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Liz Mitchell

reflects on the fight for equal justice and the armour God gives



Who did you used to be? And other questions.

Rev'd Gaynor Hammond on how we best support those living with dementia.

Rock Against Racism: Poetry by Khadijah Ibrahiim

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What is distinctive about faith engagement with social media?

Who did you used to be? And other questions

Revd Gaynor Hammond, Baptist
Minister & member of Leeds Faith in
Elderly People

During my work as a nurse before retirement I was, and in ministry now I still am, deeply moved by the realities of life for people living with dementia. A former consultant psychiatrist I know has vascular dementia and is able to describe her experience. She likens it to 'Locked in Syndrome' because, while on the inside she knows what she wants to express, she cannot always 'find' the words or phrases to express herself. That must feel so debilitating and frustrating.

Medical science is a long way from giving us any cures or preventatives; there is no miracle pill.

The only solutions within our grasp are to be found at a simple, honest, human level: through kindness and through love where that is possible.

The body is diseased, the mind is deteriorating, but the person is still there, the spirit is still there and that is what needs to be nourished. The things that matter so much to us are the things that matter to a person with dementia. Work and play, family and friendships, the simple things of life are what make life worth living.

Tom Kitwood's pioneering work in the 80s and 90s is still some of the most critical thinking we have on how to offer appropriate support to people with dementia. He identifies a spiritual need in all of us to be affirmed, valued and have a sense of self-worth. We need to hold on to that sense of self in whatever state we become through age, health problems and of course dementia. Jesus called this having life, that is '*life in all its fullness.*'

As a church and as individuals we need to think about ways we can help people with dementia and support them to continue to be the person they have always been and who they want to continue to be.



John Killick, a former colleague of mine, is a poet and language specialist who works with people who have dementia, trying to understand their use of language and communication. One day when he met a woman with dementia and asked her name, she answered: "I used to be Elsie". He wondered why she used the words used to be. But then members of her family arrived, obviously loving and supportive, and they described Elsie to John saying: "She used to be a wonderful cook, a hairdresser, Grannie". It became clear that these well-meaning compliments only served to make Elsie feel like a 'used to be' in every way. That is an unbearable thought.

We need to be careful to use language that reinforces people's sense of worth and value, not their sense of loss.

To take an approach to supporting people's value and worth takes time. At my church there is a support group for people who are living with dementia. They are all at different stages and they asked me if I would be part of their group. And they specifically asked me if I would please not organise them. It is really important that I respect that. They tell me that they just enjoy being together, being able to share, laugh and cry together, and they really do help one another. Between them they have a wealth of experience to share with others.

People who volunteer with the group say that just being with these people who are living with dementia has taken away their fear. They know that it is a dreadful disease, and no one would want it for themselves or their loved ones, but they know that it is possible to live well with dementia with the help and support of friends and family.

They also have a way of helping carers, especially those who are often frightened because they have a husband

