev Dr John Parry
- 9.30 pm Evening Prayer following the liturgy of Shantivanam

Wednesday 15 July

- 8.00 am Morning Prayer – Searching the Beloved
- 8.30 am Breakfast
- 9.30 am ‘Religious Pluralism in 13 theses’
Dr Perry Schmidt-Leukel
- 11.00 am Coffee
- 11.30 am Groups
- 12.15 am Feedback and discussion
- 1.00 pm Lunch
- 2.30 pm Workshops led by:

Rev Bonnie Evans-Hills
Vinod Kapashi
Jenny Kartupelis
Charanjit Singh
Rev Sonya Wratten
- Further details below; sign up in conference hall
- 4.00 pm Tea
- 4.30 pm ‘Images of the Divine: a Hindu-Christian dialogue’
Shaunaka Rishi Das
Dr Laura Johnson
- 6.30 pm Dinner

8.00 pm Film: “Story of the Universe”
followed by Skype discussion with Jim Kenney

9.30 pm Night prayer - Songs of the Beloved

Thursday 16 July

8.00 am Morning Prayer – Sending Out

8.30am Breakfast

9.30 am ‘Religion and Violence’
Dr Shanthy Chettiarachchi

10.45 am Coffee

11.15 am ‘Inter faith encounters:
what has been achieved and what is to come?’
Dr Harriet Crabtree

1.00 pm Lunch

WORKSHOPS

Please sign up for one these on the noticeboard in the main conference hall before Tuesday lunchtime. Room allocation depends on numbers attending each workshop and so will be announced on Wednesday morning.

1. “Listen to her Roar!” with Rev Bonnie Evans-Hills

Bonnie Evans-Hills received her MA in Pastoral Theology from Heythrop College, University of London and has considerable experience in Muslim-Christian dialogue, focusing in particular on dialogue with Shi’a Islam following a period of three years study in Qum, Iran. She also took part in a theological exchange at al-Azhar University in Cairo for the Anglican Communion’s al-Azhar Dialogue. Bonnie is Inter Faith Adviser in the Diocese of St Albans, a parish priest, and serves on the national Presence & Engagement task group mandated by General Synod to resource multi-faith

parishes. Alongside her friend & colleague, Michael Rusk, Bonnie has written the book 'Engaging Islam: a Christian perspective' for Peter Lang Publishing.

"Listen to her Roar!" is the title of a chapter in her book; Bonnie Evans-Hills will be looking at some of the feminist movements within a smattering of religious traditions, not only Christianity and Islam. It is hoped a roaring discussion will ensue!

2. "Seeking the Sacred in Sikhism" with Charanjit AjitSingh

Charanjit AjitSingh is one of the Vice Presidents of the World Congress of Faiths, the chair of Hounslow Friends of Faith and the International Interfaith Centre. She has devoted about forty-five years to the Sikh faith and Interfaith relations as a speaker and writer in local, national and international arenas. Professionally a retired educationalist, she has served as a lecturer, principal, director of education and an Ofsted inspector. She also has the honour of being the Sikh signatory to the Interfaith Climate Manifesto at Uppsala, Sweden in 2008 and a contributor to the Encyclopaedia of Christianity. She serves on the editorial board of 'Faith Initiative' an interfaith magazine and has written the book, 'The Wisdom of Sikhism.'

This workshop will explore what is meant by the sacred in the Sikh faith from her perspective as Sikh woman. Her reflections will include references to Indian religious traditions as mentioned in the Sikh scriptures and as witnessed in day to day situations here in the UK and in India. It will touch on issues of culture, demography and diversity and how these have an impact on religious practice.

3. "Christians facilitating inter faith dialogue: opportunities and challenges in practice" with Jenny Kartupelis

Jenny Kartupelis is the Programme and Development Officer for the World Congress of Faiths, helping to shape its future direction in strategic and practical ways, and fostering collaboration with faith groups, existing inter

faith organisations and the academic community. Jenny was previously the Director of the East of England Faiths Council for 11 years, an organisation she helped to establish. The Council's main roles were to support local interfaith in the region, act as a representative and advocate for faith in society, and interact with local and national government. Her professional background is in public relations and research, and she is studying for a Professional Doctorate in multi faith policy with Anglia Ruskin University and the Cambridge Theological Federation, in which city she is based.

4. “Jainism and the Multiplicity of View Points” with Vinod Kapashi

Vinod Kapashi is a member of WCF Executive Committee and active in interfaith work as a member of the Jain community. He promotes the principle ‘Anekantvad’ which teaches us to understand others’ view points and how to reconcile with and how to promote the ideals of Peaceful Co-existence.

