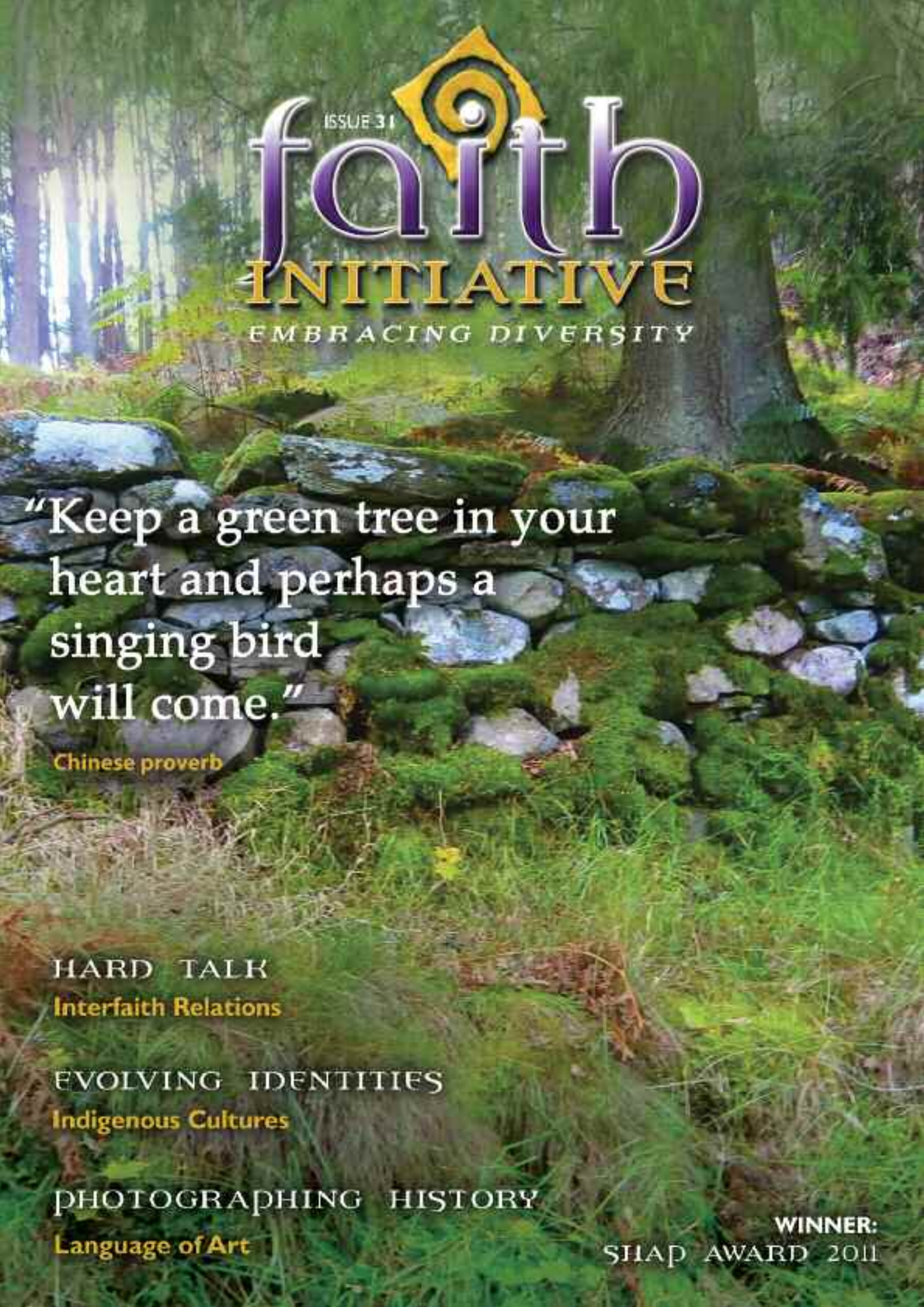
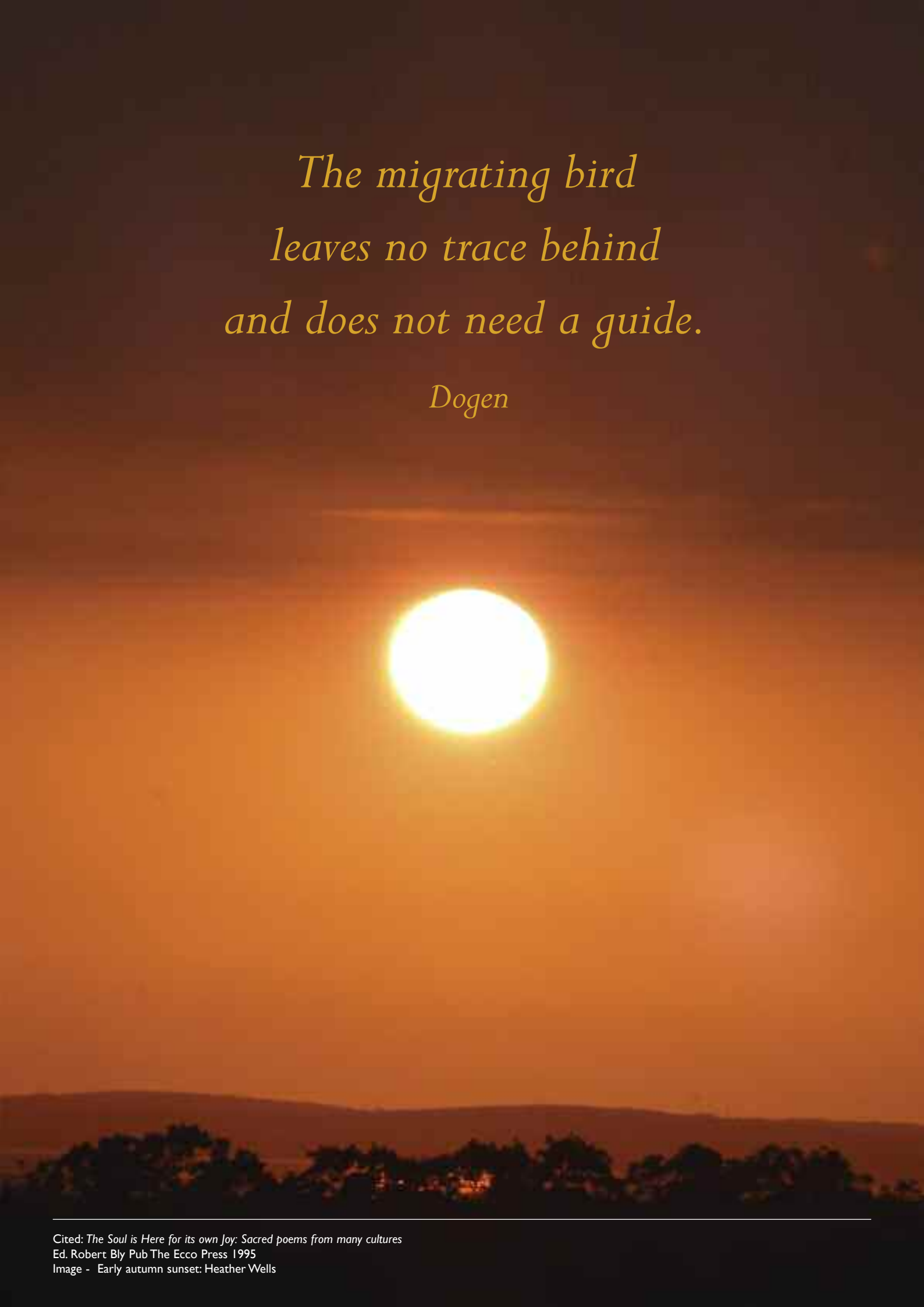

ISSUE 31
faith
INITIATIVE
EMBRACING DIVERSITY
"Keep a green tree in your heart and perhaps a singing bird will come."
Chinese proverb
HARD TALK
Interfaith Relations
EVOLVING IDENTITIES
Indigenous Cultures
PHOTOGRAPHING HISTORY
Language of Art
WINNER:
SHAP AWARD 2011



Cited: *The Soul is Here for its own Joy: Sacred poems from many cultures*
Ed. Robert Bly Pub The Ecco Press 1995
Image - Early autumn sunset: Heather Wells

faith INITIATIVE
EMBRACING DIVERSITY

Issue 31 publication date October 2014

contents

editorial

Our keynote writers Reefat and Khurshid Drabu provide a heartfelt insight into the crisis in Kashmir; weaving a thread from a time of religious and social harmony in a land of great beauty, to the eruption of political violence and military force as two powerful neighbours claim territorial rights, and citizens suffer the consequences. Sadly such devastation finds its echo in many situations around the world and it is in this current global political/religious climate that we feel it appropriate to provide a safe and respectful platform to the vital issue of 'Interfaith Relations'. The views expressed are personal but deeply felt, and we are aware that some people may find them challenging to read, but they are issues that we genuinely believe need opening up for interfaith dialogue to be truly meaningful.

The contributions, by Rabbi Jonathan Wittenberg and Fiyaz Mughal, are dealing with sensitive and highly emotive issues surrounding the Israel/Palestine situation, and I am reminded on reading them of a radio programme I listened to some years ago: the speaker was advocating the need for a return to 'honest' talk. He made the distinction between 'honest talk' and 'insensitive speech', often the two overlapping as emotions run high; what is said is not always what is meant. I personally feel that frustration and anger are natural feelings, often alerting us to something that is not quite right, but if expression is stifled often hurtful and destructive words and actions can follow. But in a world of political correctness 'honest talk' can be difficult. While political correctness is right in principle, in its expectations of how a person should use appropriate or alternative language, it does not change the way some people think and feel, but only mask it. Perhaps we have become too superficial and shallow in our dialogues, being 'honest' only amongst those we know think like us, where we feel we are on safe ground. But this polarization of dialogue does not move relationships forward it only reinforces what we want to hear. Honest dialogue is about getting to the heart of the matter, revealing our views and allowing them to be challenged and possibly tempered or changed. Dialogue is not about smooth talking, surface talking or pretty talk: it is about deep talking and deep listening. Only if we allow this level of dialogue can we cultivate the skills needed for this essential level of communication.

If we fail to nurture hard talk and listening then interfaith relations will deteriorate: people will draw back into their comfort zones, retracting rather than engaging, and before we know it segregation is the norm and violence a likely consequence. Our featured artist, Moriah LeFebvre, challenges us with her thought-provoking portrayals of man's inhumanity to man – graphically illustrating the repercussions of communication breakdown when only one side is left talking, and listening only to themselves.

Lorna Douglas

We thank all our contributors - writers, artists, poets and photographers – and of course subscribers. We also gratefully acknowledge the support of donors, who wish to remain anonymous. To sustain and develop the magazine however we need regular financial donations. If any readers know of Trust Funds, Grants or private donors who may be willing to help with funding, however big or small, the Editor (Heather Wells) would appreciate your advice and/or recommendations. For contact details please see above.

faith INITIATIVE

www.faithinitiative.co.uk

Initiative Interfaith Trust

Registered Charity No. 1113345

Trustees: Heather Wells, Lorna Douglas and Emma Winthrop.

Object:
The promotion of religious harmony by: Providing educational resources and information to promote a better awareness of the causes and consequences of inter-religious tensions and conflicts; and educating the public in the diverse nature of religious belief.

Faith Initiative Magazine

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Co-Editor and Design Consultant: Lorna Douglas

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Poet in residence: **Rebecca Irvine Bilkau**

Aim: The aim of Faith Initiative Magazine is to open windows on the beliefs and practices of people of faith to foster understanding and help reduce religiously motivated violence.

Statement: Whilst the contents of this magazine will always be in accordance with the 'object' of Initiative Interfaith Trust there will be freedom of expression.

Invitation: We invite you to contribute articles, poems, letters, illustrations and responses so that the magazine reflects the religious communities it seeks to serve. Editorial guidance can be obtained from

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- Children of War
- Colours of Faith

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Back cover: Poem: © Rebecca Irving Bilkau
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SPIRAL: "This is an ancient symbol that reminds us of the womb and the protective mothering nature in all of us. It takes us from the broad sweeps of the outer life to an infinitely small centre where we cease to exist."

Cited:
Mandalas: Spiritual Circles for Harmony & Fulfilment
Laura J. Watts (2002) Pub. Hermes House, London ISBN 184308 973 7

The spiral logo was designed by Caroline Jariwala for Initiative Interfaith Trust

Common Heritage *and* politics *of* division

We have a common heritage and family roots. We were born in a place nestled in the lap of the mighty Himalayas - the valley of Kashmir. Its capital Srinagar was our hometown where I (Khurshid) grew up.

I received primary and secondary school education in Roman Catholic and Anglican Church schools. My parents had no misgivings about educating their only son in Christian schools. They brought me up as a Muslim whose mission in life had to be understanding and practicing my own faith – Islam - but at the same time respecting and caring for people of other faiths, and of no faith or belief. From early days my father, a very pious and devout man, demonstrated to me the joy of being a Muslim. Islam was taught to me as the true path to good humanity, and Allah our creator and judge as the most compassionate and loving. Performance of 'Salat' was strongly encouraged as were regular visits to the shrines. My maternal grandfather was founder of the struggle for freedom from the oppressive rule of the Maharajah: I was in his charge for much of my formative years and so faith and politics are part of my DNA. My mother, a highly intelligent and strong willed lady, taught me to engage with people of other faiths and backgrounds in the quest for mutual understanding, reminding me that it was Allah who had made us different in our faiths, colours, cultures and race. She made sure that my psyche was not dominated by fear of Allah, but by love for Him and belief in his His mercy and His omnipotence.

> My mother... made sure that my psyche was not dominated by fear of Allah, but by love for Him...

Although born in Kashmir I (Reefat) was brought up in England. My first visit to the valley of my birth was in the late sixties. It was then that I discovered the many realities that set Kashmir apart from the rest of its neighbours. My first impression of Kashmir was of tall poplars, snow-capped mountains, translucent lakes and fast flowing rivers. The paddy fields and the people just filled me with an intense sense of wonder. I was impressed that the people in the valley came from all faiths yet were bound more by culture than their religion. Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs all went to the same shrines, ate rice, had Khawa (green tea with nuts and saffron), Nun-Chai (salted tea), and of course Wazawan (cuisine for celebrations) was special to all. Friendships bound Kashmiris and I never saw a distinction drawn over religion. It was the commonalities that held the people together and made the place special. There was no distinction in dress code or lifestyle. Each faith shared similar values, and it was a joy that they celebrated all the festivals as one community. Kashmir is the land where it is believed that Jesus Christ came after his crucifixion and where, contrary to mainstream Islamic belief, it is asserted that he is buried in Srinagar. It is also believed that Prophet Moses too visited Kashmir and left his foot imprint on a stone in the south of the valley.