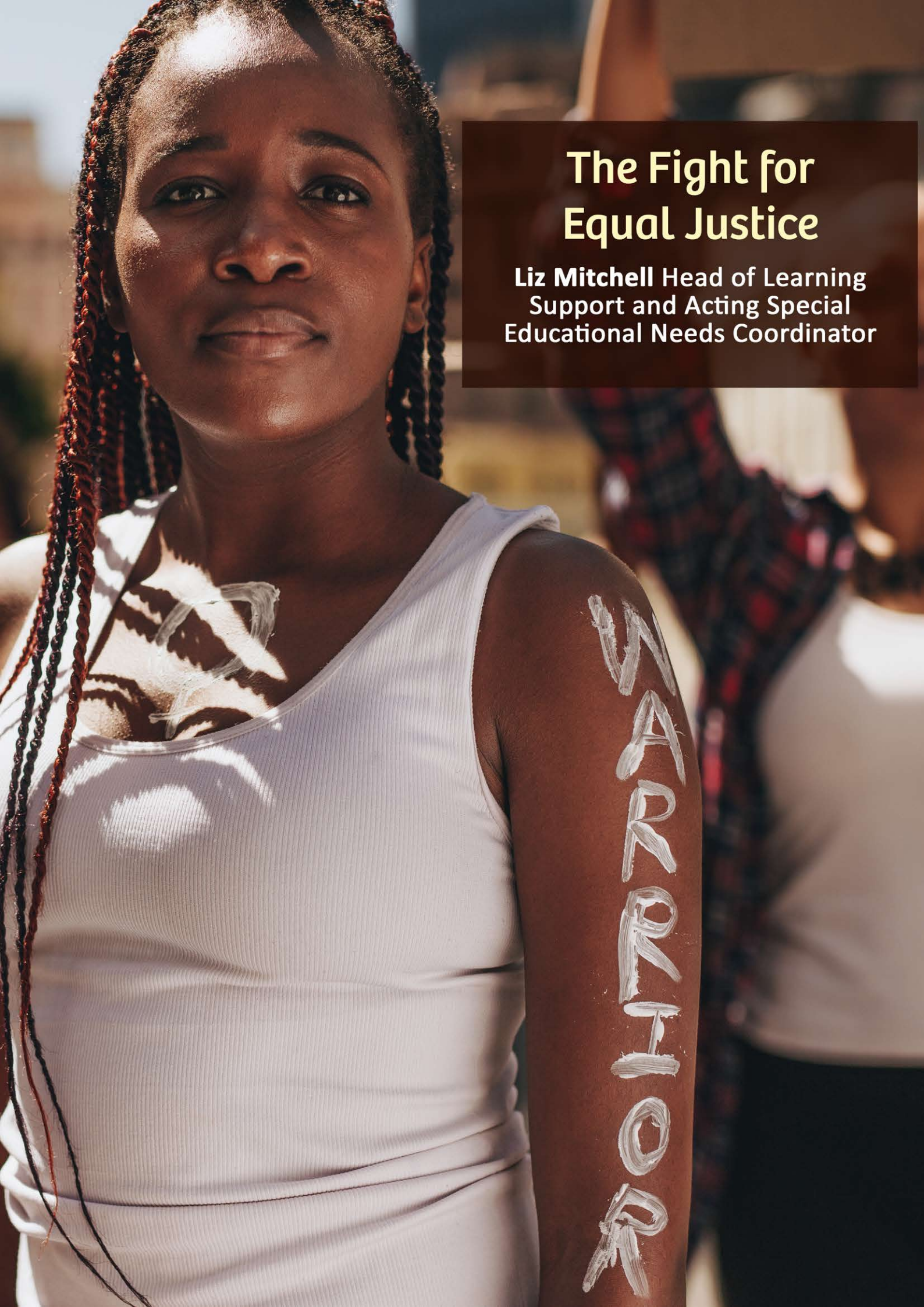
or wife who is newly-diagnosed. They are very generous with their time and experience, and as people living with dementia, they help put new carers' minds at rest. That is an amazing gift and it is mutually enriching. It also makes people with dementia feel that they are not just being 'done to' but also have their own massive contribution to make.

One member of the group suddenly began to deteriorate quite rapidly following a viral illness. His speech was almost impossible to decipher and he needed time to communicate, not always using words. One day I had been talking to him about his son who lives down south, reminding him that his son, who came often to see his dad, would be coming soon.

He started talking to me about nuts and bolts, miming how they are screwed together, and talking about the hope that they will hold. After a while, I got it: "Yes you are right, that is all we can do, when we are bringing them up we put the nuts and bolts in place as best as we can and with everything we have got we hope we got it right and our kids will turn out right!" He grabbed my hand and said, "Yes, yes! Oh, thank you". We both found that communication hugely satisfying.