5. Art and Interfaith Dialogue with Rev Sonya Wratten

Sonya J. Wratten is a parish priest in Bedford in a highly culturally diverse and multifaith area of the town. She believes in truthfulness in the representation of religions.

Sonya uses art to relax and fill her vicarage walls. This workshop provides a chance to create a painted tile that expresses something of your experience/observation/feeling of interfaith dialogue and related issues. This is a time to unwind as you create your masterpiece to soothing music in a quiet, contemplative atmosphere. Tiles can be taken home too and no art expertise required.

Sonya has written ‘Christianity and Feminism’, one of the booklets in the series Together in Hope, which includes Modern Church as one of the partners.

Conference Chair: Rev Canon Dr Alan Race

Alan Race is Rector of St Margaret's Church, Lee, in south London. He has worked as a University Chaplain, a teacher in ministerial theological education and a priest in multifaith parishes. He was Dean of Postgraduate Studies at St Philip's Centre in Leicester, where he established a Masters Programme through De Montfort University. Alan is a trustee of Modern Church, Chair of the World Congress of Faiths and Co-Editor of their journal, *Interreligious Insight*. His book *Christians and Religious Pluralism* (1983) remains a classic reference text in theology of religions debates.

Book Recommendations:

- Alan Race, *Making Sense of Religious Pluralism*, SPCK, 2013
- J. Philip Wogaman, *What Christians Can Learn from Other Religions*, Westminster John Knox Press, 2014
- Paul Knitter, *Without Buddha I Could not be a Christian*, Oneworld, Oxford, 2009
- Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Patterns of Faith Around the World*, Oneworld, Oxford, 1998
- Kenneth Rose, *Pluralism; the Future of Religion*, Bloomsbury, London, 2013
- Ed. S.Sugirtharajah, *Religious Pluralism and the Modern World*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012
- Eds. Alan Race and Paul Hedges, *Christian Approaches to Other Faiths*, SCM Core Text, 2008 and SCM Reader, 2009

Dr Shanthi Chettiarachchi

Shanthikumar Hettiarachchi has a PhD in majority-minority ethnic and religious conflict from the Melbourne College of Divinity, University of Melbourne. He has worked extensively with community groups and social movements in Sri Lanka and studied them in depth both at community and post graduate level. Dr Hettiarachchi is the founder Co-ordinator of the Luton Council of Faiths, Bedfordshire, UK. He worked at St. Philip's Centre for study and Engagement, Leicester, UK as its World Religions specialist with a focus on conflict and religiously motivated violence.

Dr Harriet Crabtree

Harriet Crabtree OBE is the Director of the Inter Faith Network for the UK (IFN). IFN links in membership national faith community representative bodies, inter faith bodies and educational and academic bodies with an interest in inter faith issues. It has worked with them since 1987 to promote inter faith understanding and cooperation in the UK. Before coming to work for IFN, Harriet studied and worked in the United States, living at the Center for the Study of World Religions at Harvard Divinity School (from which she received her doctorate). She has worked in the field of inter faith relations since 1990, researched and written on a number of areas, including the development of local inter faith structures in the UK.

Shaunaka Rishi Das

Shaunaka Rishi Das is from Wexford, Ireland. He has been Director of the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies (OCHS) since its inception in 1997. Shaunaka maintains the vision and ethos of the Centre on behalf of the Board of Governors, and encourages the Centre's continued growth and development in all spheres. He has overall responsibility for its fundraising, administration, and communication. The OCHS is an academy for the study of Hindu cultures, societies, philosophies, religions, and languages, in all periods and in all parts of the world. It is dedicated to preserving India's cultural heritage and promoting a better understanding of it through a comprehensive programme of education, publishing, and research.

Dr Elizabeth Harris

Elizabeth Harris is an Associate Professor in the Comparative Study of Religion at Liverpool Hope University, specializing in Buddhist Studies. Prior to this, she was the Executive Secretary for Inter Faith Relations for the

Methodist Church in Britain (1996-2007) and a Research Fellow at Westminster College, Oxford. She completed a doctorate in Buddhist Studies in Sri Lanka in 1993. She is currently President of the European Network of Buddhist-Christian Studies and Moderator of the Inter Faith Theology Advisory Group of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland.

