



# Autumn Assembly Report: October 2006

October 21st dawned bright and sunny as participants came to Amigo Hall for the Autumn Assembly. Our title for the day was 'All human Beings - born free and equal? Past & Present forms of slavery' and sought to understand the impact of the Transatlantic Slave Trade and its legacies; as well as looking at some of the forms of slavery that unfortunately still exist today. We were very pleased to have Archbishop Kevin and Bishop Paul Hendricks with us during the day.

The keynote speaker was Richard Reddie, the project director of 'set all free'. This project has been set up by the Churches Together in England as "a network to promote appropriate Christian responses to commemorate the bicentenary of the British Abolition of the Slave Trade Act in 1807." The three 'pillars' of the campaign are to REMEMBER - the horrors of the Transatlantic Slave Trade, the abolitionists of all colours & sexes who worked to end it, & the role of the church at the time; to REFLECT - upon its consequences for us; and to RESPOND - to the legacies by taking action and working to effect healing and reconciliation.

Richard set the scene by giving the context of the Transatlantic Slave Trade. There were three centuries of this triangular trade, which saw the movement of 9 - 12 million people to Western Europe. 60% of them were males between the ages of 15 - 35. They were shipped to England, France, Spain, Portugal, Holland, and Denmark - most of the countries of Europe. The horrific journeys took between 6 weeks and three months and had a mortality rate of 2 in 10 on the ships. It was a 'lucrative' trade, even being seen as 'respectable' for Kings and Queens to be associated with. In Charles II's time, the Royal African Company 'exported' 5,000 Negroes a year. The implication of this trade was the loss over centuries of fit young adults from the countries of Africa.



Richard Reddie

Christians were involved in the Slave Trade on both sides. The Bible was 'co-opted' to support the trade and passages were quoted to justify it happening. The letter to Philemon was used to show that Christians could own slaves, and Revelation 21 was used to suggest that the slaves would find their reward in heaven. Whilst other Christians used the Bible as part of their campaign to 'set the captives free' and worked tirelessly on behalf of the slaves, often this negative side of Church involvement is forgotten or ignored, and Richard suggested we need to come to terms with it.

He went on to speak of the group known as the Abolitionists - those men and women who had worked in Britain to bring about an end to this trade. The person most recognised is William Wilberforce, but there are a host of others, including Thomas Clarkson, Olaudah Equiano, Hannah More and Granville Sharp; all of whom were British, but who have somehow 'slipped' from memory. "Why are they not known?" he asked. In fact, when most adults are asked, it would appear that they did not study slavery at school despite it being British history.

Consequences of this trade were the destabilisation of West Africa,

*"We need to connect the past with the present, there is still unfinished business to be attended to - the legacy of racism needs a dialogue to bring about healing and reconciliation."*

depopulation, a loss of skilled personnel, the destruction of markets and industries, and destruction of the African self-image. In the eyes of the Europeans, the African slaves were seen as 'cargo' or 'commodities' rather than human beings. They were dehumanised, and not seen as 'made in the image of God' which made it 'easier' for them to receive such terrible treatment.

As we reflect upon the effects of the Slave Trade we must find ways of responding to its legacies. One huge area is that of racism. "We still need", he said, "dialogue to effect healing and reconciliation." We must take the opportunity offered us by next year's anniversary to bring to public awareness these legacies. By holding conferences and using published materials these questions can be addressed.

There will be many ways in which the Bicentenary will be marked next year. The cities mostly deeply associated with the Slave Trade are all

*(Continued on page 2)*

(Continued from page 1)

holding events. The Royal Mail will be producing a set of stamps, the Royal Mint a £2 coin, the BBC special programmes. There will be a series of Bible Studies for use in churches, and many Museums will be holding events. One place of finding out about these and other commemorations is to go to the 'setallfree' website - [www.setallfree.net](http://www.setallfree.net) and click on the events page. *What can we do?* Richard suggested a few ways - join Anti-Slavery International who are working on present day forms of slavery, by lobbying our MP, buying Fairtrade/ethically traded

goods, holding an event to raise awareness of the Bicentenary, educating ourselves and using the website. (There are other suggestions that can be found there.) We need to make connections - what underpins present day slavery is still poverty and discrimination, which we can see in Eastern Europe, and the US (Mexicans).