It was in the 1980s that Kashmir erupted politically. The freedom fighters, supported by Pakistan against Indian rule, started gently but over the next decade they roared into a movement which led to strife for ordinary people. Many thousands were killed, many more went missing and no one was safe. Cinemas were burnt down and women were compelled to wear the hijab. Restrictions in normal lifestyle were imposed. A brand of Islam which expressed its identity through dress code and appearance was born. This was when Governor's rule was imposed and Indian

In Kashmir 2014

Mountain Image. Atif Gulzar (http://www.sxc.hu/photo/341372)

politician/civil servant Jagmohan Malhotra unleashed his atrocities. During this time an exodus of Hindus was driven, to some extent, by the fear of freedom fighters, but also by the hard line political agenda: here was an opportunity to ethnically cleanse Kashmir of its Muslim population. Central government recalled Jagmohan before he succeeded in his alleged mission.

Kashmir now became a valley of army bunkers and army camps. The presence of army personnel was suffocating. The army trucks intruded into daily life, threatening and demeaning the ordinary Kashmiri: everyone was a suspect. There were random security checks which caused resentment and loss of dignity as they spared no one. Life revolved around hartals (strikes): there was no knowing where the next bomb would go off. The freedom fighters and the army, at times, became as one: both committing atrocities in the name of some ill-conceived ideology.

Kashmir now became a valley of army bunkers and army camps

Since 1989 over 120,000 people have become victims of bullets in the valley: hundreds of thousands of innocent children have become orphans and thousands of young women have been widowed as a result of acts of inhumanity and brutality but the international geo politics is such that this tragedy receives no attention. As years have gone by India and Pakistan have become nuclear powers strengthening their grip on the territories they occupy – Pakistan using Islam as their justification for the territory, and India claiming that its retention of Kashmir is essential for its claim to secular philosophy. An act of Indian Parliament called AFSA protects the Armed Forces in Kashmir from prosecution and grants them immunity. Hence centres of torture and structures of oppression have been created to deal with any inkling of "insurgency". This is wrong, India should not suspect all Kashmiris of militancy and separatism. It should learn to respect the voices and views of critical Kashmiri friends just as it does the thinking and opinions of non-Kashmiris on all kinds of issues. The leadership of the Indian Armed Forces should have no public say in matters of law and policy on Kashmir: occupation by military might, history tells us, does not last long. Indian leadership needs to face that lesson and move to better strategies.

We genuinely believe that if the Indian government wish to sincerely and honestly pursue the welfare of its own people, it should re-visit its meaningless mantra claiming Kashmir as an integral part of India. Pakistan cannot afford to keep its country on a constant war footing on Kashmir either. As well-wishers and friends of India as well as that of Pakistan, we (Reefat and Khurshid) say, the two governments need to relinquish the path to delusional politics. The people of Kashmir cannot and will not be silenced by the barrel of gun – no matter who wields the gun – be it in the name of Islam or that of secularism. Kashmir is not a territory for sale. Its future has to be decided by the people of Kashmir expressing their will through a fair and independent referendum. Kashmir is unique in the subcontinent that despite the most volatile political environment, there has not been a single riot on grounds of religion. The Indian government has to change its culture of suspecting all Kashmiri Muslims to be wedded to allegiance with Pakistan.

About the authors:

Dr Reefat Drabu has recently retired from General Medical Practice, having served for over thirty five years.
She qualified from the University of Manchester in 1973.
She has always taken active interest in inter-faith politics with particular reference to Islam.
She was elected to the post of Assistant Secretary General of the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) in 2010 having been an elected member on its governing body for five years.
She held the appointment of Governor to the Southampton Solent University for three year term from 2009 -2012
She has served on the BBC Regional Advisory Board from 2008 to 2011.
She is the founder and current Treasurer of Southampton Al-Nisaa Association.

Khurshid Drabu CBE is a Barrister at Law, who received Gold Medal from the Aligarh Muslim University in India for obtaining First Class First in his LL.B examination.
He is a Visiting Professor of Law at the University of Middlesex.
He is a part–time Judge of the Upper Tribunal (Immigration and Asylum chamber), having retired from full – time employment in 2007.
He is one of the founders of the Muslim Council of Britain- the largest and the most representative Muslim umbrella organisation - and has been its Election Commissioner and Adviser on Legal and Constitutional Affairs since its inception.
He is one of the founders of MINAB – Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board which is a self regulatory body involved in promoting good governance of mosques and capacity building.
He is the Chairman of Medina Mosque Trust Ltd in Southampton: Trustee of the Joseph Interfaith Foundation: Founding Trustee of Kashmir Medical Relief Trust UK.
He served as Adviser on Islamic Affairs to the Ministry of Defence for over ten years.
In 2010 he was honoured by HM The Queen with the title of CBE for his work on religious and community affairs.

“It won’t end until we talk”

“Here you have sixty seconds to get to the shelter”, Rabbi Mauricio Balter explains to me. “Your body is on constant stand-by. You have to think through every moment. What do you do when taking a shower? What about elderly relatives who walk with a frame?” We are in the office of his beautiful synagogue in Beer Sheva, with its kindergartens attached. It’s barely a few miles from the border with Gaza and rockets fired by Hamas are frequent. He’s worried for the children, he continues sadly, “They’ll look at the world with eyes of suspicion instead of trust”. He describes his congregation’s shared activities with Bedouin and Arab communities, “I worry for the future of Judaism, the pluralist, open, debating Judaism we love”. “And the future of Israel”, a colleague adds.

I have come to Israel now because there is so much anxiety and pain, and I want to stand alongside some of those who bear it and strive, despite everything, to bring healing. Even if only briefly and symbolically, I want to be with those who, even in these cruel times, keep bridges open.

I am in the homes of Israeli Arabs with Simon Lichman, whose Centre for Creativity in Education runs remarkable programmes which bring Israeli and Palestinian school-communities together. Here are mainly old friends; how is the war affecting them? They too are underneath the rockets, and afraid: “*Force is a loser. The leaders have to talk*”, said a retired Imam. “*If only they would just let us get on with living together*”, two sisters told me. But just living isn’t easy: “*There aren’t many Arab women in the Jerusalem light railway now; it’s frightening in the streets*”. There’s a tone of resigned determination; these people keep stubborn, even affectionate faith with the country despite the indignities they sometimes experience: “*My father didn’t bring us up to say ‘That’s a Jew’ or ‘That’s an Arab, but ‘That’s a human being*’”.

I hear the same message from Jewish Israelis. ‘*It won’t end until we talk*’, is the slogan of the Parent’s Circle, the organisation of bereaved Israeli and Palestinian parents who have lost children in the conflict. Since the start of the war they have held an open meeting every evening in a square in Tel Aviv. A man cycling past stops to argue: “*There’s no one to talk to. You can’t talk to Hamas!*”. He is invited to stay and discuss. One of the long-standing members of the Circle, Jacob Gutterman, tells his story: “*My father died in the first day’s fighting in the Warsaw Ghetto. Aged nine, I was an orphan. I came to Israel, married, had two sons. My wife died of cancer when I was thirty. I brought those boys up with love. Raz insisted on joining the Golani. He was killed at Beaufort in 1982. How many wars must there be? What do they achieve? We need to end the occupation, and talk.*” The questioner is not satisfied.

Yet people still do talk. A colleague writes to me of how after a bombing raid she calls a Palestinian friend across the border with Gaza: “*Are you alright?*”. When rockets pass over in the other direction her friend calls back: “*Are you OK?*”

> “My father didn’t bring us up to say ‘That’s a Jew’ or ‘That’s an Arab, but ‘That’s a human being’”

I visit the family of an Israeli officer who was killed in the fighting. On the way I pass the military cemetery; his grave is covered in wreaths, now starting to wither. They are from his unit, his friends, colleagues of his parents. He had just become engaged; the couple were planning their wedding. He was the kind of leader people longed to follow, an excellent officer. He would say: “*One can think of oneself, or do better and think of others*”. He was an artist; in his prayer book are beautiful hand-written prayers: ‘Let our hearts see the virtues in our fellow beings, not the faults; let there be no hatred’. His kind and gentle family welcome me.

I visit wounded soldiers at the remarkable Seroka Hospital. “*They have mainly gone home, thank God. Yesterday this place was*

packed with well-wishers, children, choirs, politicians." I'm moved by the cards, the gifts of food, the appreciative affection for those who have seen the terrible fighting. A family waits outside Intensive Care: "*We talk to him, play music. His level of consciousness is low, but we have faith. He will come back to us!*" "*He's a true hero*", says our guide, indicating a soldier as we pass; I see stitches all down his leg. I've been spared serving in any army; I've no idea how terrifying it must have been in the dreadful tunnels of Gaza.

'Let our hearts see the virtues in our fellow beings, not the faults; let there be no hatred'

I visit the rehabilitation centre at Tel Hashomer. It's easy to forget how young the soldiers are; at just twenty or twenty-one they are responsible for the borders, the kibbutzim, their comrades. They have wounds on their legs, arms, shrapnel injuries on back and shoulders. Several lost companions in battle. In their memories many must be carrying haunting images of injury and death. Yet they smile and speak warmly about the future.

I had asked if it was possible to visit wounded Palestinians. The ordinary people, especially the children, hadn't chosen to be born in Gaza, trapped as human shields between the cunning cruelties of Hamas and Israeli's response. Friends take me to Mokassed Hospital. I'm nervous but they tell me, "*No, they appreciate Jewish visitors. It's important.*"

Children arrive here from Gaza every day. "*It'll make your heart weep*", our driver is telling my friends. A woman cradles a young boy; I ask if she is his mother. "*No; she's a volunteer. Eighteen of his family were killed. There's only his grandfather left.*" I turn to an elderly man: "*It's God's will*", he says. It matters to him deeply that we visit, he adds.

In another ward is a girl with a sweet smile; her face is covered in burns. A relative wordlessly lifts the blankets; her arm, her legs are completely bandaged. She has shrapnel wounds too. Most of her family are wounded, I'm told. They've needed amputations. The question arises: what will happen when they get home? There is no home; their home has been destroyed.

They sit us down: "*There are hundreds of such cases; the doctors have never seen anything like this. This can't be right. If this is supposed to be Judaism, someone isn't reading the Torah correctly. Are these children targets?*"

One of them continues: "*I've been pro-peace since before Oslo. But what's this? Why don't the Israeli leaders talk to their friends? Why has Abu Mazen been humiliated? Don't imagine Hamas is weaker now.*" "*But Hamas…*", I feel like arguing, then realise I am not here to argue, not in the face of these appalling injuries. I am here to listen and bear witness. He says: "*Jews have been leaders in thinking. But about the future for Israeli Arabs, the future for Israel, they do not think. We need to hear the voice of Jewry.*"

Afterwards my friends explain that people are slipping them envelopes with money for the hospital. It's desperately needed for medication. "*So that I can look myself in the mirror*", one eminent Israeli said as she gave several thousand shekels. A doctor from Tel Hashomer tells me that they care for many Palestinians. He hopes the bridges will soon be rebuilt so that they can work together with Palestinian hospitals for the best future for the children.

"If only they would just let us get on with living together"

Every country has the right and duty of self-defence. But where will force alone take us? The solution has to be political, diplomatic, moral, human. It has to contain dignity, justice and security. People have to be truly equal. Only there lies life: '*It won't end until we talk*'.

In the car back from Beer Sheva, the driver, a deep patriot, said to me: "*We did need to defend ourselves; but maybe not everything was justified*". His friend's son is an officer, he adds. *"After two weeks in Gaza he was allowed to call home. He simply wept: "The devastation; the destruction...!" He didn't want to cry in front of his men, he told his mother, but he could hear them weeping in the night."*

Jonathan Wittenberg is Senior Rabbi of Masorti Judaism UK
This essay first featured in part in the Jewish Chronicle 21st August 2014

HARD TALK - Sustaining our common humanity

Those who might have thought that the issue of Palestine would, over time, fade into political insignificance in terms of the UK's political discourse, must have been taken aback by the strong reaction to the recent Israel-Gaza conflict from both pro-Palestinian and pro-Israeli sides.

Twitter effectively has become the battleground for ideas and opinions. The live pictures, the pain, ferocity and rhetoric made this a platform to activate another generation of young Muslims around the world to become politicized, activated and energized by a desire to speak out against what they perceive to be a glaring injustice.

In the UK, as in many other parts of the world, young Jewish and Muslim men and women - who have so much in common, and who may have worked together on interfaith or social cohesion projects – gravitated to opposite poles when the conflict started. When discussions went back to issues of interfaith projects and activities, relations resumed to a degree but the Israel/Palestine situation remained as the elephant in the room.

Exacerbating the tension between the two communities, and the 'them or us' dynamic, is the fact that extreme groups have jumped in, opportunistically, to exploit the Gaza crisis. For example, members of far-right groups such as the English Defence League and Britain First have expressed some of the most stalwart support for Israel. Within some of these far-right groups, anti-Muslim rhetoric and deeply bigoted messages make up the mainstay of their propaganda and online activities.

On the pro-Palestinian side, we have a complement of conspiracy theorists, anarchists and those looking for an avenue to promote some of their anti-Semitic views.

> Yet, what is lost in all of this polarization is mutual recognition

Yet, what is lost in all of this polarization is mutual recognition: The very real pain and suffering of the innocent men, women and children in Gaza who have endured occupation and collective punishment for so long. Empathy and care for those civilians in Israel who have lost their lives and who fear rocket attacks. In the political melee it seems that the main thing missing is our common humanity and sense of empathy for each other.

The coalition government has talked about a foreign policy whose core values are based on humanitarian interventionism. Through the Foreign Office's Human Rights Department, it has pushed for Christian, Shia and Ahmadiyya rights in Pakistan, whilst also pushing for minority rights in Iraq, Bahrain, Iran, to name a few. But on Gaza – silence.

When Britain's first Muslim cabinet minister, Baroness Sayeeda Warsi, recently resigned from her government post, this absence came to the fore. Whatever the public may have made of her resignation, there is no escaping the one simple fact of the double standards she raised regarding the government's position on Israeli violations of human rights, and the lack of a robust call for the killing and suffering to stop. In one of Baroness Warsi's outgoing interviews she sums up the feeling of perceived double standards by the government:

"One of the arguments I've heard from people is 'Why don't you criticise Assad?' Well we did. 'Why don't you criticise ISIS?' Well we did. 'Why don't you criticise Iran?' We did. 'Why don't you criticise Putin?' We did. 'Why don't you criticise Israel?' Well, we didn't. That's the difference."

It is a difference which no doubt will resonate with Muslim communities and beyond, and one which has scored an own goal against any form of an ethical foreign policy in the eyes of many Muslims. Whatever the future holds, a consistent foreign policy means a reduced set of grievances and fewer chances for those with extreme agendas to take hold.

The issue of Palestine has been constantly pushed to the side in work on interfaith relations, and the prevention of radicalization. This is the case even when senior civil servants, in departments such as the Home Office and the Department for Communities and Local Government, quietly acknowledge the impact that the Palestinian issue has on general community cohesion, and its role within the Muslim community as a longstanding grievance, and its impact – as one amid several factors - on triggering extremism within the Muslim community. Palestine has been used by extremists as a rallying call, because of the strength of emotions with which it resonates and has done over a long period of time.

