

## Inter-faith Dialogue

**It always happens when you're in a hurry. I wanted to get home promptly because I had promised my children in a moment of weakness to take them to the Pokemon movie. I hope you realise that it is a fundamental necessity of children's evangelism at the moment to provide theological reflection on Ash's sacrifice in *Mew versus Mewtwo* and to know the significance of having a soul-friend called Pikachu. But I digress.**

**I arrived hot foot at Fenchurch Street only to discover that some poor soul, perhaps having been driven to distraction by children battling with their Squirtles and Charizards, had thrown themselves under a train and that there would be nothing leaving for the wilds of Essex until the track had been cleared, as the announcer euphemistically put it. My brother-in-law is a train driver on this line and though only in his twenties, has had to deal with smashed bodies spread over half a mile of track on a number of occasions. It's not funny. So my frustration was somewhat mitigated by knowing what a dreadful mess someone was having to clear up somewhere, as I trudged off to get a tube.**



Photo by G-Man

**So there I was, with all the other sardines on a tube to Upminster, thinking about the times I'd been with my brother-in-law in his cab and wondering how I'd cope with a person hitting my windscreen, when I found myself talking with a group of young people with whom I was crushed into a corner. We were all discussing the fatality on the line, which was affecting the tube as well. We were talking about the sort of circumstances which drive people to take their lives. All my companions, from the communities around East Ham and Barking, knew someone who had taken their life. As we were talking, the train came into Bromley-by-Bow and a woman got on and said 'Good evening everyone' in a loud voice. Our first thought was that she was some sort of busker or collecting for something, but then she launched into 'Repent and be baptised! God does not want anyone to perish! Jesus is the only way to eternal life!' She made her way down the carriage until she got to my group. 'Sorry, I'm a Muslim' said one of my friends, in a jokey sort of way and with a smile. She glared at him. Then she glared at me. 'You should be ashamed of yourself' she said.**

This made me feel uncomfortable. I wasn't quite sure what I was supposed to be ashamed of. Was it because I was wearing a prominent cross and not assisting her in her witness? Was it because I was talking to a group of Muslims? Was it because I was simply not responding to her, not on her side? Or was it a more general comment, aimed at me because I was more identifiable as someone who should know what she was talking about. But this drove me to think about the particular quality of different kinds of discourse. Her problem was that her evangelising was just scuffing the surface of tired commuters on their way home. Trapped in a stuffy carriage, everyone closed down, refusing the words, no matter what their import. No-one wanted to start a dialogue. God does not want anyone to perish, but today someone *had* perished, for whatever reason, and that reality, which was making us all late, the shared-circumstance of death which had touched all of us at one time or another, had opened up an entirely different mode of discourse in which God and our experience of God formed the platform for our understanding.

Our evangelist got off the train and two stops further on, yet another woman got on and began the same script. 'Sorry, I'm *still* a Muslim!' shouted my friend. This brought the house down and the poor woman didn't stand a chance after that.

I arrived home too late for the local showings of Pokemon, so drove the children to Bluewater, where we just squeezed in. There is a particular Pokemon called Jigglypuff, who when she sings sends everyone to sleep and who then gets angry and draws on the sleeping audience's faces. I fell asleep long before Jigglypuff made an appearance and spent the rest of the evening, unbeknown to me, with my son's black squiggles all over my face.....

One last piece of inter-faith discussion. The day after Pokemon, my husband and I went out to a fish restaurant in Southend for his birthday. Behind us a family were well through several bottles of wine when they had this interesting, though bizarre, discussion:

'Dad, why do Catholics only eat fish on Fridays?'

'Well it's like the Jews only eat pork on Saturdays'

'Wasn't it something to do with Jesus being crucified?' (This is not a joke!)

'Was it?'

'Yeah, on a Friday'

'Must be something to do with the Pope then'

I am writing this on Monday of Holy Week. The turbulent mystery of Easter beckons. And into this mystery is poured Ash's death and resurrection in Pokemon, the unknown misery of the train line fatality, the relay tube evangelists' unwanted certainties, my friends who are still Muslims and the rumour of God that still vaguely remembers that Jesus was crucified. Perhaps here, perhaps *only* here, some sort of sense will come.