It is times like that, when we experience wonderful, spiritual moments, that we live life in all its fullness, just as Jesus promised us. We have to spend time making these moments happen. For too long now there has been an often unspoken consensus that we don't visit people with dementia in their homes, let alone look at ways to help them to feel 'at home' in churches, because there is no real point. Except, of course, when we look at scripture and accept Jesus' promise of life in all its fullness, it is an invitation and a promise to all. At a time when more people are living longer, and dementia is on the increase, we should to respond in the light of our faith, spend time together, and experience life in its fullness.





The Fight for Equal Justice

Liz Mitchell Head of Learning
Support and Acting Special
Educational Needs Coordinator

Battles...we've all faced them to some degree or another in our lives. Some may seem short and easily won, others are perhaps more longstanding and taxing to overcome. As Christians, we are plagued by daily battles. They are something that simply come with the territory of Christian life. We're pre-warned of challenges and even given a wonderful guide on how to arm ourselves in preparation. Ephesians Chapter Six speaks so eloquently about the armour we need to wear, what we need to do and most importantly: why! Verses 11-17 tell us:

"Put on the whole armour of God that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God:"

We're not told to sit, run or turn away. No, three times we're told unmistakably to just stand. Battles are normally because of something we don't agree with and there's a whole lot of disagreement on Planet Earth. This sadly will be the case till Christ returns and although we know things will get worse, we are not told to just lay down and ignore, we're told to stand. The passion to stand against injustice or to stand alongside those battling an injustice is most definitely engrained in my own DNA.

Born in Leeds and growing up in Yorkshire has presented itself with a whole raft of battles. My parents were born in the Caribbean, and their resilience, perseverance and all-round respectful fighting spirit set an example for myself and other children of the Windrush era as we arrived into a somewhat hostile England as mere children of 16 and 17 years of age.

Good work ethic and tolerance also added to the influence.

I recall the constant encouragement and reminders of how well other family members were doing around the world. There may not have been black history in our school lessons, but there was certainly 'black reality' lessons in our home. Conversations about who was doing what, how so and so had got on etc. was always something revered in the discussions that 'big people' had.

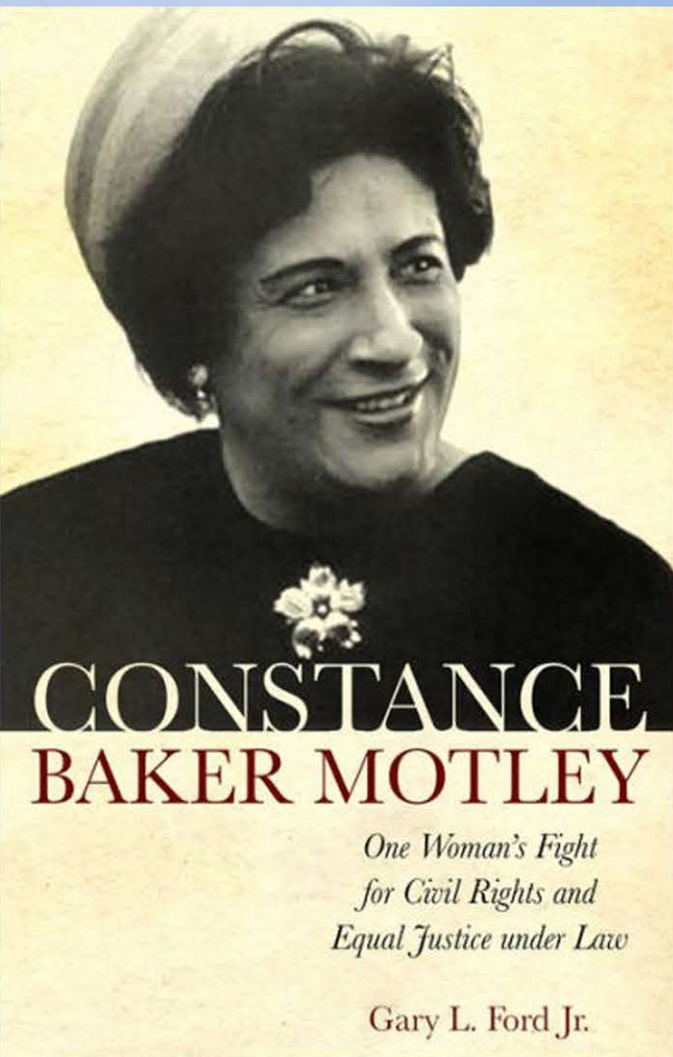
My late father would regularly tell me, for example about his aunt in America. As a little girl I didn't actually know what my dad was on about, other than remembering his words: "Aunty Connie, she's big you know?!" I was probably looking bemused each time, yet my father would then say: "She's in America, that place is crazy, American people are crazy and I'd never go there, not even if you paid me a million pounds! But anyway, she's big time over there you know, law and all that, she's a judge now, I seen her in Nevis". Aunty Connie, an important judge, in a land of crazy people, note to self – never go to America. Well, I ended up marrying an American but that's another story. It was thanks to technology and conversations with cousins in America much later on in life that I learned Aunty Connie was in fact more than just big time – she was off the scale.