The Joseph Interfaith Foundation has recently put out a joint statement on the Gaza crisis asking for peace and calm heads to prevail. Organisations such as this have a civic space that needs to be widened and strengthened if we are to try and overcome the chronic as well as the acute damage to Muslim and Jewish relations. To build a genuinely solid and sustainable interfaith relationship we all need to come out of our comfort zones and take steps to ensure that we all are willing to listen, engage and really talk about at least some of the issues that increasingly divide us. As well as religious and lay leaders this must also include civil servants providing platforms for such engagement, actively resourcing them and having the stomach and commitment to stand by such work. Only then, can we try and untangle the polarization that our communities find ourselves in.

This piece first featured in part in Ha'aretz

Fiyaz Mughal OBE is the founder and director of the interfaith organisation Faith Matters, and of TELL MAMA, which support victims of anti-Muslim hate and maps, monitors and measures levels of anti-Muslim bigotry in England and Wales.

President of Faith Matters Rt. Hon.Simon Hughes MP.

Faith Matters is a not for profit organisation founded in 2005 which works to reduce extremism and interfaith and intra-faith tensions and developing platforms for discourse and interaction between Muslim, Sikh, Christian, Jewish and Hindu communities across the globe. The organisation has offices in the United Kingdom, Pakistan and the Middle East (Jerusalem)

Musalaha is a Christian organisation working for peace and reconciliation in Israel-Palestine, and has one worker who is responsible for the work with women. Our Lancaster based Muslim/Christian dialogue group 'East meets West' have skyped with some of these women on two occasions. They were surprised and inspired to hear about us, and we were similarly inspired to hear how Israeli and Palestinian women meet up for joint conferences twice a year. With recent news covering tragic events in the area we were pleased to receive the following letter from Jerusalem…

Hilary Hopwood

FEARLESS FELLOWSHIP

Dear Friends,

We would like to thank everyone who has been praying for us here and the situation happening in our land. While the conflict is drawing our peoples further apart, we are grateful that it is drawing Musalaha women closer together. On July 11, Palestinian and Israeli women came together to pray, worship and encourage one another to be ambassadors for fellowship and reconciliation.

"We want to see an end to violence. Hallas (enough). No more violence against each other" an Israeli woman proclaimed. The presence of the women at this meeting was courageous - many meetings and scheduled events have been cancelled in the light of the current situation. Also, there were a number of last minute cancellations from Israelis who feared coming to the meeting, and some of the Palestinian women who attended asked that they not be photographed, fearing the repercussions they might encounter from other Palestinians if they knew they were meeting with Israelis. Yet those who attended made victorious exclamations of an overcoming God illustrated in their commitment to pursue love.

"We choose to say 'No' to fears: we choose to say 'Yes' to love. We choose Your courage, Your love, Your faithfulness" a Palestinian women prayed with authority. "We want peace in this land, but first we must have peace in our hearts."

We want peace in this land, but first we must have peace in our hearts

This was a day where the fellowship of Christ (The Israeli women are Jewish believers in Jesus, or Messianic Jews, and the Palestinian women are Christians) poured out into all the fearless women gathered at this meeting. Towards the end of their time together Palestinian women living in the West Bank split to one side of the room while the Israeli women from Jerusalem and the surrounding areas gathered on the other side. The two groups wrote supportive words to one another and placed them on a very significant gift exchange. In this loving gesture, Palestinian women gave Israeli women a bottle of olive oil produced from olive trees in the West Bank, whilst Israeli women gave large cases of water to the Palestinian women (as they regularly experience water shortages in Palestinian towns). Christ's love spread in and through each woman as she passed her special gift to a woman from the other side, and embraced her with a compassionate hug.

We thank you again for your support and prayers.
God bless,

The Musalaha staff.

Musalaha's summer camps in Hebron, Taybeh & Zebabdeh, for impoverished children, are initiated and run by women and youth leaders trained in reconciliation.

For further information, or to make a donation to the organisation, please see www.musalaha.org or contact:
The Andrew Christian Trust, Rockwood, Storth Road, Sandside, Milnthorpe, Cumbria LA7 7PH

THE PRODIGAL DAUGHTER *Oil on Canvas by Charlie Mackesy*

Please see http://www.charliemackesy.com/ for an insight into the artist's work

Restoring THE FOURTH PILLAR

The telephone in Dr.Chatsumarn Kabilsingh's Office in Thammasat University, Bangkok was buzzing when I called to interview her on the 11th July 1996. That morning the newspapers had been full of a tragic case in which a five year old girl had been raped and murdered by a man, an ex-prisoner and a drug addict, who had been released from prison under the amnesty that operated for the King's birthday. Whilst Chatsumarn believed he should never have been released she maintained that his treatment of this little girl reflected the social undermining of the female figure in Thai society, but just as the child is a victim so is the man – of his socialization. She had written for the daily newspaper and there was to be a public meeting to address the problem of social attitudes towards such tragedies. She believed that there was no point in calling for the man's death, which would solve nothing: "**the public has to be made aware of the ever-present undercurrent of female degradation**". This incident illustrated the way that Chatsumarn operated on the cutting edge of feminism in Thailand: her forthright style out of keeping in a society that values smooth interpersonal interaction and a public restraint of emotion. Her stance, in both the secular and the religious domain, was a lonely one as she sought to raise the status of women generally throughout society, and specifically within the Buddhist Sangha by re-establishing Ordination rites for Buddhist nuns in the Theravada tradition. My meeting with her was to discuss the current situation in regard to the latter and I was interested to learn that her mother Ven. Voramai Kabilsingh had become a fully ordained bhikkhuni in the Mahahayana lineage in 1971, when Chatsumarn was 10 years old. Unable to receive full ordination in Thailand her mother had journeyed to Taiwan and returned to make her family home into a monastery, where Chatsumarn had received Buddhist instruction and training along with the nuns. Deeply rooted in Buddhism as she is, I could see that Chatsumarn's strong desire to re-establish the full ordination of nuns – and therefore complete the four pillars of Buddhism - was not for selfish reasons, but to maintain the spiritual heritage of the Buddha's teachings for the wellbeing of the religion.

More than 2500 years ago Siddhartha Gautama founded the first Buddhist Sangha, comprising it of four groups: bhikkhu and bhikkhuni – male and female ordinands - upasaka and upasika – male and female laity. He advocated interdependence within the religious community that would ensure the continuity of his teachings, and introduced Special Eight Rules governing nuns in the Sangha. Rule 6 demands that a nun is ordained by both Orders – male and female: there are two parts to the ceremony – one in which ordained nuns raise the initiate up, and then the monks ordain her fully. The crux of the problem relating to the current ordination of nuns lies within the Thai Buddhist Sangha where monks and scholars alike consider that the Ordination rites for women were 'lost' in the 10th century, and therefore, as it is not possible to comply fully with Rule 6, they cannot be reinstated. The Order of monks was also under threat of extinction around the 10th century, but King Mahinda invited monks from Burma to perform the bhikkhu ordination and so the Order was restored.

As a consequence of the 'lost' Ordination rites - despite renunciation of all her worldly attachments, and a committed adherence to the principles of Buddhist teaching - a contemporary Theravada Buddhist nun in Thailand cannot be fully ordained, and is deemed therefore to be unable to attain the ultimate goal of spiritual enlightenment. This situation stands in stark contrast to the egalitarian nature of Buddhism which at its very foundation offered spiritual freedom for both men and women, a notion that Alan Sponberg calls 'soteriological inclusiveness'[1] and this is evidenced in the Samyutta-Nikaya text:

And be it woman, be it man or whom
Such chariot doth wait, by that same car
Into Nirvana's presence shall they come.

My meeting with Chatsumarn was a very moving one and she inspired me with her strength of character and her commitment to raising the status of women in society and within the Buddhist Sangha. However, within twenty-four hours of my meeting with her a further meeting was called by others for me to talk to Senior Monks and a Buddhist Pali/Sanskrit scholar at Mahachulalongkorn Buddhist University. I was surprised at the degree of determination shown by male Buddhist academics and senior monks that I should hear their side of the argument and thereby appreciate the "problem" with which they are faced. Although they were very welcoming to me, I felt that their concern highlighted the intensity of the debate, and it is something of an irony that the meeting was instigated by a woman, a Sociologist, who introduced me to the group in their own language saying that 'the reason' she had brought me to meet them was that she does not want me …"*to be biased by Dr.Chatsumarn, because Dr. Chatsuman's area of interest concentrates on womanism which tends to be only woman roles in the society*". Her stance and that of others at the meeting served to

1 cited: Kloppenborg 1995 p.151

highlight the isolated position of Chatsumarn as a Buddhist feminist in Thai society, with both men and women endeavouring to perpetuate female subservience to the male, and thereby retain the status quo. Chatsumarn was only too aware of this situation and saw it as a reflection of women's socialisation – and **re-education of men and women was essential for women to become aware of their true worth.**

The real significance of the renunciant's path to enlightenment is revealed through an understanding of Buddhist ideology which conceives the world as a place of suffering. Suffering (dukkha) comes from uncontrolled desire, and in satisfying this desire all human existence is caught up in an endless cycle of re-birth (samsara). The Buddha taught that worldly attachments are ephemeral and changing, and to continuously strive for such unattainable goals creates pain. Liberation from this suffering lies in the elimination of desire and through a purification of the mind. As a non-theistic religion, the power to attain this stage does not come from a transcendent being, but through one's own personal endeavours. Whilst the Buddha made this spiritual path available to all humankind he encouraged those who were able, to seek escape from suffering by following his own example and renounce family and household in order to follow the eight fold path of wisdom, moral discipline and meditation laid down by himself. It is a path that leads to the ultimate goal of Nirvana which culminates in enlightenment as the soul is released from samsara. In order to facilitate the lifestyle of a renunciant the Buddha founded the monastic Order. The state of enlightenment is perceived to be only attainable by those who are ordained, because it is only through ordination, and therefore removal from worldly matters, that true dedication can be given to the practice of meditation and the learning of the scriptures. The laity meet the material needs of the religious community, which in return reciprocates by serving as a 'field of merit', providing the means for the layperson to accumulate merit towards a better rebirth. Because of the widely perceived lack of religious status that accompanies the role of the female renunciant in contemporary Theravada Buddhism in Thailand, a nun does not receive the monastic or public acclaim to which she is entitled. **The sacrifices she makes in the name of her religious belief are seen by the Buddhist community as a personal commitment only and not one that offers a 'field of merit' for her family or the laity in general**. Thus she is unable to avail herself of economic support or an education, and her social and religious standing in contrast with the monks is a lowly one.

The major point of contention between Chatsumarn and the Sangha was their refusal to accept that the specific problem presented by the Rule 6 of the Eight Special Rules, that of the permission of the two Orders, can be overcome if treated as a "technicality". It is generally acknowledged that Chinese women received their lineage from Sri Lankan bhikkhunis in the Theravadin tradition and Chatsumarn maintained that as the monastic rule of the Chinese Sangha followed that of the Dharmagupta, a subject of Theravada Buddhism the 'technicality' of the dual permission could be fulfilled by the presence of members of that Order. Despite her insightful logic the Buddhist Sangha of Thailand would not accept her proposal and argued: "*In the Theravada sect we believe that the Buddha died and would not be born anywhere again. In the Mahahayan sect, especially in Sukawadee subsect, commonly practiced in Taiwan, it is believed that after the Buddha died, he was born in Sukawadee place (heaven). This Mahahayan belief is a contradiction with the Theravada belief: we cannot say which is right or which is wrong, but the concepts are different.*" From their perspective, this undeniable doctrinal difference between the Theravada and Mahahayan traditions made negotiation with Chatsumarn impossible.

Reaching an impasse with the Buddhist Sangha of Thailand, in 2000 Chatsumarn took early retirement from her post at Thammaset University, and travelled to Taiwan in order to receive the Bodhisattva's precept from the Fo Guang Shan Order. The following year, 2001, she received her lower ordination in Sri Lanka with female and male preceptors in attendance. Finally on the 28th February, 2003, Chatsumarn received full bhikkhuni ordination in Sri Lanka, making her the first Thai woman to receive full ordination as a Theravada nun. To further strengthen her lineage she took yet another upasampada in 2005 with her former bhikkhuni Upajjhaya - Ven.Bhikkhuni R.Saddha Sumana from Tusitarama, Eheliyagoda - and The Most Venerable Maha Nayaka Sril.Sumangalo as her bhikkhu Upajjhaya at Dambulla, Sri Lanka. Becoming The Ven. Bhikkhuni Dhammananda her ordination lineage is Syamopali from Dambulla chapter.

Now the Abbess of Songdhammakalyani Monastery, Bangkok, founded by her mother, the Ven.Bhikkhuni Dhammananda nurtures Buddhism in an inclusive way, providing an open space for both men and women, Buddhist and non-Buddhists, to learn together and from each other. Drawing on her academic background and her knowledge of Buddhism she is building a stronger foundation for a better understanding of bhikkhuni ordination, and what it is to live a Buddhist life. As Abbess and teacher she encourages the increasing number of bhikkhuni to uphold the dhamma in a practical way, drawing on their own learning of Buddhist texts to address the spiritual needs of the local community. The temple complex resides in an atmosphere of calm and purpose, providing accommodation and education also for underprivileged women and girls so that they too can be empowered to change their lives. Her vision of restoring the fourth pillar of Theravada Buddhism in Thailand has become a reality; the bhikkhuni are maintaining the legacy of the Buddha and are becoming respected and valued for their knowledge and their devotion to the principles of Buddhism.

Ven.Vorami died in 2003 aged 96

The Ven.Bhikkhuni Dhammananda was among 1000 women who were nominated the Nobel Prize in 2005 and recognised by the United Nations as an Outstanding Buddhist Woman 2004. She was co-founder of Sakyadhita International Buddhist Association 1987 and President from 1991-2005, and continues editor of the Newsletter Yasodhara 1987 to the present time.

Equal in Christ

When General Synod, the governing body of the Church of England, failed to agree to legislation that would make it possible for women to become Bishops in 2012 the church and community in general seemed in a state of shock. General Synod had already agreed that women could be Bishops in 2008, the question was how this could happen in a way that would protect both the new Bishops and those who theologically could not accept them. A new legislation was put forward in July which was passed meaning that now women in the Episcopate is not far off. This decision for many, falling in this year when we celebrated 20 years of women in the priesthood, has been a wonderful and right step forward for the Church of England. When the first woman Bishop is consecrated in the Church of England she will take her place among the other 30 female bishops in the wider Anglican communion.

When the vote failed in 2012 the Church of England was rocked by the strength of feeling expressed by many outside the church, as well those within. It seemed to many that the church was in meltdown, no longer relevant or able to speak to a modern society. Even parliament discussed whether the exemptions granted to the Church of England on sexual discrimination should stand. For some within the Church the decision against women bishops was welcomed due to strongly held theological and traditional convictions.