Richard ended by saying that the slavery issue must not be seen just in terms of that from Africa to Europe, we must realise it is much bigger than that, BUT, there was something singularly and uniquely wicked about the Transatlantic Slave Trade, because it was condoned and even justified in

terms of religion. It was brutal, violent and terrorising, and set the pattern for other forms of slavery. This commemoration hopes to get people engaged in this issue so that they can go on working on it afterwards. If that happens, then the year long project would have been 'successful'.

*"The challenge that faces us is to be prophetic, to express the prophetic outrage at injustice and call God's people back to justice and to share in God's mission to restore, recognise and perfect the 'image of God' in all people, to end subjugation, the chains of slavery."*  
Rev. Inderjit Bhogal, Chair, setallfree

During the lunch break, there was the opportunity to listen to a presentation about the Christians in Pakistan, a People in Chains. John Pontifex, the Head of Press and Information at the Aid to the Church in Need, had earlier this year visited Pakistan and had seen at first hand the life for minority peoples there. He likened it for many people as a form of slavery from a broad perspective, and gave many examples to explain why. For three weeks he travelled through parts of Pakistan, visiting and witnessing to the persecution of the Christian Church. In fact, he said, "what I hadn't bargained for was that the persecution of Christians formed part of a wider context of oppression that had reduced groups to the status of a 'people in chains.'" At the top he put women, who are often accused of adultery, smuggling, drug crimes and theft - often wrongly. In Faisalabad there is a Women's Centre set up with the help of the previous Bishop John Joseph.

There is also the problem of 'workers in chains' - those people who work in the labour intensive areas of rice and cotton farming and in the brick kilns. The local bishops have likened their plight to that of bonded labour. In the brick kilns entire families may be at work to make ends meet, working from dawn to dusk, relying on good weather so that they can make up to 1,000 bricks a day. For all this hard labour they can earn 200 rupees, the equivalent of £2. One priest friend said that, "the families who live and work in the brick kiln industry are treated like slaves. In such situations, many people, and especially the girls, are deprived of education, health care and even food." In Lahore at a convention of workers, John learnt that they have virtually no rights. Some 80% of them have no ID cards—because they have

no birth certificates (a consequence of a lowly/poor birth.) And without this they can't vote, get health care, can't open a bank account, join any official organisations or unions, and have no right to a basic wage. Officially, only those under 18 can apply for an ID card—which costs 400 rupees (£4). But with the help of Caritas, the workers are hoping to strike a deal to obtain the paperwork which will make it possible to get a card. Finally, John identified a third element that could be seen as a form of slavery, that of the Christian church. During an upsurge of violence this year, many churches, presbyteries, convents and Cathedrals have come under attack from militants, not only as a result of the Prophet Mohammed cartoons, but also due to the foreign policy of the West. Non-Muslims caught in a cycle of oppression and poverty are an easy target for vendettas.

John concluded by asking that we support those organisations that are working with these people, such as

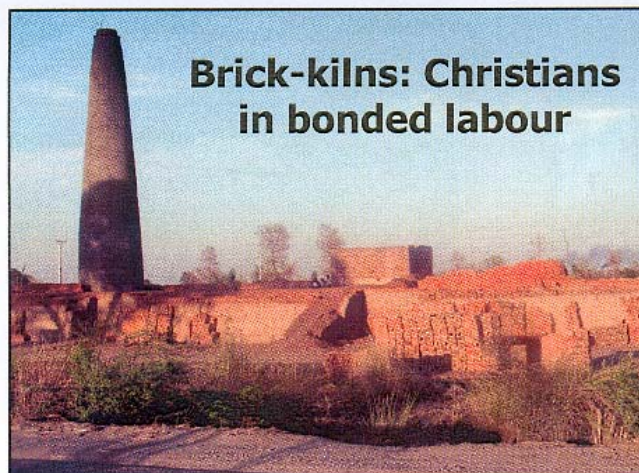
Aid to the Church in Need, who help provide assistance in re-building churches, supporting refugees and those working with them.

