

# CITYtheology

THE MAGAZINE OF THE LEEDS CHURCH INSTITUTE

WHY  
BOTHR  
WITH  
RELIGIOUS  
EDUCATION?

HOW ARE WE  
PRAYING AND  
SINGING THE  
PSALMS IN  
LEEDS?

WHAT DOES  
THE LORD  
REQUIRE  
OF ME?

AUTUMN 2023  
ISSUE 35



# Welcome to CITYTheology

**Why bother with Religious Education?**

**What does the Lord require of me?**

**How are we praying and singing the Psalms in Leeds?**

There are three challenging questions heading up the articles in this edition of the LCI magazine, each aiming to get readers reflecting theologically about key issues for people of faith in Leeds today.

CJ Ojukwu's article focuses our attention on racism in Leeds and helpfully includes some examples of everyday experiences as a starting point. He draws on the laments of the psalmists to raise up a distinctive Christian response. Warning, this is not a comfortable read, but rather a call to prayer and action.

Many of us will fondly remember RE lessons at school, but have you wondered what it is like in schools today, and indeed what pupils think about it themselves? If you are concerned it has become irrelevant, you need to read Charlotte Lister's research-based article entitled, 'Why bother with RE?' to find out more.

The words from the prophet Micah asking what the Lord requires are familiar, but you may not have heard them called the 'Micah Mantra' before. This is how Hannah Langdana refers to them in her article on justice, acknowledging the significant influence of Global South theology and praxis on her life and vocation. She rejoices in the creativity of storytellers, poets and children in responding to the call for justice.

Hannah's article is accompanied by a commissioned poem by Hannah Stone, Poet-Theologian for LCI. Her thoughtful use of language and imagery emboldens the message and enables us to look at difficult issues more fully.

As ever, I am keen to hear from readers about this edition of CITYtheology, either about individual articles, poems or the magazine as a whole. Has it set you thinking or challenged you to act or do something differently?

*Dr Helen Reid,*

Director of Leeds Church Institute





# Why bother with Religious Education? A consideration of pupil's perspectives on the value of RE.

CHARLOTTE LISTER, LEEDS CHURCH INSTITUTE MA SCHOLARSHIP STUDENT 2022-3, SHARES SOME OF THE FINDINGS FROM HER RESEARCH INTO RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS.



**Religious Education (RE) has been compulsory for all children attending state funded schools since 1944 (Education Act 1944).** In the face of modern-day religious diversity, RE within secondary education faces both new and continuing challenges like never before: How do we teach about religious traditions without essentialising them? How do we incorporate non-religious worldviews into RE, given the huge growth of people citing no religion in the most recent census? But most importantly, what does 'religion' mean to young people themselves and does RE matter to them?

Following a brief overview of the history of RE from 1944 to present, you will find an exploration of how pupils themselves feel about RE in schools. The pupil voices included in this article are taken from a research visit to a local secondary school, where RE is an optional subject at GCSE and is referred to as Religious Studies (RS). The 61 pupils, whose opinions are included in this article, are in Years 9 and 10 (aged 13-15 years).

The 1944 Education Act was designed to shape the learning and lives of young people in Britain in the aftermath of World War II. The Act mandated that pupils receive Religious Instruction (RI) and a daily act of collective worship. The Education Act included the right of parents to withdraw their child, partially or wholly, from that daily act of collective worship and also from RI. Further, the Act mandated that the RI syllabus be developed by conferences held by local authorities across England, rather than centrally.

In the early days of the subject, RI was mostly Christian in nature and those creating the syllabi also promoted a confessional Christian approach. Agreed syllabi remained staunchly in favour of Christian-centred RI until the 1960s and 70s when Britain was becoming increasingly secular, as well as growing in religious diversity due to immigration. Local authorities started to adjust their syllabi to reflect the growing religious pluralism in their areas.

The Education Reform Act (1988) introduced the National Curriculum uniting teaching nationally across the vast majority of school subjects, but not for RE. RE remained at the determination of local authorities. It reaffirmed many elements of the original 1944 Education Act, whilst introducing some major changes.