> So God created human kind in his image, in the image of God he created them: male and female he created them

The arguments against women Bishops can be divided into two main theological positions. The first is based on scripture, especially the writings of St Paul, and holds that women are prohibited from exercising public ministry or leadership. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians suggests that women should not be allowed to speak out in the Church: "*…women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says*" (1Corinthians 14 : 34 & 35). This was also an argument against the ordination of women as priests. Colossians 3 verse 18 speaks about wives being subservient to their husbands. In Ephesians 5 verse 22 & 23 states: "*wives be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the saviour*". From these passages some people believe that Paul makes it quite clear that women cannot be in positions of leadership over men, and therefore they can neither lead churches or Diocese. In some sections of the church this theology is held by both men and women who make it clear that the male and female roles in church and family are separate and distinct. The second commonly held argument concerns tradition as much as scripture. This position looks back to the 12 disciples of Jesus, all who were male, and the centuries of history of men being called and ordained by other men. This argument often centres around the idea of Apostolic succession, where all bishops and priests ordination can be traced back to the Apostles. There is also the firmly held belief by some that the Church of England, or indeed the Anglican community, does not have the right to make these decisions on their own. Many holding this position would look to the Roman Catholic Church and the Pope for a lead on this.

The majority of members of the Church of England however interpret both scripture and tradition in a more inclusive way. In St Paul's letter to the Galations we are reminded that in Christ all are made equal. "*As many of you as were baptised into Christ have clothed yourself with Christ. There is no longer jew nor greek, there is no longer slave nor free, there is no longer male nor female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.*" If all are seen as being

equal then each is capable of being called to the ordained ministry of deacon, priest or bishop. In the Acts of the Apostles, and St Paul's letters, it is clear that some women were seen as leaders within the early church, and were honoured and respected as such. Mary Magdalene, as the first witness to the resurrection, was for a long time considered as the Apostle to the Apostles. It is significant that Jesus entrusted the first beholding of him after his resurrection from the dead to a woman. Many believe that as the priesthood has been enriched by the ordination of women, so will the life of the church by the consecration of women as bishops. When the leadership of the church fully reflects all humanity, it will be better able to speak to all across society about the things of faith.

For some within the Church there is a concern that the Church has become too influenced by society and political pressure. It has been suggested that those in favour have been inspired too much by the idea of sexual equality than by either tradition or theology. Study of Church history however soon makes us reflect that the Church has often been influenced by society, not least in its attitude to women. As I have already said women were in positions of leadership in the earliest churches, and were held in high esteem, however this soon changed. Greek philosophy had a huge influence on the church, the Greek philosophers believed that women were somehow lesser beings and the source of sin. Aristotle said "*women are colder than men and thus a lower form of life*". The influence of this idea was to last for hundreds of years, as was the idea that women did not have souls. The pinnacle of godly life for a woman was to be a good wife and the mother of many children, for this was what she was created for. A woman could however be saved by the religious life of prayer as a nun. Holy women were referred to as manly Christians, which was high praise indeed. This attitude to women continued despite some of our greatest theologians being taught their faith by their mothers. St Augustine of Hippo, encouraged in his faith by his mother, believed her to have good qualities despite having an exceptionally negative attitude towards women in general. Women were seen as the daughters of Eve and the source of sin, they were temptresses who led men into sin. Because of these attitudes to women, the Church became a very male environment. Many women came to live lives of great faith, and many were martyred for their faith, but still they were seen as lesser beings in church and society. The Church has suffered from this history, receiving a leadership unable to reflect the make-up of the community it served, and unable to truly represent a proportion of God's creation. In the story of creation in Genesis 1 verse 27 we are reminded that both men and women are created in the image of God "*…so God created human kind in his image, in the image of God he created them: male and female he created them*". If men and women equally bear the image of God then ministry in his church will be diminished unless it contains both men and women together.

It is hoped that both sides of this argument will be able to hold on to the things that hold us together in our relationship with God and each other. In a spirit of generosity all may be a blessing to both church and community together. As a church fully representative of the people we are called to save, we will be much better able to address the issues of our modern age, to be a prophetic voice on the things that really matter in people's lives. In showing our unity despite our difference it is hoped that we can model God's love to the world.

After the result in Synod the Very Reverend June Osborn Dean of Salisbury said: "*I don't think you can overstate the fact that the Church of England allowing women to take up the role of bishop is going to change the church. I think it is going to change our society as well, because it is one more step in accepting that women are really and truly equal in spiritual authority, as well as in leadership in society*". The Archbishop of Canterbury The Right Reverend Justin Welby said "*Today marks the start of a great adventure of seeking mutual flourishing while still, in some cases disagreeing. The challenge for us will be for the Church to model good disagreement, and to continue to demonstrate love for those who disagree on theological grounds*".

Wherever the church goes from here it will do so with a more representative leadership, and will model that it is a place where all are honoured and respected, something that I am sure is what God intended.

Revd.Canon Rachel Watts is Rector of St.Peter & St.Paul Church, Uppingham, Rutland.
Painting by Fra Angelico (1395-1455) Annunciazione (Cortona)

WOMEN AND SOCIETY • Ann Henderson

Hearing women's voices: past, present and future

The Scottish TUC represents over 627,000 working people and their families, from communities and workplaces across Scotland. Within the trade unions affiliated to the STUC, women now make up a significant part of the membership. Women work in every sphere of industry, public services, rural communities, in the private sector and voluntary sector, all making an essential contribution to our society. Often the experience and views of women in our communities is not given its full weight when policy decisions are made, nor are women fully represented in public life.

Reflecting on the last 100 years, we have of course seen massive advances on women's equality in this country. By 1928 women finally secured the right to vote fully on the same terms as men. Margaret Irwin, the first Secretary to the STUC, speaking in 1897 at the first STUC Congress, understood exactly the importance of the campaign for women's suffrage.

"*This question of women's suffrage should not be allowed to become a party question. It was woman's question, and the woman's party was big enough to include all parties… because so much of the legislation today dealt with industrial and social questions in which women had as great a stake as men*"[1]

The representation of women in our public and political institutions continues to be the focus of campaigns and analysis. Currently women make up only 22% of MPs at Westminster, and in Scotland, at local government level, fewer than 25% of councillors are female. Given that we all know how involved women are at local community level, in schools, local projects and health services, that under-representation at local level means local policy and spending decisions are, quite simply, less well informed than if women were round the table, with our voices being heard.

In Scotland the Scottish Parliament currently sits at 34.8%. In 1999, following an effective public campaign led initially by the STUC Women's Committee, the first Scottish Parliament elected contained 37.2% female MSPs, completely changing the face of Scottish politics and at that time ranking Scotland as 5th in the world. Currently Scotland ranks nearer 24th in the world.

Within a year of the Scottish Parliament coming into being, a policy was adopted on tackling domestic violence, building alliances and investing in a multi-agency approach to challenging violence against women. The Parliament has primary responsibility for education, housing and health, all policy areas in which women's voices are invaluable. The general principle for all our institutions must be that they look like the people they seek to represent. So we still have work to do, to ensure far greater diversity amongst those women (and men) who make up elected bodies, but progress has been made. For the STUC, we are keen to see more support for women with a workplace and trade union background, including from lower income households, picking up on BME and disabled workers experiences too.

The general principle for all our institutions must be that they look like the people they seek to represent

Those concerns for child welfare, for tackling poverty and fighting for a fairer distribution of available resources, for equal pay, for safe workplaces and safe streets, and for a life free from fear of abuse or harassment, motivate women worldwide to speak up.

[1] Extract of Margaret Irwin's first speech to the Scottish TUC 1897.

We have worked with many different women's organisations in trying to hold our Governments to account on international conventions, such as the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Having signed up to this in 1981 (ratified in 1986) the United Nations examines the UK Government every four years on its progress. The most recent UN examination listened to the voices and experiences of women across the UK, and has now raised concerns about the disproportionate impact of welfare reform changes on women, and the slow progress being made on tacking poverty and under-representation of women in public life, amongst other issues.

The UN International Day for Action for the Elimination of Violence Against Women is November 25th. We will be speaking out loudly on that day – in the knowledge that we will be joining women and men across the world in speaking up for a future that rejects violence and sexual assault against women, and we will be continuing to work together to achieve that goal. It will be another opportunity to remind each other of the inspiration we can all take from hearing women's voices, and taking action.

WSPU march through the Princes Street, 1909, reproduced by kind permission of the National Library of Scotland.

Female delegates attending the Scottish Trades Union Congress in Dundee, 1911, reproduced by kind permission of the National Library of Scotland.

Red Banner - Women for Freedom - international solidarity with the page open on the song of *The Womens' Internationale* a table top of leaflets, books, pamphlets and badges records our connection and campaigns with other women in the world. Made by women in Stirling at the Cowane Centre and The Smith Art Gallery and Museum.

The banner project was organised as part of the 1997 celebrations of 100 years of the Scottish Trades Union Congress.

Ann Henderson STUC Assistant Secretary.
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Human Connections – Grass Roots Activism

"Who are you?" "We're the church in action"

Rosalind Davies describes the Street Pastors initiative – an initiative for practical Christian action in community life that recently celebrated its 10th anniversary

4 March 2014
Subject: Thank you

Hi, I was out on the 1st of March and my friend was extremely drunk and was in a bad way. She was unable to walk and was being violently sick, and me and my other friend were panicking and didn't know what to do as we couldn't move her and she was getting worse.

Then two of your street pastors approached us, offered her a bottle of water, flip flops to walk in instead of her heels, and a lift to your alcohol treatment centre in a little church. We all went there with her and she was looked after and cared for, and they made sure we had a safe way to get home.

I'm just writing to say how grateful and thankful me and my friends are. We can't express enough how amazing you are and how amazing what you do is. My friend will be so cautious about what she drinks now and you made us all realise how dangerous being in that state can be, so I just wanted to say thank you from all of us, you really are all amazing. Thank you to all the street pastors and the paramedics in the treatment centre, we can't express how thankful we are.

Street Pastors was pioneered in 2003. Its first group of trained volunteers (15 women and 3 men) walked the streets of Brixton and Hackney and were greeted with surprise, a warm welcome and the clear message from ordinary people that 'it was about time' that the Church got more involved in the challenges that communities were facing. Revd Les Isaac OBE, the founder of Street Pastors and now the CEO of Ascension Trust, the charitable organisation that oversees the Street Pastors movement, remembers that night as 'a night I will never forget':

> *Some of us went out to Brixton Road, some of us took the back streets. We had our blue fluorescent jackets on and people were looking at us and saying 'Wow!' and asking 'Who are you?' And I was really proud to say: 'We're the church.'*

Since that time the initiative has grown in a remarkable way. From its beginnings in an inner city context, inspired by the spread of guns and gangs, it has been adopted in 270 areas in the UK, ranging from rural communities, city centres and coastal resorts. From the highlands of Scotland to the Isle of Wight and the city of Belfast, the Street Pastors initiative has been accepted as a structure that helps the Church to be practical and inspires Christians to play an active part in the life – the civic life as well as the night life – of their neighbourhood.

Keeping the streets safer: street pastors remove any broken glass or discarded glass bottles that they find

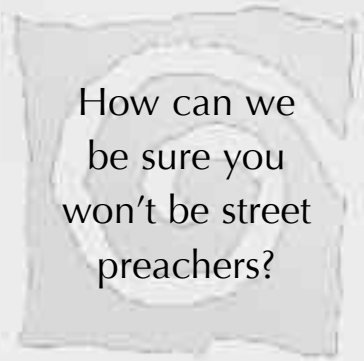
Giving out flip flops to girls walking bare feet and risking injury, sitting with someone covered with vomit, getting to know door staff and licensees, picking up discarded bottles, giving First Aid, listening to a stranger's story, making sure a vulnerable girl separated from her friends gets home safely, defusing conflict and aggression on the streets – these are the typical ways that a street pastor engages with people on the streets. It's not always at night, however, that the distinctive Street Pastors uniform can be seen. In Aberdeen, for example, you will find Retail Pastors in the shopping centre. In 24 different locations around the country local people go into schools and colleges as School Pastors and College Pastors. In London, Response Pastors is an arm of the initiative that is at the pilot stage. It aims to give street pastors additional training so that they can provide support to those affected by a disaster or crisis. There are 10 Street Pastors initiatives in nine different countries around the world: Antigua, Australia, Gibraltar, the Republic of Ireland, Jamaica, Jersey, Nigeria, Trinidad and Tobago and the USA. Whether they are going out in Mansfield or Melbourne, teams on patrol are always supported by prayer pastors who stay in contact with the team on the street via radio and pray for the situations that are encountered. Prayer and action go together!

'Big Night Out' in Manchester: Street pastors at the national conference in Manchester Cathedral in May 2014 were part of a unique 'Big Night Out' during which 150 street pastors from around the country went out onto the streets of Manchester city centre.

Over the years many questions have been asked about Street Pastors. The Police, to begin with, were cautious: 'Can ordinary members of the public work with agreed policies and procedures so that they are prepared for what they might encounter on the streets?'. Local government officials were sceptical about the stated aims of the initiative: 'How can we be sure you won't be street preachers?', they asked. The general public tend to ask two main questions: 'Who are you?' and 'Do you get paid?'.

The thank you email above tells us something of the key characteristics of a Street Pastors team.

- A street pastor is a trained volunteer from a local church (who doesn't get paid). They care for, listen to and help other people, particularly at night, between the hours of 10 p.m. and 4 a.m.
- They work in small teams of men and women in busy areas where people are drinking, partying and moving between pubs and clubs.
- They work together with the Police and other statutory services (in the email quoted above, it's paramedics), often adding a layer of pastoral support that frees up local policing teams to respond to more serious incidents.



In most towns and cities where a team operates, the street pastors are now an accepted part of the infrastructure for safety. The value placed on pastoral care has grown and street pastors and others like them are appreciated as people who are ready to make the simple, but powerful, human connection with another person.

In recent years, we have seen the status of volunteering grow. Think of the 'Games makers' of London 2012, National Volunteers Week or the various volunteer awards that are open for nominations. One police inspector has commended the street pastors that he works with in the following way: '*I see your activities as evidence of a healthy society where members of the community give up their time to support those in need through vulnerability or unwise choices.*' Street pastors have oiled the wheels of this sense of shared responsibility for the places where we live.

The inter-church challenge

A Street Pastors team is founded on the coming together of at least four different Christian denominations. In Lincoln, for example, volunteers are drawn from 18 churches in the town and its surrounding areas. Inter-church working has been a principle that has encouraged the support of local authorities and the Police and it has helped Christians from different denominations to be 'one in heart and mind' (Acts 4: 32).

The initiative has changed the high street face of Christianity in this country. Les Isaac says that this has happened because street pastors 'demonstrate the gospel of Jesus and strengthen the public understanding of the *point* of Christianity'. As Street Pastors has broken a path for churches to 'turn outwards' and engage with the communities on their doorstep it has encouraged the Church in the UK to develop a 'grass-roots activism' that is giving it a local personality, a local face and a local footprint.

When people ask a street pastor who they are the answer is often given, 'We're the local, church'. This leads to the next question, 'Which church?', and the answer – 'All of them'. This carries a wonderful simplicity that has reinvigorated an identity for the Church.

You can find out more about Street Pastors in a new book by Les Isaac and Rosalind Davies called *Faith on the Streets. Christians in Action through the Street Pastors Movement,* published by Hodder and Stoughton.