**Our afternoon** started with a presentation from the Southwark Catholic Youth Service on aspects of Slavery. The group of young people had researched the topic and had shared out the work so that they could cover a large amount of knowledge and facts. They began by giving us a very brief history of slavery which had existed since 10,000BC according to some historical accounts.

They spoke of the exploitation of workers in the sweatshops, where they toil for long hours, in dangerous conditions, with no access to education in order that we can buy 'low cost' goods. They urged us to ask questions before we spend any money! One young person had also done some research on some of the most well known names in industry - Coca Cola, Dell, Nestle, Adidas, Disney.

These were all examples of companies

(Continued on page 3)



## Brick-kilns: Christians in bonded labour

One of John's slides showed a brick kiln where the 'workers in chains' toil in what the bishop of Lahore described as bonded labour.

(Continued from page 2)

that had exploited their workers. They suggested we continue to support campaigns like Unearth Justice, the new CAFOD campaign on the exploitation of workers in the Gold Mining industry.

Another area that they had researched was that of human trafficking, where people are lured with promises of riches, but instead become marginalized and vulnerable people who are threatened and abused. Child trafficking is also rife - the group spoke of the children from Rwanda who are vulnerable to abduction. One young person also spoke of the slavery in the Sudan, which is quite unknown here in the UK.

They ended by looking at an area which perhaps many of the audience would not have thought of - the gang culture and violence that their generation suffers from and which is



Young People from Southwark Catholic Youth Service



another form of oppression. Using the threat of social exclusion, the fear of peer pressure and violence young people can be forced to take up a life of crime. Whilst not slavery in the strict sense, it is certainly a form of oppression that prevents someone living life to the full.

A time for questions followed and again the young people showed they were well able to respond to points put to them with confidence and clarity.

The group were very knowledgeable and articulate, and helped to show that not all our youth are involved in criminal activities. These young people were certainly well versed in some of the injustices of our world and are working to bring about awareness of these and other issues with their peers.

They received a well deserved round of applause for their efforts and were thanked for giving up some of their time to be with us.

After the Youth Service presentation we were fortunate to have two more excellent presentations, from repre-

sentatives of Save the Children and CHASTE (Churches Alert to Sex Trafficking in Europe).

Clare Goulborn and Emily Gorznska spent time giving us an overview of some of the projects that Save the Children are involved in to reduce child labour in its various forms. In Bangladesh they are working with Propitplan to provide an education for children who are working in the factories and other dangerous situations, often for up to 10/12 hours a day. Aged between 8 - 15 earning around £1.50 a week, using machines in workshops to make jewellery. At the Child Centre they are involved in making decisions, classes are run and cheap health care is available.

They are also working with the returned child soldiers as in Sri Lanka. Children have been used as spies, scouts, decoys, wives as well as in fighting. The organisation works with

*"300,000 children are still caught up in war as child soldiers. One, Patrick, said 'My greatest hope is to go home', but that is only the beginning."*

the governments to demobilise them and helps to re-unite them with their families, provide counselling and a means of earning a living. In 2003 the UK finally ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Children the Involvement of the Child in Armed Conflict.