Abstract

How Buddhism has affected my Faith

In this presentation, I will combine personal narrative with the theology of religions. I will outline what informed my Christian faith as I travelled to Sri Lanka in 1986 on a World Council of Churches scholarship to study Buddhism and the effect of that study on my faith. In the seven and a half years I spent in Sri Lanka, Buddhism became part of me, profoundly changing the way I imagined and interpreted Christianity. For I not only studied Buddhism but immersed myself in it, 'passing over' into Buddhism in order to come back. My theology of religions moved from being largely inclusivist to being more akin to pluralism, although these labels are inadequate to explain what actually happened. In reflecting on this, I will draw on people who influenced me from Godwin Samararatne to Aloysius Pieris s.j, and Jotiya Dhirasekera to Venerable Ayya Khema.

Books by Elizabeth Harris

- *What Buddhists Believe* (Oneworld, 1998)
- *Theravada Buddhism and the British Encounter: religious, missionary and colonial experienced in nineteenth century Sri Lanka* Routledge, 2006
- *Buddhism for a Violent World: A Christian Perspective* , Epworth, 2010; republished by SCM, 2012
- *Also recommended: publications from Christians Aware*

Rev Georgiana Heskins

Georgiana is the Tutor for Pastoral Theology and Ministerial Formation at SEITE (the South East Institute for Theological Education). She has a BD and MTh in Biblical Studies from King's College, London and trained for Anglican ministry at Westcott House in Cambridge. She worked in two parishes in London Diocese as Deaconess and Deacon and was ordained Priest in Southwark Diocese, while a member of staff on the Southwark Ordination Course. She then taught Religious Studies to teenage boys. She was a hospital chaplain in Woolwich for ten years and a member of the multifaith team, until 2012 when she joined the SEITE staff.

Justine Huxley

Justine Huxley is Director of the St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace. She is passionate about bringing diverse peoples together in new ways in order to co-create a peaceful future for all. Justine has been a student of a Naqshbandi Mujadidiyya, Sufi Master, for 19 years. She has been leading meditation and dream interpretation groups for over 14 years. She also teaches classes in the fundamentals of the Sufi path and she represents her Sheikh in the UK. She says that her Sufi training inspires her to explore the creation of spaces for diverse groups of people to experience their essential uniqueness and mutual interdependence. More recently, she has begun to explore the role non-dual consciousness can play in the transformation of conflict, and to delve more deeply into the experience of both inner and outer conflict from a spiritual perspective. She says that her key achievements have been leading St Ethelburga's Centre into a vibrant new chapter of life, managing a large range of innovative dialogue, training, leadership and conflict transformation programmes, championing the importance of protecting the dimension of the sacred in mainstream life.

Publications/resources:

- 'The Spectrum', 2009, guide to building inter-religious relationships
- What's your story: Narrative and story-based techniques for community building
- 'Conversations for the Soul', 2010, tandem dialogue programme

Dr Laura Johnson

Dr Laura Johnson completed her doctorate in 'Hindu-Christian dialogue and the blurred boundaries of religious identity' at Canterbury Christ Church University in 2013. Laura's research interests include double religious identity, Christian mission in India, dalit theology, Christian inculturation and Hindu Christian dialogue in the UK and in India. She was the administrator for a NIFCON conference on 'Anglican-Lutheran relations with Hindus in the Diaspora' held in November 2014 and is working on a book chapter from this for September 2015.

At present, she works as a part-time consultant to the St Philip's Centre, Leicester, where she tutors on their MA in Interreligious Relations. She also works for the Diocese of Hereford in two capacities; as Assistant to the Lay Development Officer and as the Young Vocations Adviser [Lay and Ordained]. She is Vice Chair of the newly established Herefordshire Interfaith Group and much of her spare time is currently spent helping to set this up.

Book recommendations

- Paul M Collins *Christian Inculturation in India* Ashgate 2007
- Bede Griffiths *Christ in India* Templegate 1984
- Shirley du Boulay *The Cave of the Heart - The Life of Swami Abhishiktananda* Orbis Books
- Mittal and Thursby (eds) *Studying Hinduism: Key Concepts and Methods* Routledge 2008
- S. Brent Plate (ed) *Religion, Art and Visual Culture* Palgrave 2002
- Bob Robinson *Christians Meeting Hindus* Regnum Books 2004
- Beth Williamson *Christian Art: A Very Short introduction* OUP 2004

Jim Kenney

Jim Kenney has been recognized for decades as a leader in the global movement for intercultural understanding. Working to promote harmony and cooperative action among the world's religious communities, he had a major role in the two largest interreligious gatherings ever held, the 1993 and 1999 Parliaments of the World's Religions (Chicago and Cape Town). He was global director of the Parliament from 1995 to 2002; and, in 2002, he founded the Interreligious Engagement Project, helping global interreligious communities address critical planetary issues. He is Co-Editor of the journal *Interreligious Insight*. His book, *Thriving in the Crosscurrent*, Quest Books 2010, breaks new ground in promoting the idea of 'cultural evolution'.