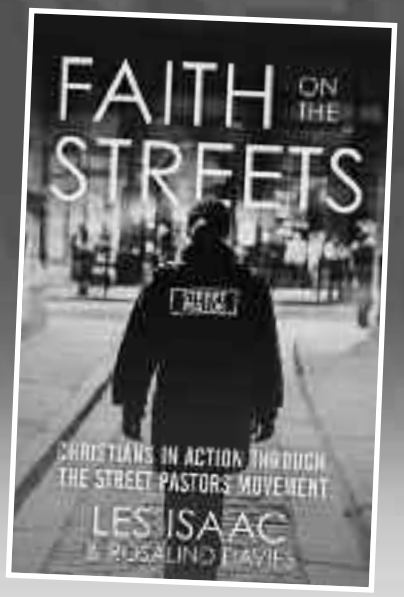
For more information go to www.streetpastors.org.uk

Street pastors are part of the night-time economy

Rosalind Davies, freelance writer and communications officer for Ascension Trust. r.davies@ascensiontrust.org.uk

FAITH ON THE STREETS

CHRISTIANS IN ACTION THROUGH THE STREET PASTOR MOVEMENT



BY LES ISAAC AND ROSALIND DAVIES

Published by Hodder and Stoughton 2014, ISBN 978-1-444-75009-6

I had heard about the street pastors locally but my knowledge about their work was rather limited. It was with great anticipation that I welcomed the arrival of the book.

I have found it a fascinating read, both in terms of the stories and personal experiences of the people and the way in which the street pastor movement has spread. In eleven years 270 teams have developed, operating throughout the UK and especially in most areas of London. Les Isaac, the founder of movement, shares his own journey honestly and openly describing his life as a young person involved in gangs, with weapons and drugs: he writes of his practice as a Rastafarian in South London to his Christian calling. His perseverance and drive have created a community of 11,000 volunteer street pastors who patrol the streets at night providing a friendly, non-judgemental and reassuring presence to the most vulnerable people, dealing with risky and sometimes potentially explosive situations with compassion and care while the rest of us sleep in our comfortable beds.

It was good to learn about how the street pastors operate as an 'ecumenical church' group in localities. The guidance and training provided by the Ascension Trust, under the direction of Les Isaac, is invaluable for developing the service in a new setting, with continued support when required, ensuring good governance and assistance with other organisational issues.

What came over in the book, again and again in the various conversations and case studies, is that the Church is not a building but a community of people. Joanne, a recipient of the service says: ' "Street Pastors have hit the nail on the head. They are helping the church to step into people's lives". They go where the people are rather than bringing them into buildings where they may not wish to be. Rosalind Davies writes,' As the street pastors represent the church and take the 'Church' out of the four walls of a building, we are seeing the repositioning of Christian activity on a bigger scale than ever before.' The visibility of the church amongst its people in the uniform of 'Street Pastors' lends itself to opportunities for informal dialogue in a variety of situations. I was moved when I read about a drug dealer asking the pastor to pray for him, refusing to sell the drug to a buyer so that he could focus and listen to the prayer being said.

It was also illuminating to learn about the concept of a different sort of 'Trinity'; the working together of the street pastors, the local authority and the police which enables development of closer relationships among these three organisations. Such collaboration, referred to as the 'Urban Trinity' helps them to deal with difficult and sensitive issues facing local communities. Over the period the pastors have gained a reputation as 'street savvy peacemakers and inclusive befrienders'. In some areas where there are school pastors too, their presence has led to a reduction in crime and a safer community. Aran, a church leader, shared his view in these words: "When we practise biblical compassion, we are building a stronger society regardless of deficits or credits in welfare spending."

As a Sikh engaged in multi-faith activities to promote interreligious and community harmony and understanding, I have found the work of Street Pastors highly inspiring. In some ways, it reminds me of the work of late Bhagat Puran Singh and his organisation Pingalwara on the streets in India. In a similar vein, some young Sikhs are engaged in working over the weekends with young and homeless people in London, providing them with hot food and a safe environment.

The issues of race and faith are touched upon but the book does not present evidence of inter-religious collaboration. When a question was posed, "If Street Pastors are so great, why can't you open it up to people without a Christian faith?" the answer was; "We are not exclusive but we want to make our own contribution".

I felt that this lack of inter-religious pastoral care did create a void, bringing to the fore the evangelical element of the movement and the exclusivity of its message. A questioning of motive could be avoided if the Street Pastors worked in an environment that embraced all races and faiths.

I AM EVERY CHILD OF WAR

I am every child of war.
I am every daughter and every son of war.
Nameless, as all names stand exhausted,
Nameless, as I am far too many to number.
I am a long list now and counting.

I lie in the rubble of elite military might.
I lie cold, mutilated and disfigured.
I lie buried in the midst of molten iron rods and broken glass.
I lie unburied in the putrid heat with no marked grave to call my own.

A spanking new corpse I lie warm in the arms of compatriots, who mourn me.
I lie in the arms of foreign aid workers whose heart and soul have touched mine.
I lie screaming in the care of frantic doctors trying their utmost to cope.

You see me on unbiased News channels; but no affront to your genteel senses that I come with a warning every time I flash across your screen -

How I died in sacred spaces, or at home, in schools, souks, refugee camps and on the beach.

How I was blown apart in my sleep while cooped up like a battery chicken in a hideout; or while running out-of-doors, made restless by the eerie blasts.

How the bloody seal of hate and hegemony lie stamped over my motionless body.

But, what does it matter?
I am soon to be yesterday's news.
From a land far away from you,
I am of a different hue.
(Though, war-makers are fathers too.)

Displaced, defaced, dehumanised, but with a spirit held high, I am the blood-spattered child of war.
You can seize my land . . .
You can raze me to the ground . . .
You can wipe out town after town . . .
But I rise from the dark grey ruins of home.
I live in those I leave behind.

On the heels of aid and many promises of replenishment, chosen investors gather for gainful ventures.
The grey ruins are perfect for makeover.
You bomb me to remodel, once a land of plenty.

With new players, a new war has begun.
Sinister offensive spreads without borders.
I am every child of every faith, for all faiths lead to God.
But you kill me anyhow by erecting new gods.
You behead me in the mountains,
You bury me alive in the foothills,
You bring me big toys of big boys,
Precipitated to grow up before my time,
My little life is bounded with your wanton play.

I am every child of every war.
Like the century old unnamed soldier, I see 'the blood swept land and seas of red' that haunt me.

Your tributes of poppies flourish; our trade of carnations and chrysanthemums perish.

You put out the lights to mark the centenary of World War 1; I am snuffed out many times over.

photograph (c) Dave J.Clark please see **www.djclark.com** for an insight into his work.

BREAKING OPEN THE WORD

Having been ordained in 1954, this year finds Monsignor Francis Slattery celebrating his Diamond Jubilee. In praising Monsignor Slattery's "long years of priestly loyalty", the Rt Rev Michael Campbell, the Bishop of Lancaster, expressed the hope that others may follow "his steadfast commitment to the priesthood".

He will no doubt be well-remembered by those he taught (1957 -1975) at the Junior Seminary of the Lancaster Diocese, and for his role of Administrator at Lancaster Cathedral (1975-1987).

Paul Billington was a pupil of Msg. Francis Slattery at the Seminary, and later a colleague at Lancaster Cathedral… he writes:

If I had to choose from all the many qualities that are surely true of Mgr Slattery I would turn to his preaching. He has spent his life incarnating the Word he has proclaimed from the altar. This happens to be the primary function of his priesthood: it is moreover the primary motivation of him as a person. For this reason his preaching rings true. Because his preaching is essential and integral to him it has never appeared as a habit or something just to do, another priestly chore. It daily sustains him and he knows even the poverty of his own words can sustain others. Therefore he is and has always been, as far as I can remember, aware of preparing properly, making the message relevant, connecting with the circumstances of the day, helping the listener to be touched within their inner selves to the Spirit of life which only breaking open the Word can bring.

It is precisely this gift for authentic and sincere ministry that has inspired various faith communities in Cumbria to make this tribute. Father Francis, as we call him, has gained the respect of all as an exemplary priest, gentle in speech and a capacity for pastoral care for all people of faith, and of none. His work is inspirational and demonstrates his commitment to the changes brought about by the Second Vatican Council, which included ecumenical moves to engage in dialogue with other religions.

Also the Assisi Conference of 1986 (the United Nations International Year of Peace), when Pope John Paul II brought together 90 religious leaders of different faiths, in recognition of the vital role of all the world religions in promoting a spirit of mutual understanding, and tolerance as prerequisites to a peaceful world.

People of different faiths should come together to pray (not pray together), thus respecting the integrity of different faiths.

Father Francis pays due regard to the view developed at the Assisi Conference that, because of the value of religious Prayer, people of different faiths should come together to pray (not pray together), thus respecting the integrity of different faiths.

His contribution to local interfaith and multifaith work was recognized by the presentation of a framed map of Jerusalem to him at his home in Windermere, by Rev John Hetherington, Secretary of South Lakeland Interfaith Forum in 2008. We marked his Diamond Jubilee with an informal multifaith gathering in Milnthorpe, Cumbria where the different faith communities came together in celebration.

Suzanne Edmunds (Roman Catholic, Kendal, Cumbria)
Jacquetta Gomes Bodhicarini Upasika Jayasili (Theravada Buddhist, Kendal, Cumbria)

The Drop

Near the drop of a cliff, my heart fails,
my body refuses to move, I freeze:
'Why did I follow these narrow trails?'
Caught between the land, sea and breeze.

He gently hauls me up, tells me to focus,
step by step, holds tight on to my hand,
"You can do it, it's not all hocus-pocus."
I sense his worry, it's not as he planned.

Constantly staring down at my shoes,
wearing blinkers; a tunnel vision in force.
My wit backing me along the path I choose,
amid the scent of coconut, vanilla gorse.

"I'd put you in my rucksack, carry you,"
We laugh about my palsy, passing through.

A booklet of Kuli Kohli's poems and prose has been published: 'Rag Doll' (2014) Peacock Feather Press. The writer has given readings of her work, or had them read, to a variety of schools and interested groups. For further information please contact: Kuli.Kohli@hotmail.co.uk
Background image: Monica Smith

Back To Back - Dialogue of The Deaf Mother-in-law Versus Daughter-in-law

Bibiji: Why is it I feel that she is not good enough for my son, whether or not I have chosen her? If I did have a choice, she would have been a Punjabi from India, and then I could have been in more control. However, these days finding a girl like myself would be like trying to find a pin in a haystack.

Deepika: The Asian attitude to a woman's growth is very daunting and discouraging. The fairy-tale stopped after the honeymoon - when I had to move in with my in-laws. It is not a private place at all. The new family do nothing and expect me to carry the burden of being the housewife, while my husband is expected to sit on his backside watching TV with a beer in his hand after his 'hard' day's work.

Bibiji: Well, if she is fertile and able to have my grandchildren then I should be proud of her - then why do I envy her? Is it because I have given her a piece of me - my son? Sadly, he is deeply influenced by her rather than me. She does not have the womanly skills I have. She cannot cook as well as I can; she is untidy and irresponsible; she always goes the opposite direction of what I expect. She cuts her hair and spends money on herself just so she can look beautiful. She prefers jeans, skirts and t-shirts (those clothes that reveal the shape of her body – oh God!) to a colourful salvar kameez that will cover her up completely.

Deepika: I am being judged at every step of my life. The only place I am free is at work or in my bedroom: the only place where I have my own key. Why can't Bibiji understand that I need my time alone with my husband so that we can connect soul-wise? I sense she is watching me with those dreadful eyes that monitor every move I make. What does she expect of me? So what if I do not fit into her category of "the Asian Woman" and I don't dress the way she wants me to? I really don't want to keep arguing with her to make her understand what it feels like to be a British Asian woman, mixed into two very diverse societies.

Bibiji: I don't understand why she doesn't like Indian solid gold jewellery! Stupid woman likes wearing fake jewels made of plastic and nickel! I never had a choice; I simply had to take what was given to me. She does not know what to do at cultural ceremonies; she embarrasses me and the whole family at religious rituals. It is the shame and the lack of family pride I find difficult to deal with and, most importantly, I cannot tolerate the thought of what people will say and think about us!

Deepika: Sadly, she will never understand. Surely she felt the same, some 30-40 years ago when she was newlywed? However, in her day and age, the woman was just a person who had no choices but to serve her husband and his family; a secret servant who reproduced without the pleasures of being loved. Someone, who could not dare to dream beyond her boundary, I do understand what she must have gone through; it was all she ever knew.

Bibiji: However, I do admire her compassionate and loving spirit, and her silence in front of me, showing me some respect at least. I cannot really tell her that, as it would be against the law of womanhood and what I have been taught by other women for many years. What I worry about most is: will she be able to cope being a mother-in-law herself?

Deepika: I wish for all this to end, so we may live happily with one another without wanting to pound each other to death. I never ever want to be like her…. I will give my own daughter-in-law the freedom and respect she deserves and give her my friendship rather than resentment.

Extract from Rag Doll 2014 Peacock Feather Press

LANGUAGE OF ART

Visual Stories

> "Photography is a way of feeling, of touching, of loving. What you have caught on film is captured forever…it remembers little things, long after you have forgotten everything."
>
> *Aaron Siskind, photographer*

Jo Farrell is a photographer and cultural anthropologist who works towards documenting traditions and cultures before they disappear. This feature gives focus to her research and interviews of Chinese women with bound feet. The ancient practice of foot-binding is believed to have started in China circa 10th Century although its origins are imprecise. Bound feet or "Lotus feet", as they were sometimes called, were seen as a status symbol for wealthy women who did not need to work. Eventually the practice spread widely to include women living in rural areas. The process was started in childhood before the arch of the foot had a chance to develop fully, and the size of the foot could be restrained, ideally to 3 – 4 inches. The toes on each foot were curled under, then pressed with force downwards and squeezed into the sole of the foot until the toes broke. The binding cloth was tightened, pulling the ball of the foot and the heel together, causing the broken foot to fold at the arch. Jo Farrell's photographs, interviews and video are a testament to the relationships she formed with the women she interviewed. They obviously felt comfortable in front of the camera, demonstrating the trust they had in her. **Heather Wells**

Su Xi Rong's shoes

Jo Farrell writes:

I want people to see beyond the feet and acknowledge the women for who they are, and the lives they have led. Where once they believed they did not have an individual story, I have sought to document a visual and written history of their lives. All of the women that I have included in this project to-date are peasant farmers working off the land in rural areas, some are living only a stone's throw from the villages where they grew up, a long way from the city life depicted so often in academic studies on foot binding: their lives did not entail beautifully embroidered shoes and luxury lifestyles. The tradition started in the Song Dynasty and was banned in the revolution of 1911, but continued in rural areas until around 1939 when women with bound feet had the bindings forcibly removed by government decree.