Rossllyn Okumu has recently joined CHASTE as their Churches Officer for the London area. Trafficking, she

said, is happening all over the world today, and her talk would only give a 'snap shot' of the subject. It is, today, the fastest growing means by which people are caught in the trap of Slavery according to Anti-Slavery International. The UN definition defines trafficking as, "the movement of human beings across borders for the purpose of exploitation." The majority of those who are trafficked are women although there are also numerous children, including young boys. It is difficult to get a handle on the scale of the problem, estimates range from 60,000 to 80,000 being trafficked into the UK alone every year. Why is this so? "Because", she said, "it is so profitable! It is the third largest source of income for organised crime in the UK after drugs and arms."

But it something that is impossible to actually see unless you actually look for it - brothels etc don't stand out as anywhere different from a normal building and are not easily recognisable. Much is going on in our ordinary streets that we are not aware of. The victims of trafficking come from all over the world - from Africa, Asia, eastern Europe. It can happen anywhere that people are from poor countries and where they are desperate to find a way of getting money to help their families.

The reality of the situation is that it involves

- deception: individuals are deceived perhaps by someone they trust with an offer of a job etc
- life threatening travel route; documents are taken by the trafficker., who begins to dehumanise the victim, often beating, raping, drugging

(Continued on page 4)



(Continued from page 3)

Listening to the afternoon speakers

“Trafficking is the fastest growing means by which people are caught in the trap of slavery today” *Anti-Slavery international*

them, forms of grooming

- treated as a slave: sold on to others and then put to work in brothels
- multiple clients: forced by pimps to serve many men every day.

Roslyn stressed that prostitution is widespread in the UK. It is run mainly by Albanian gangs at present. It is estimated that there are some 80,000 women working in prostitution, of whom 80% are foreigners. It is difficult to know how many of these have been trafficked, but could be anywhere between 2,000 and 10,000. There is growing concern over the whereabouts of young Asian and West African women who are disappearing from care homes, whom no-one can track.

Earlier in the year, ‘Operation Pentameter’ had been set up to explore the issue of trafficking and to try and get some idea of numbers involved in it. It was the first co-ordinated effort to tackle human trafficking on a national scale, involving all 55 police forces in England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales and the Channel islands. As a result, 84 trafficked women were rescued, (12 aged between 14 - 17), 232 people arrested and a new UK Human Trafficking centre was launched to combine research and intelligence functions. For further information on the centre in Sheffield, go to [www.ukhtc.org](http://www.ukhtc.org)

One way we can help is to join the campaign to get the Government to sign the European Convention against Trafficking. **Anti-Slavery International** has a campaign running that urges the Government to sign and ratify the treaty, - go to [www.antislavery.org/campaign](http://www.antislavery.org/campaign) for more details.

The day finished with time for table groups to discuss what they had heard and then to ask questions of the speakers at an ‘open session’.

Before he left, **Archbishop Kevin** thanked everyone for coming and taking time to become more informed about the issue and to find out what they could do - either for this issue or any one of the others

Panel of speakers replying to questions at the end of the day.



Thanks to Phil Kerton for notes from the day and for adapting the prayer.

that are there - Inter-faith, Trident replacement or the Environment for example.

The day drew to a close with the use of a prayer based on one from the [setallfree](http://setallfree) website:

*Ever living, ever loving God, our words are inadequate, and our minds too small to encompass you. we ask you to forgive us the times when we have acted as if we knew you so well that we could dismiss another’s understanding of your nature and purposes.*

*God who takes the side of those who bear injustice, pain and insult, we pray for healing.*

*Through the telling of our stories, and through speaking the truth in love, may we find healing and create whole and wholesome communities.*

*we pray for the imagination to think how we would feel if what has been done to others had been done to us.*

*we pray for the openness to listen to others with respect. Grant humility and forgiveness in the hearts of all.*

*Heal the blindness that looks but does not see, the deafness which refuses to listen and so does not hear,*

*the dullness which hears but does not comprehend; and the lack of integrity that knows but does not act.*

*Forgive us if we have spoken as if we knew your will and purposes to the exclusion of any possibility of new truth breaking forth.*

*Gracious God, heal our wounds and set all free. we pray in the name of Christ, Lord set us free. Amen*

*Amen*