Aunty Connie, more formally known as 'Constance Baker Motley', was a political attorney and played a key role in the civil rights movement. Working on occasion with Martin Luther King Jr. to get him out of prison and travelling to various places in the southern states of America where racism prevailed.

Segregation on trains for example wasn't something she'd experienced until travelling south. She was born in New Haven, New England, which was certainly not racially aggressive compared to the southern states where she ventured fearlessly in order to assist with the injustice and deep-rooted racial segregation that was plaguing many states and institutes.

Seeing segregation become outlawed was one thing, however ensuring that equal justice became a reality was most definitely another. Such boldness and bravery is documented vividly in a book by Dr Gary L. Ford Jr, entitled *'Constance Baker Motley: One Woman's Fight for Civil Rights and Equal Justice under Law'*. It highlights the many duties black women on the front line of the civil rights battle had to undertake and endure. The book also covers her 'work in the trenches'

and transition from being the first Black/African American woman to argue against the US supreme court in the case of Meredith V. Fair (which she won), to becoming the first African American woman federal judge, appointed by President Lyndon B. Johnson.



Her autobiography '*Equal Justice Under Law*' filled me not only with information of my late father's paternal ancestry, but most importantly, the front cover showed her and James Meredith both calm and well composed, walking amidst hatred; hatred in the form of white campaigners keen to declare their opposition. If you are unfamiliar with the case (as I was), James Meredith became the first black person to attend the University of Mississippi in 1962. Connie and James stand. They know they are wrestling with principalities, against wickedness in high places, nevertheless they stand. They stand fully clothed with truth, righteousness, peace, faith and I can only imagine it is the sword of the spirit which prevailed.

The church played a key role during the civil rights movement and its buildings became key places to meet and share information; remember there was not a WhatsApp group or the Internet back then!

“But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law” – Galatians 5:18.

The law was not just, nor equal, and thus had to be challenged.

In 1964, President Truman signed an executive order abolishing segregation, yet as mentioned above, outlawing segregation is one thing, but seeing that lived out in reality is another.

Even now, racism and discrimination still flaw the minds of so many. Although I opted for a career path in education, injustice had to be challenged and even led me to become a union steward, the first 'black school support staff' steward in my local union at the time. I so hope someone else in England can pre-date me in a different local union, as that was in 2006.

The visibly discriminatory signs and placards may no longer be held by angry white people, or stuck in accommodation windows, but the resentment and disdain that some people have towards people of other cultures still persists. I recall one old man saying he preferred the racism in the 60's and 70's because the directness he felt was much easier to deal with then, as opposed to now where discrimination is more 'undercover' and results in the false smiles, uncertainty, lies and institutional racism which many continue to deny. Although of course, to deny that racism exists is much harder now, due to the influx of media updates and information covering the topic via the internet.

So, what do we do?