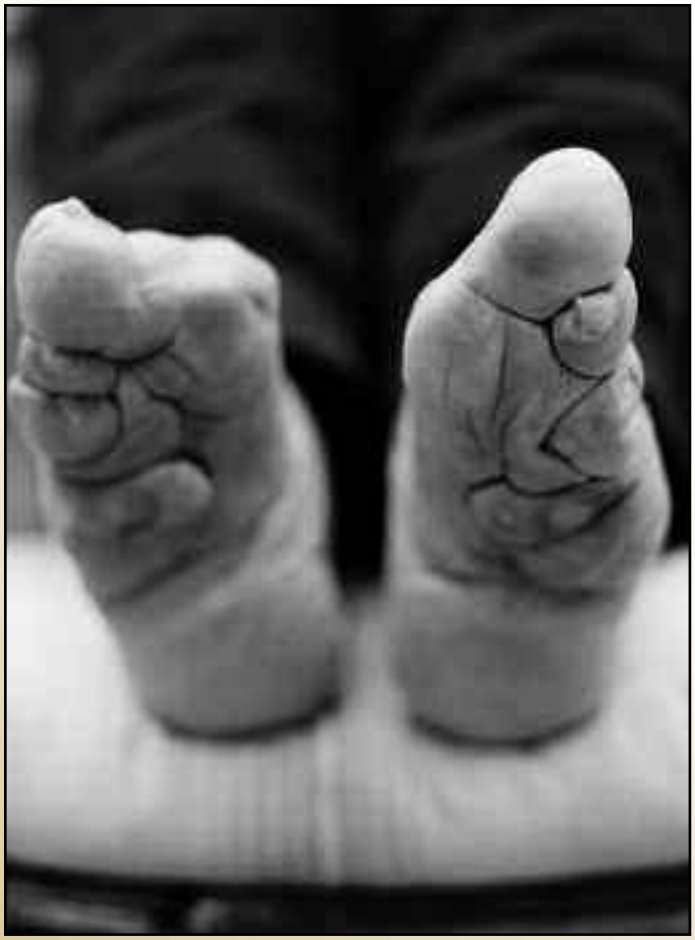
People were penalised for the four olds: old habits, old manners, old customs and old culture.

Although we may now consider foot-binding as barbaric – and perhaps here we need to reflect that in every culture there are forms of body modification that adhere to that culture's perception of beauty: from breast augmentation, Botox, scarring and tattooing, to rib removals, toe tucks and labrets - this was a tradition that enabled women at the time to find a suitable partner: match-makers and/or mothers-in-law required their son's betrothed to have bound feet as a sign that she would be a good wife - she would be subservient and without complaint, honouring her husband and her sons.

These are some of the most incredibly kind, generous and compassionate women I have ever met they have lived through famine, the cultural revolution - where people were penalised for the four olds: old habits, old manners, old customs and old culture – deconstruction of village life in more modern times, due to urban sprawl, and the erosion of traditional family life when young people have moved 100's and 1000's of miles away.

My aim is to capture and celebrate the lives of these women, a part of history that is currently rarely shown and will soon be lost forever. In the past year alone, three of the women I have been documenting have sadly died, and I feel it is now imperative to focus on recording the lives of the last remaining women in China with bound feet, before it is too late. I have developed friendships with the women I have interviewed, returning many times to talk with them and film them in their homes and surrounding areas. These women are now in their 80's and 90's and sometimes they have difficulty in recalling the binding of their feet as it happened so long ago. Their hearing is also often impaired and that is why it is so important to have a local

Portrait of Yange Jing aged 87 (2010) b.1923



Detail

translator to help bring their stories to life - I have two alternate Mandarin/English teachers born locally that understand the area dialect.

I use black and white film with a 503C Hasselblad camera to record my meetings with these amazing women. I love the process of developing my own negatives in the darkroom, watching my efforts come to life in front of me. I have to be precise on lighting, shadows, form and detail when taking the photograph and each frame is composed within the camera and printed full frame with no cropping – what you see is what I intended to shoot. I use traditional methods to create silver gelatin prints.

Portrait of Zhao Hua Hong aged 84 (2010) b.1926-2013

Detail

Portrait of Su Xi Rong aged 75 (2008) b.1933

Detail

For further insight and information please see Jo Farrell's video: **https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6vVb2V9xt0o** and websites: **www.livinghistory.photography/welcome.html** and **www.jofarrell.com**

O Lord Shiva
On that day when
you looked at me
you enslaved me
and out of love melted
my mind.

Saint Manikkavachakar

Cosmic Dance of Shiva as Lord of the Dance Nataraja
(Symbol of the eternal movement of the universe)

Drum *damaru*
A symbol of creation: the universe was set in motion by the regular rhythm of the dance. Also combination of male and female attributes.

***Abhaya* position**
Blessing, protection, reassurance.

Gesture of an Elephant
Gesture of greatest strength and power.

Raised Foot
Gesture of liberation.

Ring of Fire *prabha*
Representing the cyclical, cosmic concept of time, an endless cycle of creation and destruction.

Devotional prayer and image cited in:
An introduction to the exhibition CHOLA: SACRED BRONZES OF SOUTHERN INDIA Nov 2006 – Feb 2007
Written by Adrian K.Locke for the Education Department, Royal Academy of Arts, London

Shiva as Nataraja (Lord of Dance) c.1100 bronze 86 x 107cm. Government Museum, Chennai.
Photo: Aditya Arya Photography

Fire *agni*
Representing destruction as well as energy in its purest form but also creation.

Demon Dwarf *Mushalagan*
Representing ignorance.

Renewed like the eagles

In a German seminar room containing fourteen people of a variety of ages, nationalities and backgrounds, a British rabbi remarks that on his journey to the conference he was reading about the Middle Eastern crisis and experienced a growing sense of discomfort: "What are we *doing* here studying the Psalms?" he asks. "Shouldn`t we be out there in the world doing something…?"

It is a profound, and fair, question that compels us to focus our minds on trying to reach some meaningful conclusions as we discuss our responses to Psalm 90: '*A prayer of Moses, the man of God*'. We do this in terms of the contemporary world and our interaction with it, drawing on personal experiences, religious convictions, the issue of translation and ambiguity, psychoanalysis, Middle Eastern politics, and more besides.

> "I`m going to have to go away and think it all through again."

Reflecting specifically on verse 12: "*Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom*" and verse 17: "…*establish the work of our hands*" we conclude that the Psalm prompts us to go inwards towards deeper spiritual insights before urging us outwards into creativity and action. Indeed, the Psalms as a whole, as a series of divinely-inspired poems and songs, rather than any systematised framework for religious belief, is a valuable source of energy and inspiration.

For a whole week in early August this year, on a beautiful campus in Northern Germany, 127 Christians and Jews from every continent studied, prayed and lived together. Held annually since the 1960`s, the Bible Week is an outgrowth of the annual International Jewish-Christian-Muslim Conference established by Rabbi Lionel Blue and Pastor Winfried Maechler (a friend and colleague of Dietrich Bonhoeffer) to encourage understanding between the three Ibrahamic religions. Both events have engendered loyalties and friendships which have endured for decades, fostering invaluable relationships between three key religious faiths in an atmosphere of mutual respect and understanding. Each year the Bible Week takes a new section of the Bible for special study (this year`s selection was Psalms 90 to 106). Participants have the opportunity to attend morning study groups, adopting different approaches: linguistic, literary, political, and artistic responses all feature.

Afternoon activities include lectures on theological and cultural issues surrounding the Psalms (this year saw speakers from Oxford University and Leo Baeck Rabbinical College in North London) as well as a dazzling array of other talks and activities, ranging from elementary Hebrew through to a biographical presentation on the life and work of Nadine Gordimer. There were meditations on Jesus` Jewish identity, and the proposition from a Liberal rabbi that Jesus can be viewed as a physical embodiment of the Torah, which leads to the conclusion that Jews and Christians share the same covenant. One trainee Liberal rabbi commented afterwards, "I`ve heard some of those arguments before but never have I heard them presented so radically....I`m going to have to go away and think it all through again."

There are not many venues where one might attend a discussion session in which a North London rabbi's talk is translated by a German Benedictine nun, or a morning Psalm reading features translations in Hebrew, German, English, Indonesian and Hungarian. The experience was arresting and visionary; by the end of the week our study group agreed that whilst we had experienced a 'stepping out' of the world for a short while, with our different ages, nationalities and backgrounds, the contemporary world had in fact been with us all the time.

Of the Psalms that we had given special attention to a particularly intriguing one was Psalm 103, vv. 1 and 5:

"*Praise the Lord...who satisfies your desires with good things so that your strength is renewed like the eagles`....*"

Discussion of that passage led to the recounting of a fable: once in a decade the eagle will burn its feathers close to the sun before plunging into the sea, emerging with fresh plumage. The phoenix-like narrative of ending and renewal seems extremely appropriate for this inspired and inspiring event: it has nourished my soul and challenged my mind. I am now committed to thinking more sensitively and engaging more sincerely with fellow believers of all faiths.

Care-worn bird, sun-singed,
slips seawards: rich crash….
Fresh-feathered,
now erupts skywards.

Haiku inspired by Psalm 103, vv. 1 and 5, Jonathan Doering

An Eagle Emerging From the Waves: the 46th International Jewish-Christian Bible Week Conference, held at Haus Ohrbeck, Germany.
Those interested in attending this event next year can find more information and contact details at: www.haus-ohrbeck.de
Photograph: Fr. Franz Richardt

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A common sense of place and time, story

It is perhaps a serious problem that discussion of indigenous peoples has, almost since recorded history began, been used as a mirror to reflect upon the so-called 'civilised' world rather than to actually take proper account of the worlds of indigenous peoples.

Historically, indigenous communities have either been praised for the simplicity and honesty of their lives compared especially to the city dwelling urbanite, or derided for their savagery, brutality and low moral standards. Neither of these has had any particular relevance to the actual lives of indigenous peoples. They have instead been used as a way of commenting upon the behaviour of the commentator's own people – be that Greeks, Romans, Europeans or Americans.

For example, the Romans both demonized and glorified the indigenous peoples they conquered – though we have to be careful in using the word indigenous here. For example, Tacitus writing of the defeated British chieftain and warrior Caratacus (also known as Caractacus – was he a Celt descended from a people who according to some, came to Britain around 500 BC or a truly Indigenous Brit?) was betrayed and handed over by another leader to the Roman authorities. He was paraded through Rome in the Victory Procession of the Emperor Claudius in the year 51 AD, and Tacitus uses a supposed speech by this 'noble savage' to mock the pretentions of the Roman Empire:

If the degree of my nobility and fortune had been matched by only moderate success, I should have come to this City as a friend rather than a prisoner and you would not have disdained to make a treaty of peace with one of such noble birth and ruling a great many nations. But as it is, my humiliation, is magnificent for you. I had horses, men, arms, and wealth: are you surprised if I was unwilling to lose them? If you want to rule the world, does it really follow that everyone should accept or even welcome your slavery? If I were now being handed over as one who had surrendered immediately, neither my fortune nor your glory would have achieved brilliance. It is also true that in my case any reprisal will be followed by oblivion. On the other hand, if you preserve me safe and sound, I shall be an eternal example of your clemency.

From the mouth of the savage – for thus he and the British of that time were seen – Tacitus is writing at the end of the 1st century AD – comes a condemnation of the brutality and power of the 'civilised' Empire.

Earlier, Julius Caesar had written about the barbarity of the British and had set the Roman standard of civilization as a bench mark against which the British singularly failed.

And so a pattern was established for almost any writer emerging from Europe or later America or Australia. Civilised societies were either the model which you hoped the indigenous peoples would eventually try to emulate, or the lifestyle of the indigenous people was an implicit rebuff of the corruption and vice that so-called civilized societies had fallen into.

The original Roman dichotomy was then further developed under the rise of Christianity and its growing arrogance. One only has to think of poor St. Augustine of Canterbury in the late 6th century. When commanded by Pope Gregory to go to Britain and to convert the tribes in Kent, he sought every possible means to avoid going into such a barbaric world - away from the creature comforts such as hot baths and good wine of Rome which was where he was an abbot. Rarely has there been a more reluctant 'missionary'.

As the illiterate tribes of Northern Europe were converted, either by the Word, by acts of saintly kindness or by the sword of the Teutonic Knights, so Christianity became the model of civilization and the pre-Christian worlds and beliefs became the demonic worlds of the barbarian.

This reached its apogee in the late 15th century with the 'discovery' by the West of the Americas, of India and the East. The Pope, when he divided the New World into a Portuguese part and a Spanish part, gave authority to these countries to take possession and then to convert all the lands and peoples they seized. The assumption was that they were either of no faith – or at least of no faith worth the mention – or were Muslims and therefore needed to be converted or disposed of.

This imperial and missionary view, while it was often challenged by monks such as Bartolome de Las Casas in the mid 16th century and by the Jesuits in the 17th and early 18th century, not only took hold within the religious world: it also provided a justification for imperial acts of suppression and slavery against the indigenous peoples around the world from South America, through Africa to the East by the military, by traders and by the governing classes who took over these "outposts of Empire".

He sets up a model of an indigenous person and through how he is treated, casts an unflattering light on his own world.

Alongside this world view of the indigenous peoples as being peoples needing to be brought into the light of the West, of Christianity, of The Enlightenment etc – ran another story. This story set the indigenous people as a rebuke to the corruption that had eaten into the heart of Christianity, of the West, of the whole 'civilised' world. Shakespeare is part of that. His most famous indigenous character is Caliban in *The Tempest*. The only indigenous inhabitant of the island upon which the tempest casts up the castaways, he at first delights to learn but also to share:

When thou camest first, Thou strokedst me and madest much of me, wouldst give me Water with berries in't, and teach me how To name the bigger light, and how the less, That burn by day and night: and then I loved thee And show'd thee all the qualities o' the isle, The fresh springs, brine-pits, barren place and fertile-- (1.2.3)

But soon he is enslaved and ends enslaved.

Whether Shakespeare was making an anti-colonial point is moot, but what he does is not dissimilar to Tacitus with Caractacus. He sets up a model of an indigenous person and through how he is treated, casts an unflattering light on his own world.

Meanwhile, exactly the same process is taking place in just about every other major culture. In India, Hinduism sets out to convert the tribal areas to Vedic beliefs – a process which continues to this day though without the terrible violence which has marked so much of the West's engagement with indigenous communities. In China, the position of tribes was always seen as being a challenge to the notion of Chinese civilization. In the Shang Shu – the Most Venerable Book – also known as the Shu Jing – Book of Chronicles – compiled around 800 BC, this point is brought home very forcefully. In chapter six, the world map of ancient China is clearly spelt out. The world is centred upon the Chinese capital; about two hundred miles out is the next ring where the Nobles live. This is followed by the ring of Security ruled by the military. Beyond this is the ring of Forbidden Lands of violent people. Then comes the ring of barbarians – the tribal people and finally beyond them is the ring of the worst criminals.

In China today, fifty four indigenous tribal groups are recognized. But one has to remember that the Han Chinese are themselves indigenous to this area so what exactly does it mean to talk of indigenous here? Perhaps it makes sense only in the context of the imperial expansion of China over the last two thousand years into previously non-Han indigenous areas.

In India, the rise of a powerful Hinduism – or to be more precise Vedic culture has meant the increased encroachment upon indigenous areas and communities many of which have been drawn into Hindu practices by having their local deities 'baptised' as manifestations of Hindu deities. This process continues today.