The name for the study of religion was changed from 'Religious Instruction' to 'Religious Education'. There was a widespread acknowledgement that RI had been associated and, in some cases, synonymous with, Christian Instruction. A change in name was deemed necessary for the subject to move on and reflect the religious diversity present in society.

The 1988 Act made explicit the teaching of



Christianity, whilst also ensuring that representatives from religious beliefs, and non-religious worldviews that are not affiliated with Christianity, were included in the Agreed Syllabus Conferences. This was an explicit attempt to promote religious diversity within school classrooms.

In recent years, there has been a move towards the concept of 'religion and worldviews' within RE to further diversify the subject. This enables curricula to include non-religious views in RE, which is of increasing importance as the number of people identifying as non-religious in the UK is growing (2021 UK Census). A worldview is simply "how a person understands [...] their own place in the world." Therefore, a worldview is a person's "approach to life". A person can hold multiple worldviews and their approach to life does not have to fit perfectly inside a traditional, and often essentialised, understanding of how a religious person should live.

The Commission on Religious Education argues that because everyone holds worldviews, religious or not, pupils should study how worldviews are formed, change over time, how they are expressed and the influence they can have upon people. By transitioning from the central subject concept of 'religions' to 'worldviews' the reality of lived religion in Britain is recognised, as is the need for pupils to explore the complexity of this in the safe space of the classroom.

Turning now to my research. It is clear that pupils value religion even if they are not religious themselves. It is my hope that, by listening to the voices of pupils, adjustments can be made to school curricula and locally agreed syllabi, in order to accommodate more topics that pupils themselves are interested in. Through listening to pupil voices, we would be in a better position to advocate for young people and provide an intellectually rigorous RE curriculum that fosters pupil's love for the academic study of religion throughout their time in secondary school.

It is important to note that teachers are constrained in Key Stage 4 by the requirements of exam boards and therefore, their curricula are restricted by GCSE content. Therefore, my aim would be to focus on the wants of pupils within Key Stage 3, where there is more flexibility. However, it could be possible to incorporate pupil

interests in RE at Key Stage 4 into specialised 'RE days' where pupils could explore a religion or belief that does not feature in their GCSE syllabus.

A considerable majority of the survey's participants said they enjoyed RS (77% of Year 9 and 73% of Year 10 pupils answering 'Yes'). 17% of Year 9 pupils and 26% of Year 10 pupils said that they 'Sometimes' enjoy RS, with only 1 Year 9 pupil saying that they did not enjoy RS.

When asked what components of RS they enjoyed the most, pupils across both year groups, said that they enjoyed debates and discussions in RS, especially those that link to controversial topics or where multiple points of view are expressed. They believed that debates helped them to make links between different points of view and helped them to develop well rounded opinions themselves, whilst also being able to understand others. One pupil said:

———— “ —————  
I love doing moral debates  
because I get to understand  
other people's feelings better.

———— ” —————  
Pupils also enjoyed learning about other religions and cultures and felt that this was central to teaching and learning within RE. Some pupils situated this in relation to their own worldviews. For example, "Learning about the traditions and cultures other religions take part in and how they change, different from the traditions I have been brought up with."

Others acknowledged the need to understand other religions because much of their understanding of religion through school had been subconsciously Christian. For example, "as we live in a predominantly Christian country where rules are based off Christianity, even without knowing it, we already know a substantial amount about Christianity. But in RE we get to explore other cultures and religions." Therefore, pupils value this aspect of RE because they feel that it can provide them with the experience and skills needed to understand others who live differently to them.

However, pupils did not enjoy the exam aspects of the subject and found that the pressure to memorise information was sometimes too



much. Year 10 pupils dislike how marks are distributed across exam papers and would prefer fewer questions that are worth more marks. Year 10 pupils were also receptive to the idea of coursework within the subject to reduce pressure on memorisation.

Most pupils felt that RS had helped them prepare for life in a religiously diverse society. Pupils placed emphasis on the ability of GCSE RS to promote understanding of different religions, beliefs, and cultures. According to pupils in the fieldwork groups, understanding difference is a key skill they gained from GCSE RS, which they saw as unique to the subject. As one pupil said: “I learnt that everyone is very different, which includes colour, race and faith.” Another pupil even linked debating skills to religious literacy:

———— “ —————  
I am more understanding and  
aware of other beliefs and  
opinions. I have learnt how to  
debate in a professional way.  
————— ” —————

To pupils, RS provides them with a tool kit for life, a way to interact with others who are different to themselves, without prejudice.