As Christians we are called plain and simply to do the two most important things Christ told us, the two greatest commandments which are found mainly in Matthew, Mark and Luke, but echoed also in Deuteronomy, Leviticus and John and that is to: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength” and secondly: “You shall love your neighbour as yourself”.

It's a tough ask in these times, but if we lean not on our own understanding and trust in the Lord, it actually works rather well. Yes, smile and show kindness, remember that we ALL have to battle with sin and make mistakes. With that in mind, we need to remember also the helmet of salvation. As Christians we wear that on our head so we never forget that we are forgiven. Forgiveness we know also is available for 'whosoever' believes.

Let us never stop forgiving and in the same respect, let us never forget the armour we are called to wear in this battle and fight for equal justice, each and every day.

ROCK AGAINST RACISM

By Khadijah Ibrahiim

In our back-to-back and through-terraced houses,
working-class black and white
youth played Snap!
Sex Pistols latched onto this white heat,
graffitied Elizabeth's head,
stuck two fingers up, wore safety-pins
and spat on the Union Jack.
We watched them pogo dancing up and down
to The Clash's *white riot* of reggae-snatched rhythms,
while Maggie snatched milk,
brought recession and the poll tax.
And when The Specials rocked against racism,
they marched right past my street
up to Potternewton Park
*'til it was like a zebra crossing, black and white,
black and white as far as you can see.*

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Through whose eyes?

By **Kelly Scott**, Education Officer at the National Holocaust Museum

Few people today would not recognise a photograph of Hitler. Everyone has seen at least one image showing victims of Nazi racial persecution: but through whose eyes are we seeing this past?

Most Holocaust photos we look at today were created by perpetrators. Such photos provide important evidence of heinous crime. But are they also a demonstration of power? How do they make us feel about the victims? And what do they fail to show?

Photos taken by victims of the Nazi regime are rarely seen today. But like survivor testimony, these photos reveal different stories: stories of individuality, love, resilience and resistance in the face of suffering and horror.

Clearly, photos are historical sources created with particular agendas in mind. We need to examine them

critically if we are to learn any lessons from them. A new exhibition has been co-produced by the National Holocaust Centre and Museum and academics from the University of Nottingham that enables us to take a fresh look at the perspective of history offered to us by photography. It includes visual testimony of Jewish people and members of the anti-Nazi resistance from inside the camps as well as art work created by award-winning international artist Lina Selander.

The Eye As Witness Exhibition offers no complete history of Nazism and the Holocaust. Instead, it invites us to assess the sources ourselves. It prompts us to reflect on the gaps in our understanding and in our shared memory. We can learn about history and also from history so that when we see images in the media, we ask, 'Who took these photos and why? Whose voices do we choose to listen to?'

THE EYE AS WITNESS: RECORDING THE HOLOCAUST

View this new exhibition in the city centre of Leeds before it begins a national tour in 2020.

Eye as Witness enables us to take a fresh look at the perspective of history offered by photography. It is devised by the National Holocaust Museum and is free to visit.

Where?

Leeds Church Institute
20 New Market Street
LS1 6DG

Monday 9th December 2-3:30pm: *A guided Community Viewing with Kelly Scott of the National Holocaust Museum and Stop Hate UK*

Tuesday 10th December between 5pm and 8 pm

Friday 13th December between 9am and 5pm

If you miss this exhibition while it is at the Leeds Church Institute it is travelling to a variety of other venues across the country. Visit The National Holocaust Centre and Museum website at www.holocaust.org.uk to find out more.

What is **distinctive** about faith engagement with social media?

By **Camila Cunningham**, undergraduate student at the School of Philosophy, Religion and History of Science, University of Leeds and on placement at Leeds Church Institute 2018-2019.

More and more churches, faith organisations and faith-based charities are using social media such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram as a tool for communication and public dialogue. Within social media generally there is now a sphere identified as digital religion. Theories are offered that describe the distinctiveness of a faith presence in social media. One key part of this is mediatisation whereby social media begins to transform the role of the faith institution. Faith is seen as detaching itself from the traditional church structure, for example, sermons, and expressing itself in the form of 140-character tweets.