Islam has been converting indigenous peoples from its very earliest days. Indeed its origin is the conversion of tribal peoples who worshipped many deities at Makkah into Muslims worshipping only One God. This has been achieved as has the spread of Christianity by both the power of the Word, by wonderful lives of kindness and beauty and by the sword.

Buddhism is of course the first missionary religion we have any historical data for. In the 3rd century BC the Indian Emperor Asoka sent Buddhist missionaries out around the known world – sending them to Greece, to Persia, to Afghanistan, to other parts of India and to Sri Lanka amongst other places. They too had to sort out what to do with indigenous beliefs and on the whole they either converted them into deities attendant upon the Buddha or into demons whom the Buddha and his disciples had come to conquer and convert to Buddhism if they could.

And this brings us to the heart of what we have to take account of when talking about indigenous cultures and communities. With a very, very few exceptions, every indigenous community is now also part of a major world faith community. What they have done with that major world religion is fascinating, adapting it to absorb older deities, beliefs and practices but nevertheless, the vast majority of indigenous peoples today are members in some form or another of a world faith.

This is important to stress because those who want to romanticize indigenous communities often speak as if they exist in a pre-lapsian world of perfection remote from engagement with other faiths and cultures. This simply is not the case and is just another version of the view which has come to be labelled 'noble savage' – the view that Tacitus and to a certain degree Shakespeare presents.

Today, indigenous versions of the major world religions are amongst the fastest growing forms of religion. Take for example the Indigenous Christian movements of sub-Saharan Africa –

also called African initiated churches. So powerful are they, they have their own Council. Across Africa groups such as the Kimbanguist Church of the Congo region; the Zion Christian Church of South Africa or the Aladura Pentecostal Churches which started in Nigeria – have emerged with either no links to the mainstream missionary churches or in reaction to their racism and exclusivism.

Such Churches incorporate traditional practices, veneration for example of sacred grooves; respect for traditional taboos alongside preaching an often fiery and powerful form of Protestant Christianity.

In South America, the fusion of traditional African beliefs and later beliefs picked up amongst the indigenous peoples of the area by the slaves brought from Africa has created both indigenous elements within the Catholicism of the region: example as are to be seen most powerfully in the Mexican Day of the Dead where older deities are linked with Christian saints in dramatic fashion and relate to the dead in traditions which stretch back to pre-Spanish conquest rites and traditions. This has now spread throughout South America and even to Spain itself. Alongside this Catholic fusion, new indigenous/semi Christian faiths have emerged such as the Cuban Santeria which merges Yoruba traditions the slaves brought from Africa with Christianity and local healing and ecstatic beliefs and practices.

In Indonesia, the Toraja Church is an indigenous Church which mixes the old traditions – especially rites of burial – with a vigorous Christianity and to which almost all members of the community belong.

In Tibetan Buddhism as in Sri Lankian Buddhism, Mongolian Buddhism and Chinese Buddhism, previous beliefs and deities of the indigenous culture are to be found embedded into the superstructure of Buddhism both literally and theologically. Tibetan and Mongolian Buddhism absorbed the shamanic traditions of Bon and Mongolian shamanism though both still exist outside the confines of Buddhism as well – sometimes in an uneasy relationship. Mostly Buddhism has absorbed as servant deities the gods and goddess of the older traditions; some it has demonized as for example the Dalai Lama's denunciation of the Nyingma tradition and its worship of a ferocious and wrathful deity called Dorje Shugden. Essentially the Dalai Lama has accused the Nyingma Buddhist tradition of elevating a non-Buddhist style deity as a forceful power who will destroy – kill - other Buddhists who disagree with the Nyingma teachings.

A visit to any Buddhist temple in Mongolia, Tibet or Sri Lanka (for example the Temple of the Tooth in Kandy, Sri Lanka) will show that local beliefs continue almost uninterrupted in local areas with just a thin gloss of Buddhism. As one Buddhist monk said to me in Sri Lanka, *"If you have toothache you go to the god of toothache because the Buddha is of no use. But if you want enlightenment and philosophy, you go and discuss the Buddha with the monks."*

Even Islam has become indigenised. Throughout Sub-Saharan Africa there are local traditions, local 'saints', local holy places which pre-date the coming of Islam over the last thousand years. It is often these ancient sites with their worship of almost deified imams, their veneration of relics, even their visits to sacred mountains and spring for healing which the Islamic extremists target with such anger. The sack of Timbuktu last year saw ancient holy places, shrines, tombs and even books being destroyed as un-Islamic. Many of the rituals and festivals on the East African Coast are such a mixture – for example the dancing and singing festival on the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad celebrated in Lamu on the Kenyan Coast.

So prevalent is this Indigenous Islam that it is classified in academic studies as such.

We also need to be careful of over glamourising the indigenous way of life per se. Many young people within such communities have spoken out about the inherent lower status of women and the frequent abuse they suffer. This is not of course unique to such communities. Everywhere this is a sad fact of life for women, whether that is in the halls of aristocratic mansions in the UK, the suburban housing estates of Germany or the inner city sink estates of the USA. But some have tried to see the hierarchical nature of indigenous communities as something desirable, something we have discarded in the West with our questioning of every institution. But there are great dangers in such views and much to be thankful for in the decades if not centuries long challenging of the Establishment, religious, social or political that has marked Western culture.

> Today, indigenous versions of the major world religions are amongst the fastest growing forms of religion.

Alongside the abuse of women in such hierarchical societies goes the elevation of the elders and the denigration of young people. Again, many in the West would, with some justification, say we have gone too far in elevating the cult of Youth. They look at the respect and the wisdom often to be found in the elders of indigenous communities and see something of great value which we seem to have cast aside or cast off. Yet again, young people talk of the abuse which often comes with such power – abuse which we have seen in the UK recently when figures of authority – elders such Members of Parliament, media celebrities, policemen and clergy have been found to have abused thousands of young people as if by right.

In both cases we have to recognise that this is more about putting a mirror up to our own culture than it is a true and valid interpretation of the indigenous communities.

In engaging with indigenous communities we also tend to favour the small, the remote, the exotic and to all intents and purposes the voiceless communities. Then we interpret them and often act as their guardians and voice.

Yet around the world we seem willing to ignore vast indigenous communities. The Han Chinese are indigenous and have an indigenous religion called Daoism. The Japanese are indigenous even if they may have arrived by boats from somewhere in the Pacific millennia ago. They too have an

indigenous religion Shintoism.

How long do you have to have been in a place to be considered indigenous? The Australian Aborigine is thought to have first arrived 40 to 60,000 years ago from somewhere else. Native Americans migrated from Siberia around 12,000 years ago but were not the initial people in the region.

Indigenous peoples in Sub-Saharan Africa have been migrating south for centuries if not millennia.

So what qualifies as indigenous and why are we so keen to identify such groups?

Partly it is because imperialism – be that military or commercial – moves into existing communities and undermines or subverts those communities so that they become useful to the dominant power. This means much is lost. This was beautifully expressed by a Yanomamo leader in Brazil a few years ago who said. "***I wish you could have seen our culture before you came. There were so many beautiful and wonderful things in it.***" The tone of regret and the use of the past tense sums up what is lost when we neglect what was there before the greater forces came, even if some of it is continued under the aegis of a world religion.

Partly it is this desire to believe that somewhere in the world, some community has got it right! Somewhere they know how to live in harmony with nature; with each other etc.

Partly it is a desire to feel that a people have been here for ever, emerging almost out of the very land itself. Actually we are all descended from migrants!

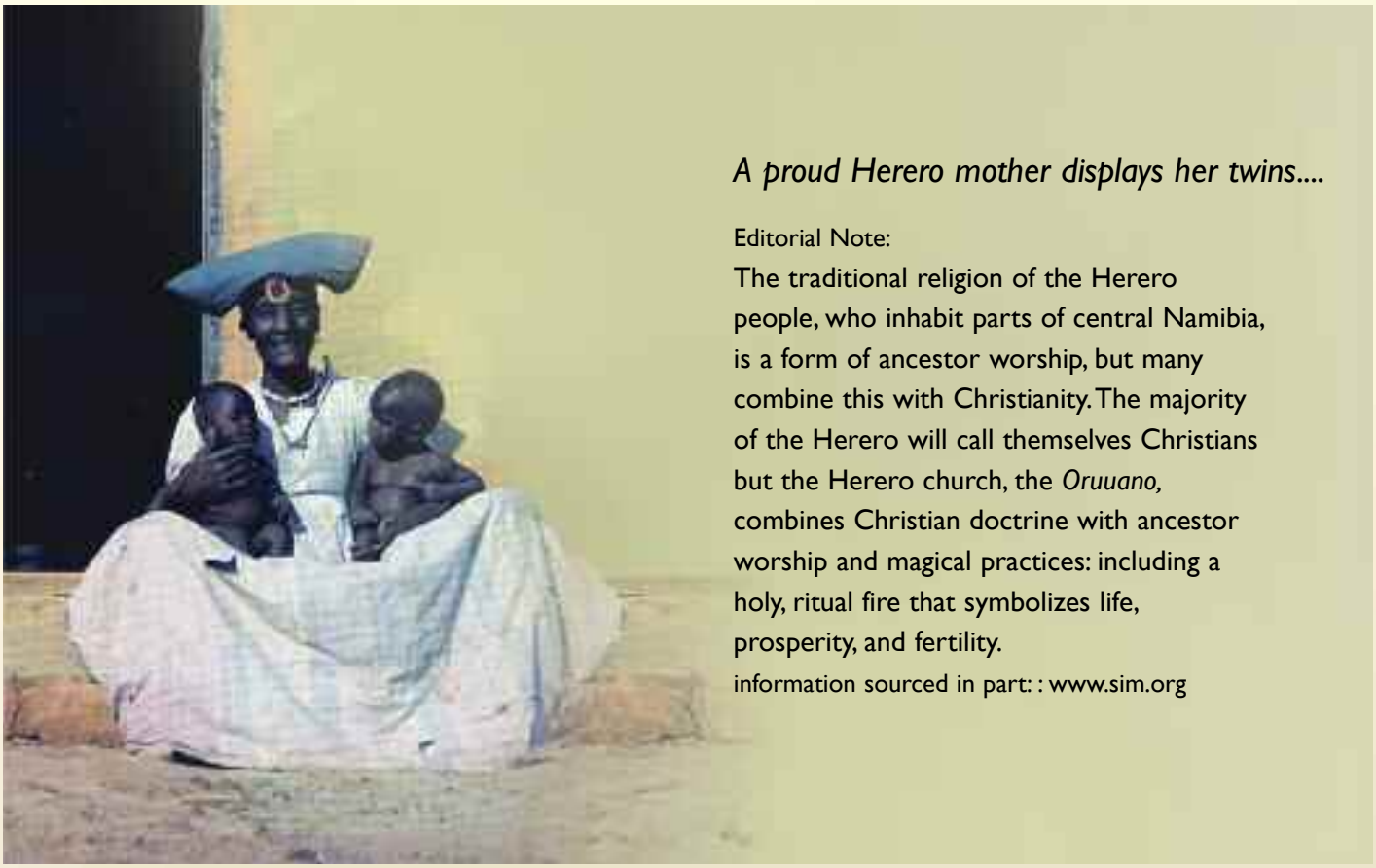
What indigenous communities – like religious communities – understand is that change is inevitable but adaptation takes generations

And the truth is that human beings have always changed wherever they go. The giant marsupials of Australia were soon wiped out when people first arrived thousand of years ago. The same is true for North America – within a thousand years of the arrival of the first tribes from Siberia all the giant animals were extinct. The same is true to Europe.

What indigenous communities – like religious communities – understand is that change is inevitable but adaptation takes generations. In a world of speed, both faiths and indigenous communities – many of whom form vibrant elements of our faiths, know that nothing worthwhile happens in less than the timespan of a generation. This is why every twenty years the indigenous religion of Japan, Shintoism, ritually rebuilds its most sacred shrine, that of the sun goddess Amaterasu at Ise. By doing this as they have done for over 1400 years at least, they pass on the skills, the knowledge and the patience which is needed by the next generation. Maybe that is what we need to discover as faiths in the engagement with indigenous communities. A common sense of time and place and of story.

Martin Palmer is Secretary General: Alliance of Religions and Conservation www.arc.org

Photograph: Peter Pickford



A proud Herero mother displays her twins....

Editorial Note:

The traditional religion of the Herero people, who inhabit parts of central Namibia, is a form of ancestor worship, but many combine this with Christianity. The majority of the Herero will call themselves Christians but the Herero church, the *Oruuano,* combines Christian doctrine with ancestor worship and magical practices: including a holy, ritual fire that symbolizes life, prosperity, and fertility.

information sourced in part: : www.sim.org

photograph: (c) Peter Pickford.

Please see back cover for a repeat of this image accompanied by Rebecca Irvine Bilkau's response to it.

SHARING SPIRITUAL WEALTH

WE, THE CUSTODIANS

We do not own the land we belong to it, the land owns us.

This profound statement sums up the basic tenet of Aboriginal Australians. The law, (which in some Aboriginal tribes is called Tjukurrpa), how to live in harmony with the environment, was enshrined in every day practices. Hunting, gathering of food and other activities of human endeavour were performed to secure resources. For thousands of years Aborigines lived on this island continent according to the laws of nature. They depicted their myriad myths, ancestral cult figures and creators on cave walls long before the ancestors of modern Europeans painted cave lions, bison and other creatures on the rocks of the shelters in Lascaux in France, and Altamira in Spain. They were already in Australia performing ceremonies before the Egyptians built the pyramids and long before Stonehenge drew worshippers from distant places. Their survival depended on their intimate knowledge of edible plants and also of their medicinal properties, the close observance of behaviour of animals and of weather patterns. We find evidence of their lives, in times past, in every habitat: the immense deserts, coastal plains, along river banks, hills and mountains. They lived in harmony with their world.

Since the 1970s I have travelled to many places in Australia. As a new migrant, from Europe, I wanted to find out for myself and discover the stories of this ancient land.

To my great dismay, I learned about the plight of the incredible race of people, the first inhabitants. Since the discovery of the "great south land" in 1770 by Captain James Cook, who took official possession of Australia for the English King George III, and subsequent colonisation of Australia in 1788 by white people, the Aborigines suffered dispossession, massacres, and loss of resources. They were perishing of introduced diseases to which they had no immunity. Australia, declared 'Terra Nullius' -

Cassidy Tjapaltjarri draws 'Possum Dreaming' on sand

INDIGENOUS BELIEFS • Margo Birnberg

Empty Land/No-ones Land- was, at the beginning, a place of destination for convicts, a prison settlement, and then a land for free settlers. The law of the colonizing powers was supreme. To the Aborigines, the land grab, as practiced by the newcomers, was incomprehensible. To them, the tribal territories were **indivisible**, to be **shared** in times of famine and **enjoyed** at times of plenty.

The Aborigines developed a very complex beliefs/religious practice, intricate marriage system, ethical behaviour of individuals towards each other and their society. Their knowledge of the environment in which they lived was, and still is. prodigious. Every part of the lands was known, named and treasured. They recognized the reasons and the need for preserving food and water sources. To keep the land fruitful, Aborigines performed specific ceremonies. Every fully initiated adult member of a clan/horde/tribe took part in secret and sacred ceremonies. As animists, they held a belief that everything in nature possesses spiritual essence/spiritual power.