The population of the UK is increasingly diverse and far more so than it was in the mid-20th century when Religious Instruction was first introduced. Therefore, it is essential that RE in school equips pupils with the ability to navigate this diverse landscape with appreciation for difference at its core. This is especially the case regarding South Asian religions, and the majority of pupils felt that they wanted to learn more about Hinduism, Sikhi and Buddhism.

The Year 10 group felt that only learning about two religions at GCSE was too restrictive and wanted to learn about ancient traditions and contemporary religious movements, especially Spirituality, Paganism and Satanism. In these ways, pupils express an interest in learning about different religions, drawing on the methods of academic study.

My fieldwork has demonstrated that pupils do enjoy RE. They like having the freedom to debate with others in a safe space, they value learning about differing approaches to life, they do think RE provides them with transferrable skills and

believe that learning about religion in modernity is important.

However, pupils did also highlight some concerns with RE. They felt that exam-style learning for RE at GCSE was difficult and content easy to confuse. They also wanted to explore more religions and beliefs in depth, feeling that a coursework approach to assessment would help facilitate this. Pupils also wanted to expand beyond the traditions that are typically taught in school (Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikhi) and include minority traditions such as Satanism, Pagan religions, as well as Spiritual beliefs.

Therefore, if we are to make a positive change to RE in secondary education, we must *continue* to ask young people themselves what they want to see taught in the classroom. Young people value RE and value religion, they show keen interest in understanding others and feel that RE facilitates this within school. We do not see many young people taking an active role within their local church or holding a personal religious belief. Despite this, the evidence is clear that young people do value religion, as well as the values and opinions of believers, seeing difference as an avenue for learning and developing understanding about the world and other people.

#### **Recommended Reading:**

Commission on Religious Education. 2018. *Religion and Worldviews: A National Plan for RE.*

Available online

Dinham, A and Shaw, M. 2015. *The Future of Teaching and Learning About Religion and Belief.*

Available online

Dinham, A, Arat, A and Shaw, M. 2021. *Religion and Belief Literacy: Reconnecting a Chain of Learning.*

Bristol: Bristol University Press.



# What does the Lord require of me? To act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with your God.

HANNAH LANGDANA, GLOBAL ISSUES GLOBAL SUBJECTS  
COORDINATOR FOR LEEDS DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION CENTRE,  
REFLECTS ON HER FAITH RESPONSE TO INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL  
INJUSTICE AND HER WORK HERE IN LEEDS.



Taking time out for this article to reflect on how and why I put my faith into action, leads me straight to the Micah Mantra. I find myself asking *'what does the Lord require of me?'*

I believe God's Kingdom is not about oppression. It is not dehumanising. It is not othering the poor. We are all made in God's image. Those who experience the impacts of poverty are my brothers and sisters. As I walk humbly on my journey, supporting schools to embrace wisdom, I am witness to the power of insight. This reveals new possibilities for a just world where all people have an equal share. My perceptions of mercy, and how the words 'Thy Kingdom come' connect to teaching methods around justice, act as a guide for my work at Leeds Development Education Centre (Leeds DEC).

This time of reflection brings me back to the start of my social justice journey, walking alongside those who have lived experience of the impacts of poverty.

I arrived in Leeds aged 19, to study Sustainable Development. I came from a small Norfolk village where my experience of the impacts of poverty on a local or global scale was limited.

---

Attending charismatic and evangelical worship, the focus was not on a preferential option for the poor, like some other Christian denominations, but rather on my personal journey with Christ. It was later that I developed a lexicon of mission and exposure to acts of mercy, allowing me to walk humbly with my God.

---

It was through my gap year that I gained insight and a calling to tackle the infrastructure of oppression that shackles our brothers and sisters in extreme poverty. I travelled to India with the Oasis Christian Charity and lived with a Mumbai family for a year. They were part of a charismatic evangelical church which had a very strong call for social mission.

