

A Spiritual Field Guide: Meditations for the Outdoors: Nicholson lost daughter in London bombings

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A debate on absolution was stirred in England recently after an Anglican priest stepped down from her parish duties because she could not forgive those who carried out the July bombings on London's transport system. The attacks resulted in the death of more than 50 people, including her daughter.

"Can I forgive them for what they did? No, I cannot. And I don't wish to," said Julie Nicholson, vicar of St. Aidan with St. George Church in Bristol, in an interview carried on BBC television March 7. Her 24-year-old daughter, Jenny, was among the victims.

"I believe that there are some things in life which are unforgivable by the human spirit," said Nicholson. "We are all faced with choice, and those four human beings on that day chose to do what they did."

The vicar said she felt "unable to stand behind the altar and celebrate the communion and lead people in words of peace and reconciliation and forgiveness." She remains an ordained priest and has taken a job with a community youth project connected with the arts, a subject close to her daughter's heart.

The bishop of Bristol, Michael Hill, said, "I think these situations in life shake the faith of everybody because they immediately bring into focus the 'why' question. Unfortunately, there's no simple . . . answer to that."

The London *Times* noted in a March 7 editorial: "Some in her flock may prefer her to swallow her doubts and live up to her calling. Others may regard her decision as a missed opportunity," believing that "during a time of increased interfaith and cultural suspicion, she could have performed an invaluable service to the country by absolving the murderous fanatics."

“Mrs. Nicholson’s loss is great and her faith troubled, but her integrity is intact. To extend forgiveness to the misguided, the mistaken or the ignorant is significantly easier if they offer repentance. Suicide bombers do not linger to explain their actions.” -*Ecumenical News International*