Rev Dr John Parry

John Parry was ordained as a Presbyterian of the Church of Bangladesh but is now disguised as a minister of the United Reformed Church. He was Director of an interfaith project in Southall for many years during the 1980s and then was appointed as a research fellow enabling him to work in SOAS, Birmingham, Patiala and Amritsar on the history and nature of the encounter of Sikhs and Christians resulting in a PhD. He moved to Manchester in 1992 where he taught World Church Studies and World Faiths at the Partnership for Theological Education in Luther King House, and from time to time in the University of Bangor and theological colleges in Taiwan, Samoa and Madagascar. He is now in semi-retirement with oversight of a small joint URC and Methodist congregation in Buckinghamshire.

Professor Perry Schmidt-Leukel

Perry Schmidt-Leukel is Professor of Religious Studies and Intercultural Theology at the University of Münster, Germany. After studying Theology and Philosophy of Religion in Munich, he taught at the Universities of Munich,

Innsbruck and Salzburg. From 2000-2009 he was Professor of Religious Studies and Systematic Theology at the University of Glasgow. His main interest is in the fields of inter-faith relations, Buddhist-Christian dialogue, pluralist theologies of religions and inter-faith theology. He has published more than 20 books in different languages.

Abstract

The tripolar classification of approaches to religious diversity (exclusivism, inclusivism, pluralism), introduced by Alan Race in 1983, has become subject to much criticism over the past years. This paper, however, will demonstrate the analytic strength and logical indispensability of the classification. In this context it will present a more clear-cut definition of the pluralist option discussing both its advantages over the alternative options as well as its limitations.

Books

Among his more recent publications in English are:

- *Understanding Buddhism, Edinburgh*: Dunedin Academic Press 2006; (ed.) *Buddhist Attitudes to Other Religions*, St. Ottilien: EOS Publisher 2008
- *Transformation by Integration. How Inter-faith Encounter Changes Christianity*, London: SCM Press 2009; (ed.)
- *Buddhism and Religious Diversity*, Abingdon – New York: Routledge 2013; (co-ed. with Joachim Gentz)
- *Religious Diversity in Chinese Thought*, London – New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2013.

Dr Ataulah Siddiqui

Ataulah Siddiqui is a Reader in Religious Pluralism and Inter-Faith Relations at the Markfield Institute of Higher Education where he was also the Director of the Institute from 2001 to 2008. He is a Visiting Professor at the University of Gloucestershire and a Visiting Fellow at York St. John's University. He is a

member of the Advisory Board of the HRH Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Centre for the Study of Islam in the Contemporary World at the University of Edinburgh. He was founder President and Vice Chair of the 'Christian Muslim Forum' in England, and a founder member of the Leicester Council of Faiths.

Dr Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh

Nikky Singh is the Crawford Family Professor at Colby College in Maine, USA. Her interests focus on poetics and feminist issues. She has published extensively in the field of Sikhism, including *The Feminine Principle in the Sikh Vision of the Transcendent* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), *The Name of My Beloved: Verses of the Sikh Gurus* (HarperCollins and Penguin), *Metaphysics and Physics of the Guru Granth Sahib* (Sterling). Her book on Sikhism was translated into Japanese. She has lectured widely in North America, England, France, India, and Singapore, and her views have been aired on television and radio in America, Canada, Bangladesh, Australia, Ireland and India.

Book recommendation

N. K Singh, *Of Sacred and Secular Desire: Anthology of Lyrics from the Punjab*, I.B.Tauris

Rabbi Jonathan Wittenberg

Jonathan Wittenberg was born in Glasgow in 1957, to a family of German Jewish origin with rabbinic ancestors on both sides. He read English at King's College Cambridge (1976-9). After two years teaching and social work in Israel and England he took a PGCE at Goldsmith's College, London.

Already deeply involved in Jewish life, he trained for the rabbinate at Leo Baeck College London, receiving ordination in 1987, and continued

his studies to gain a further rabbinic qualification from his teacher Dr. Aryeh Strikovsky in Israel.

Since then he has worked as rabbi of the New North London Synagogue and has taken a leading role in the development of the Masorti Movement for traditional non-fundamentalist Judaism in England. In 2008 he was appointed Senior Rabbi of Masorti Judaism in the UK.