The family was an amazing role model in terms of putting faith into practice through relating to the poor and the oppressed. The mother's name was Deborah, and the dad, David, regularly shared his food with people who lived in the spaces in and around the train station. Their church was involved in a slum school, where we assisted in practical tasks with the children.

They laid the foundations of social justice for me and my faith, because when I saw oppression on that scale for the first time, particularly children begging for money or working in the street, the injustice of it hit me hard. I had a strong feeling that what I was seeing was just not right and there should be a better way, a way inspired by the acts of compassion of David and Deborah.

For those of us with faith, it is a driver for how we see the world, how we see our place in the world and ultimately how we relate to every living thing. Even for those who don't have a religious faith, society at large understands what drives people of faith to make a difference in the world.

I began working on Fairtrade projects in 2002 when I led a pilot of the Fairtrade Schools Award scheme in Leeds. Funded by CAFOD and Christian Aid, it provided a concrete way in which children connect to complicated global issues. The scheme continues to offer an opportunity for whole school communities to empathise. It enables awareness about the



people who grow cocoa, coffee, tea and many of our essential store cupboard favourites. Together, we think about how the lives of food growers and producers are both different and similar to our own. We reflect on key Religions Education curriculum outcomes, including prophecy, creation beliefs and stewardship of creation.

When we deliver our Cocoa Farmer Workshop we share Mary's story that offers an insight into her life as a cocoa farmer in Ghana. Hearing that she has no access to clean drinking water helps the children to reflect and they ask why she has to walk a mile to get dirty water. Fairtrade creates an opportunity for children to have agency. In our workshops, children pledge to look out for Fairtrade products in shops and to celebrate the skill and effort of Fairtrade producers, and their global neighbours in 71 countries around the world.

Our work helps children in schools like Bracken Edge Primary, Kirkstall St Stephen's Primary, New Bewerley Community School and Abbey Grange Academy to make the connections between Fairtrade and the intertwined concerns of climate and racial injustices. This work is underpinned by the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which are incredibly powerful and important. They represent the first time in history that all the countries of the world have collaborated to focus on pressing environmental, social and racial justice issues.

SDGs state the need to work together to tackle inequalities. There is a recognition amongst global leaders that many in the world do not have their basic needs met. There is also a recognition that we cannot separate people from nature and that the reality is clear: When nature struggles, we all struggle, and we need our planet for us to grow and to thrive.

Global recognition of these goals compounds a united international sense of responsibility, that rich and poor countries alike need to address inequality together. Set against an agreed timeline with practical targets like net zero by 2030, the whole project is tangible for nations, organisations and individuals alike.

In June, we hosted our annual Fairtrade Awards ceremony at Leeds Civic Hall. Schoolchildren from across Leeds celebrated with song, dance

and activities through a range of workshops including one led by Leeds Church Institute's Poet Theologian, Hannah Stone. Planning the poetry workshop dovetailed my faith with our charity's mission to provide interactive learning about the causes and consequences of poverty. The poem Hannah wrote in reflection after the event was called 'Deborah Dances'. The poem shows us how oppression depersonalises people at the start of the growing process and it signposts a more caring way. It encourages us to walk humbly with God and act justly. The poem humanises people. It shows the places, faces and spaces that Adele from Africaniwa so eloquently talked about in her presentation. In this instance, it shows the power of having an eloquent and engaging speaker, with her roots in Ghana, sharing a story that resonates and engages with the children of Leeds. None more so than Deborah, a primary school pupil from Leeds, who danced along to the rhymes and rhythms of Africaniwa's performance.

Historically, global trade has taken over the ability to appreciate the person in the production of food. Just like *theologia poetica* in the Renaissance offered political philosophy, Hannah Stone's reflection on children's questions and the zeal for change, exposes our broken and unfair global system of trade, compelling us to ask serious questions of our civic leaders.

It is my hope that this beautiful poem, along with our teacher training, school workshops and published resources, will raise awareness amongst children in our city, inspiring them to act justly, embracing their global brothers and sisters with a faithful love.

We need more people to volunteer to help deliver the work of Leeds DEC. There is so much work still to be done. If something has stirred within you, please join me as I walk humbly towards a more just and sustainable world. Visit [www.leedsdec.org.uk](http://www.leedsdec.org.uk) for more information.