These new approaches begin to shape understandings of religion and its presence in the public sphere as people view religion through this platform, and religious identities are formed and circulated within the digital culture.



Facebook, with its 1.56 million daily users, defies geographical and cultural borders. It connects like-minded individuals together and has the capacity to network individuals of differing faiths and beliefs.

Research into religious use of Facebook show it is seen as a channel for ministry, spiritual enlightenment, religious information, and entertainment.

It also shows a correlation between regular attendance at religious services and engagement in religious activities online. The more frequently individuals attended religious activities (weekly vs monthly/yearly or seldom/never), the more likely they were to engage in religious activities online. This means that the use of social media does not necessarily engage churches with a wider audience.

The editability and interactive tools available on Facebook that utilise multimedia elements (photos, memes, gifs, text, and video) mean that users create and recreate shared cultural and spiritual experiences.

The manipulation, craft and expression of language and symbols provides an alternate channel for Christian discourse.

There is clear evidence of leaders encouraging the adoption of online communication as a way for members to evangelise. This development which can be beneficial can also produce a negative shift of values, one which might be seen as contradicting the agenda of Christianity. For example, social media can encourage a 'one size fits all' message, put excessive value on 'likes' and 'followers', and distract people from a relationship with God and their nearest neighbours. This shows that while the use of Facebook is being embraced it must be balanced by considerations from wider traditions in the church.

Inter mirifica, the Second Vatican Council decree on the media of social communication stated the need to, "learn in moderation and discipline" the use of the media, in order, "to understand fully what they see, hear and read [and to] discuss them with their teachers and experts." Despite this being a guideline from the 1960s and therefore pre-dating current social media platforms, it is still valid today. Christians seek to directly link their use of and learning within social media to wider church life, traditions and thinking.

For many faith participants, including Leeds Church

Institute, there is a commitment to sharing in positive and spiritually engaged discussions on social media.

Controversial headlines get more attention on social media, however, so the more peaceful approach can result in a lower response rate to content. It has the effect of limiting contact to people already in existing networks and their contacts rather than catching the attention of new audiences.

Research suggests that this is a key reason why faith organisations do not perform well online compared to the wider market.

There may be similarities between faith usage of social media and not-for-profit organisations. Research into the profit versus non-profit utilisation of social media points out fundamental strategic differences. Not-for-profits tend to cater to multiple publics, including customers who often are not the ones who pay; they collaborate as well as compete with others working in their field; and they usually have multiple, nonfinancial objectives such as to stimulate behavioural change. This means that their target audience is harder to categorise and target; and the outcomes they seek are complex compared to wanting someone to buy something. This is thought to account for the lower rates of social media impact achieved by non-profits compared to profit seeking organisations.

Religion and social media cannot be critiqued as two separate phenomena because they are evolving in a mutual way. It is a fast track version of the processes that work between religion and culture. My research has shown that for faith communities and organisations, social media can be a useful tool but there is a danger in judging 'success' in terms dictated by the corporate and consumerist users of social media.