#### **Recommended reading:**

Ronald Sider. *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger: Moving from Affluence to Generosity* 2015.

Shane Claiborne. *The Irresistible Revolution: Living as an Ordinary Radical* 2006.

'What Does the Lord Require of You? To Act Justly and to Love Mercy and to Walk Humbly with Your God' Micah 6:8



# Deborah dances

A poem in response to the DEC workshop  
8 June, 2023, and in honour of Adelle  
A'Asante and the work of Africaniwa





These children can sit nicely; each has a place at the table.  
They have learned how to rhyme 'care' and 'share' and 'fair.'  
They can choose to use a blue pen, or a red.  
They raise their hands for permission to speak,  
and take turns in showing their work.  
How hard they are trying, we say, with an approving nod.

Then a woman bounds onto the stage,  
and the children fidget in their seats, twisting  
to see; their hands shooting up into the air like kites.  
They have the answers! Will she pick them?  
Soon she has us on our feet, whirling and turning.  
'This is my story', whispers Deborah, in my ear.  
'My father is called Badū; it means 'tenth born.'

And as the woman leads us in the dance  
of the chocolate-growers, Deborah spins,  
and unwraps herself from the threads of his-story  
embossed on the walls of this northern civic hall;  
her prancing fingers graze the names  
of the big white men  
who gained the freedom of the city of Leeds,  
as if to erase their titles.

'Maama Boadua wants to know the places,  
and the faces, and the spaces  
where her chocolate is enjoyed!  
Chocolate has a name!'

And Deborah's braids swing round her head,  
as she tells her story with her feet and her hands,  
with her smile and her eyes;  
a small black girl who has learned to care and share,  
who needs her world to be more fair.

Dance on Deborah, sweet bee; keep  
a sting in your tail. Find your own rhythm,  
speak your life. Dance for your sisters,  
your brothers, your freedoms, our world.

Hannah Stone  
June 2023



# How are we praying and singing the Psalms in Leeds?

CJ OJUKWU REFLECTS ON THE RESONANCE OF THE WORDS OF LAMENT IN THE PSALMS WHEN PEOPLE EXPERIENCE RACISM IN LEEDS.



“  
For there is no  
truth in their  
mouth.

*Psalm 5 verse 9*

**Harrogate Road,  
North Leeds.  
08:47am**

A loving father is enjoying the beauty and intimacy of a parental bond with his ten-year-old son. They are on the way to school, when they are interrupted by a police officer who pulls them over and accuses the father of not wearing his seatbelt. Father and son protest their innocence, politely: with the father asking for evidence of their wrongdoing which is not provided. Instead, he is given an option to choose between a fine and a course. His persistent request for the name of the officer is met with both insolence and the threat of a fine.

Father and son are black, and beautiful.

“  
“How long, O  
Lord?”

*Psalm 13 verse 1*

**Milan Road, Harehills, East Leeds.**

Racist graffiti sits on a wall directly opposite a GP practice, within public view of a site with an overbearing police presence. It is also metres away from a primary school, a mosque and a youth club. The graffiti has been reported to both the local authority and the neighbourhood policing team, who have promised to remove it. A promise that is two months old and growing.

“  
“Yea, they have  
oppressed the  
stranger woefully  
long, O Lord”

*Ezekiel 22  
verse 29*

**Arndale Centre, Headingley, North West Leeds.**

A young couple is desperately looking for a house to rent, having been living in the overcrowded house of a relative. They finally find an agency, who promises to remove their desired property from the market after payment of a £200 deposit. Following the payment, the agency begins to stall the process, whilst organising a viewing of the property to other prospective tenants: others seen as more desirable, in racial and economic terms. Despite an initial promise to return the deposit over the phone, the agency denies making such a claim and refuses to return the money to the family, even after the house is secured by another family.

Another beautiful family from Romania tastes Jim Crow in Leeds.



It might seem that the single, primary thread connecting these stories is racism. However, to read between the lines is to see that, whilst racism requires public indifference to flourish in any given context, it is precisely the inequitable application of law that institutionalises the distance between dark skin and justice.