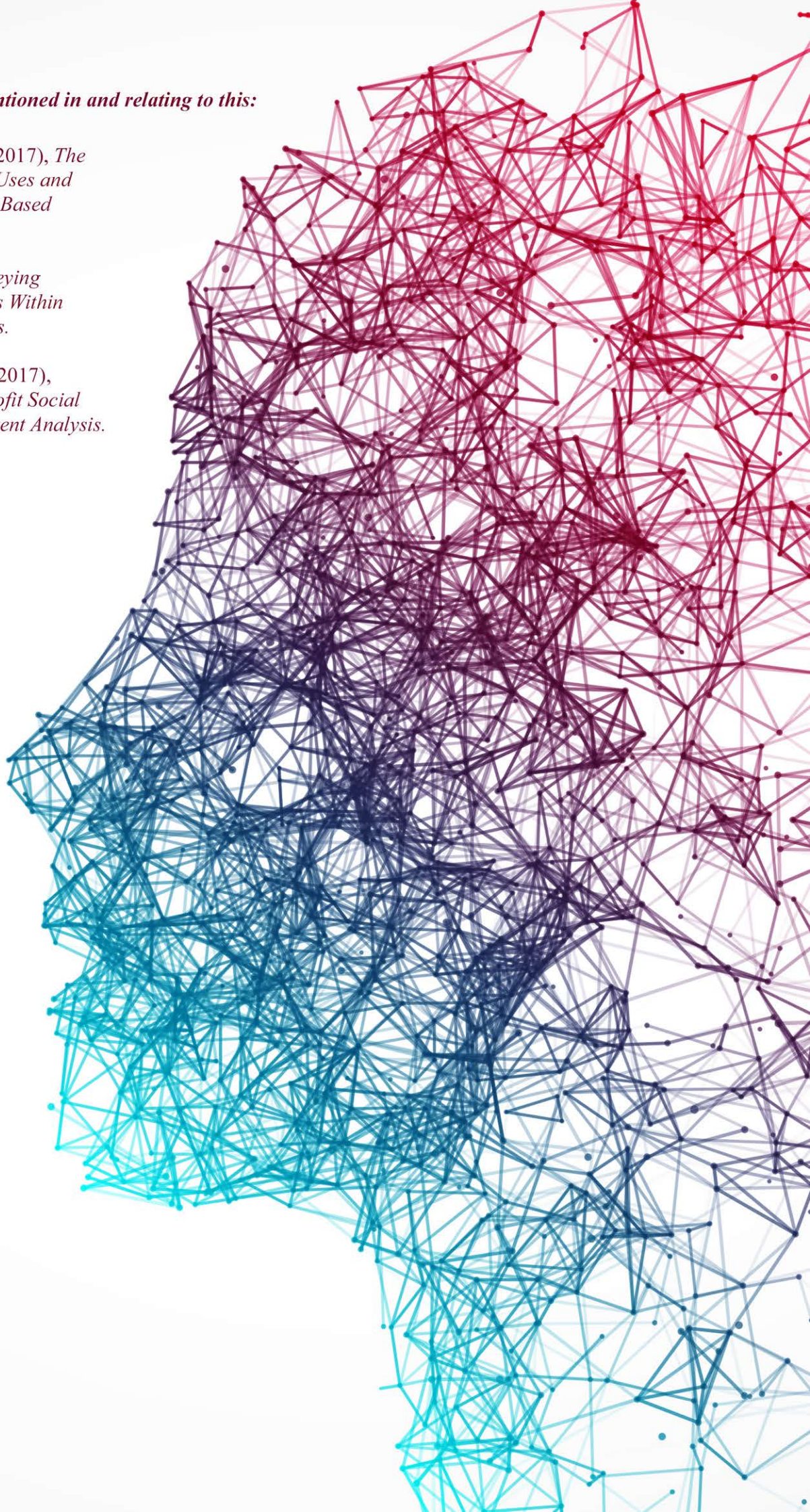
The statistics of engagement and likes do not give the full picture for organisations with an approach that focuses on a deeper level of meaning in interactions. But the use of social media is now a given for faith groups, and they need to continue to reflect on their online presence and the wider life, faith and practice of their community.

Books and articles mentioned in and relating to this:

Brubacker and Haigh (2017), *The Religious Experience: Uses and Gratifications of Faith-Based Content*.

Campbell (2017), *Surveying Theoretical Approaches Within Digital Religion Studies*.

Fudurić and Mandelli (2017), *Corporate and Non-Profit Social Media Policies: A Content Analysis*.



Christmas Cake Coffee and Conversation

Come along for time to talk, a quiz and lots of cake.

On Thursday 19th December, 11am to 12:30pm

At Leeds Church Institute, LS1 6DG.

This event is FREE but booking is required. Email

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