It is not simply the racial profiling of a driver on Harrogate Road by the police, or the refusal to remove the racist graffiti on a wall in Harehills, that is the primary concern; rather, it is the fact that they are tolerated within a social context that does not prioritise racial justice as a public good. These stories are part of the contours of a city that continues to pretend to be both welcoming and compassionate in the face of an entrenched racial inequality.

In contrast to this, prayer requires humility and honesty: the psalmist does not even exonerate God from his lament. Prayer gives us an opportunity to know human suffering intimately, in a way which helps us to yield to God's desire for justice. More importantly, the same God who invites us to pray also responds decisively to the groaning of the oppressed:

**"The Lord works righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed."**

*Psalm 103 verse 6*

Like the psalmist, we too are called to nurture a vision of a God who 'works' righteousness: with a heart attentive to the silent cry and groanings of victims of racial discrimination. This is an invitation to prayer and action.

Honest prayer. Passionate prayer. Consistent prayer, which sustains action.

Such prayer cannot afford the luxury of colour-blindness, or the politics of respectability, if it is to connect emotionally with the depth of human suffering caused by racism. Rather, it must both see and touch the wounded heart of God, that bleeds from even the slightest hint of contempt or attempt to violate human dignity. It must also lead gently, into the way of the crucified, which is often lonely, dangerous and yet redemptive. For those willing to pursue racial justice as a lifelong vocation, it is the way of love,

patience, sacrifice and courage where God is able to redeem even the most racist heart and institution. In the words of the Psalmist:

**"O Israel, hope in the Lord, for with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is plentiful redemption. He will redeem Israel [Leeds] from all their iniquities."**

*Psalm 130 verse 7-8*

Such prayer is not idle or merely sentimental: on the contrary, it gives us strength, patience and tenderness to wrestle with the contradictions of society, without losing hope or condemning those who refuse to join the struggle against racism. It also empowers us to challenge the root causes of racial inequality, holistically, in a way that threatens the sense of safety, undue privilege and feeling of superiority which racism provides to those who benefit from dehumanisation of others seen and perceived as disposable.

To quote the words of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel: *"What afflicts my conscience is that my face, whose skin happens not to be dark, instead of radiating the likeness of God, has come to be taken as an image of haughty assumption and overbalance. Whether justified or not, I, the white man, have become, in the eyes of others, a symbol of arrogance and pretension, giving offense to other human beings, hurting their pride, even without intending it."*

Finally, to pray like the psalmist, amid the contradictions of life, gives us the ability to keep raising questions about justice, even if they remain ignored and unanswered by those who would rather not trouble their conscience.

- Why should a ten-year-old watch his father harassed on the way to school in a supposedly child friendly city?
- Why should it take more than three months to clean up racist graffiti in a city of culture and compassion?
- Why is an estate agent permitted to practise discrimination freely without any hint of concern for consequences?



# How has Leeds Church Institute been making a difference?

Our Annual Impact Report for 2022 is now available on the LCI website, so you can get to know some of the incredible projects we had the pleasure of starting and supporting last year.

Our AGM in September was a fantastic celebration of all we have achieved, and it's been a joy to continue this work in 2023 and beyond.

You can read the report here:



## Contact

To keep up to date with all our current events, posts and podcasts:  
Please visit our website or follow us on Facebook and X @LCILeeds

Please ensure we have your up to date email address and information so you do not miss out on any of our updates and news. To update your membership email: [info@leedschurchinstitute.org](mailto:info@leedschurchinstitute.org)

For more articles, and information about events, visit [www.LCILeeds.org](http://www.LCILeeds.org)

 [www.facebook.com/LCILeeds](https://www.facebook.com/LCILeeds)

 [www.twitter.com/LCILeeds](https://www.twitter.com/LCILeeds)

Email:  
[events@leedschurchinstitute.org](mailto:events@leedschurchinstitute.org)  
Phone: 0113 245 4700  
Charity no. 220966

Design: Daniel Ingram-Brown  
Images: Front cover, Dancers, Students, Father and Son © Adobe Stock

Leeds Church Institute 43 The Calls, Leeds, LS2 7EY  
[lcileeds.org](http://lcileeds.org)



Leeds  
Church  
Institute