When I asked my Aboriginal friends what it meant, I was told that even stones have power, but not as much as trees or animals. The most power is bestowed in humans. Totemism, to which they adhere also, embraces the belief that there is a primary source, such as land itself or the creative ancestors (sometime called Tingari), who provide the basis to spiritual and material life. We are part of nature, not superior to it or separate from it, then added, **palya?**, which in their language (Pitjantjatjarra) meant: 'all right, that's how it is'.

These beliefs, so central to the Aboriginal way of life, were a secure base for thousands of generations. The land, on which they lived, performed ceremonies, raised their children and died to be reborn again, was part of them, not to be traded, taken over, or conquered. Once removed, forcibly or by coercion to mission stations or government settlements, the Aborigines became resigned, apathetic and disconsolate. The reason to live was taken away from them. They longed to go back because without them, they believed, the land and the

Margo with Eunice Napangardi & family - 'Bush Banana Dreaming'

Nungalka Tjariya Stanley from Ernabella, South Australia is a world class painter

Edward Taiita Blitner paints with ochres on canvas

Michelle Possum Nungurrayi paints 'Grandmother's Dreaming'

totemic sites would wither away. The dislocation, away from their sacred places, denied them their spiritual connection to the land. They no longer could look after their tribal country. One of the things, realised by anthropologists in the twentieth century, was that methods and the importance of fire controlled farming, as practiced by the Aborigines for centuries, was beneficial to the Australian environment.

Until the 1970s, successive governments had a policy of removing part Aboriginal children from their families to integrate them with white society. This created incredible trauma to the children and their family members. It was only in 2008, following a shift in government policy and the pressure from the Australian people that the Prime Minister of the time, The Right Honourable Kevin Rudd, apologized to the so called 'stolen generation". By delivering the apology in the Australian Parliament, the Prime Minister not only spoke on his own behalf, but that of the Australian people. The apology gave recognition to the fact of the inhuman treatment meted out to Aborigines: many of them look now for their families and try to reconnect with their roots and heritage.

> To the Aborigines, the land grab, as practiced by the newcomers, was incomprehensible.

In 1971, a young school teacher from Sydney, Geoffrey Bardon, came to Papunya, an Aboriginal settlement in the Northern Territory. In his book, written later on, he called it a dismal place. But in this place of misery something beautiful blossomed. Bardon became friends with some of the Aboriginal men and proposed to them that they paint a mural on the wall of the school. Papunya is part of the myth of the Honey Ants, so the men decided to paint this sacred songline. The interest shown by Bardon allowed the men to start to paint their ancient myths and legends on canvas with acrylic paints. Australians, and then the rest of the world, discovered the richness and beauty of this ancient culture. For the Aborigines, it was reclaiming their heritage and dignity. The Aboriginal people want to share their knowledge and veneration for the land with all of us. By their art they show the world the rich traditions and spiritual wealth of knowledge in understanding nature. They try to show us that we are all custodians of the land and we must look after it.

Margo Birnberg's book: What is Aboriginal art? (2011) is published by JB Publishing. ISBN 1876 622 660

I'm okay, you're okay

The Sami are an indigenous culture situated in Northern Scandinavia, mostly in Norway, with a particular way of life that is unlike the Europeans around them, much closer in comparison with certain Native American tribes. To partially understand the clash between Western/European settlers and the Sami, and enlighten discussion of this unique people, a close examination of the distinctive perspective the Sami hold is necessary: in several key conceptual areas the Sami lie in direct contradiction with Western thought.

The most obvious difference stems from religious beliefs. The Sami originally practiced a shamanistic religion, wherein every animal had a spirit and the Sami shaman, the *noiadi,* conversed with these spirits and used their help to travel in the spirit world. An intimate connection between all things in life was stressed. Rather than a dualistic heaven/hell dichotomy, the Sami believed that life continued after death as it had in life, with reindeer hunting, gathering, and other daily activities remaining the primary focus of activity. Certain sacred places were said to be the homes of these Sami after death. Also, the Sami followed a polytheistic belief system, worshipping many gods and goddesses whose provincial realms corresponded remarkably with what was relevant to maintain existence: ground, sky, hearth, childbirth, hunt, individual animal species, etc.

This spiritual perspective led to a disparity in the Sami and Western view of nature. Unlike most Europeans, who saw the natural world as something to be conquered by the progress of man's technological superiority, the Sami thought of themselves as a part of nature, not so different from the birds of the sky and the reindeer and wolves of the earth. The ramifications of this view entail that nature is to be treated with respect and reverence: all parts of a hunted animal are used, killing an animal must always be followed by some sort of sacrifice to please the animal's spirit, and indiscriminate exploitation of animals for profit is discouraged. These views make sense, in part, because the Sami do not have a tradition akin to the Western philosophical tradition of Plato and Descartes, which separates the mind from the body, and in essence separates culture from nature.

The cohesion felt between all living things in the Sami mythos had other interesting effects. Land was 'owned' by all who used it collectively. This applied to animals as well as Sami; certain lands were recognized as reindeer grazing or spawning grounds, and were reserved by all for that purpose. Also, the Sami *noiadis* believed certain animal spirits acted as their guides in journeys through the different worlds: birds were their guides in the spirit world, fish or snakes went into the underworld for them, and reindeer helped them in spiritual battles. As living beings endowed with spirits, animals were not seen as mere creatures existing solely to be exploited by man, a view the Judeo-Christian world-view promotes, especially in the second story of Creation as told in Genesis.

The Sami also had a different model of knowledge than the West, based closely again on the principles of utility and relevance, as applied to their lives and religious beliefs. The Sami language, as Nils Jernsletten points out, is structured heavily around aspects of the environment (snow, landscapes, reindeer, seals) that were most relevant to day-to-day survival. With various special suffixes, words with the same root could have drastically different meanings, or have subtleties indistinguishable to outsiders. Other phenomenon, such as the gods and goddesses, spirits and social units, had words devoted to them as well, but certain other things, such as songbirds, were not even in the vocabulary. This seems to mean that language served a primarily utilitarian function. Granted, all languages in some way seem to serve a secondary purpose in the preservation of a unique and localized cultural perspective. Knowledge and language were not something gleaned from hours of tedious class work and study; they were learned through use. An older Sami would apprentice a younger one and the elder would teach the younger words and skills that were intimately linked together. In this exchange, knowledge, experience based knowledge, would be passed on. The Western model puts theory, not empirical observation, as the object of language. On this the Sami differ noticeably with Westerners.

Knowledge and language were not something gleaned from hours of tedious class work and study; they were learned through use

Image: Lola Akinmade Akerstrom/imagebank.sweden.se

Finally, the Sami have an alternate model of time to the West. The European view is that time progresses in a manner directly measurable and linear. In other words, time progresses infinitely from some indefinite point A to another indefinite point B. Units of time are finite sections of this line. The Sami see time as a never-ending continuum of cycles. The year, with its various seasonal changes, was the basis of their time system, but rather than a quantitative measure of days, weeks, months, et al, the Sami calendar was based on natural changes, like the reindeer's migration patterns and weather. Thus the Sami did not understand the rigidity of Western time, where everything must have a beginning and an end.

the yoik is the Sami's main poetic and musical form

The Sami are of small numbers, usually estimated as 50,000 or so, but their culture and heritage has much to tell the world at large. Their story can teach the West about tolerance of others, especially those whose world-views contradict or oppose the standard model of the West, the marriage of Christianity with science and capitalism.

The Sami never went to war against their colonial oppressors. Yet in the years since WWII they have carved for themselves a cultural space in which they can thrive. The reasons for this success are many. The Sami never expressed intolerance of others based on their religion or ideology; they simply understood others as different from them and let them do whatever they felt as right. This seems incredibly long-sighted, a precursor to multi-cultural tolerance, an "I'm okay, you're okay" view of the world that seems non-judgmental and yet perceives every culture as unique and worthy of existence. The Christian and Norwegian trespassers (let's face it, the Sami were in the region first) did not extend this courtesy to the Sami, and the long-term effects this has had on the Sami's place as a culture will probably never be completely understood. The Sami now demand what they see as theirs: a space of their own, both physical and psychical. As an American, I see this approach as instructive in the United States' treatment of Native American peoples; they should have all the rights of other Americans and yet be given certain considerations to foster and maintain their unique heritage. The Sami never ask the Norwegians to leave, but to understand.

Unlike ranchers and factory farmers, the Sami have an intimate connection to the land and animals around them. Such a relationship creates a very different view of the environment than the traditional 'tame the wild beast' perspective that Western culture has indoctrinated for millennia. The Sami never seek to conquer nature, but rather to co-exist with it and use it in a way beneficial to both man and nature. Reindeer herders keep in mind the natural cycle of reindeer migration and allow their animals to continue this. Factory farmers treat the animals in them as mere products to use and consume at whim, considerations for the natural cycle of animals are non-existent. The difference in these two perspectives is balance. The Sami seem to share a stronger connection with nature than the West. This connection allows from them to think of animals, whether in their herds or wild, as brothers in a sense, and as deserving respect.

Modern writers often talk of the alienation rampant in the Western world. Man is no longer connected with something outside of himself. Cold, calculating science and faceless capitalism are the contemporary ruling regimes. The Sami show an alternate path. All things are linked together in a sacred web, and disturbance of one member of the web disrupts the whole. The Sami see life as a continuum. Would poverty and disease be looked upon with the same disdain if those suffering were viewed as brothers and sisters, part of the same network as us and worthy of attention? I think not. Would profit at all costs be the order of the day if the value of human suffering entered the equation? Again, I doubt it. In some ways, Sami spirituality and the values connected with it would call into question modernity itself.

Yet Sami culture lives. Major musicians use the yoik (the yoik is the Sami's main poetic and musical form) as a musical form in new and exciting ways. At the 1994 Lillehammer Olympics, the Sami showed the world they survived, as well as the validity of their art, theater and culture. The University of Tromsø, as well as other major Norwegian universities, has a department of Sami language and literature. The Sami have their own mass media, consisting of newspapers, magazines, publishing firms, radio stations and TV stations and programs. Sami writers are translated not only into Norwegian and Swedish but English, and the Sami serve a prominent role in the World Council of Indigenous Peoples. Sami children are now taught in Sami rather than Norwegian. The Sami will not die and have a right to survive, to their language and perspective. From their story, we can learn and alter the course of ours.

www.utexas.edu/courses/sami/diehtu/newera/journal2.htm
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ON GOD'S SIDE

BY JIM WALLIS

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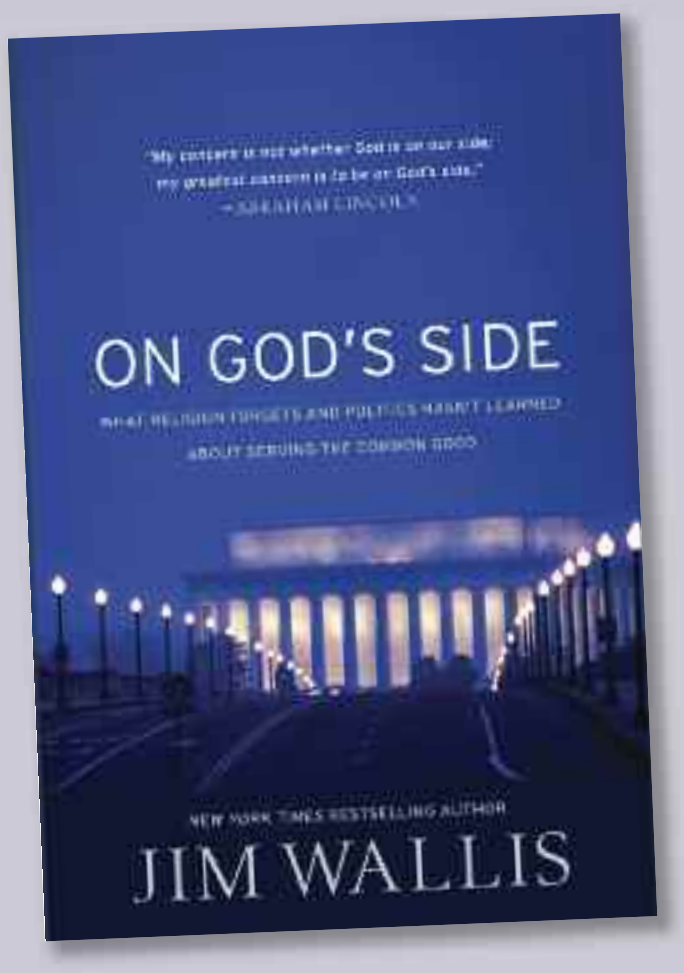
Conflict Resolution (p. 129 - 133)

If your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Rom. 12:20-21)

But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you. (Luke 6:27)

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. (Matt. 5:9)



How many sermons have we heard in our churches about loving our enemies since September 11, 2001? We now seem to be in a perpetual state of war with "enemies" who are very hard to find or completely defeat. The "war on terror" is unlike any we have ever fought, and it is harder still to tell when or how it will ever end. The primary strategy with which the United States chose to deal with the threats of terrorism was wars of occupation. But the effectiveness, sustainability, and morality of such wars have come under great doubt. Many Americans are suffering from "war exhaustion." Is there a better way to deal with our enemies, both perceived and real?

Nations tend to turn their enemies into "the other" and attribute all manner of malevolent motivations and frightening capacities to them. Much of that is often overstated, and in view of the actual facts, some of it is completely false. We fought the whole war in Iraq—at an enormous human and financial cost—over facts and justifications that were patently untrue, making the horrible numbers of deaths, injuries, and permanently damaged lives all the more painful to bear. The war in Afghanistan, begun to pursue those who had attacked the United States on 9/11, has turned into the longest war in American history, with no near end in sight and a multitude of problems that just seem to get worse.

Although much of any nation's propaganda (which all nations use) about its enemies is not truthful and needs to be vigorously challenged, it is also true *that we will have real enemies in this*

world, as persons, groups, and nations; even our faith communities will encounter them. Jesus's teaching does *not* assume that we won't have any enemies; rather, he instructs us on how to act when we encounter them. What Jesus and Paul are saying in the passages above is actually guidance for *better* and even *more effective* ways of dealing with our enemies. It may well be that our continual habit of going to war to deal with our enemies is running out of any real effectiveness or moral support.

Another and perhaps better way to discuss the problem of enemies, conflict, violence, and war is to turn to the language of *conflict resolution*—a concept and course of action used on the field of battle that is growing around the world. More people, especially young people, are turning to conflict resolution skills with fresh and creative energy, and a whole new discipline and experimental practice is emerging. What actually works in solving conflicts is being examined in new and creative ways.

It starts with the recognition that *human conflict is inevitable* between persons and families; between groups, clans, and tribes; between different cultures; and certainly between nation-states. To assume otherwise is foolish, from the perspective of history, certainly, but also in light of our best theology about the nature of the human condition. Yet it is also true that *most* human conflicts are resolved without recourse to violence. Most of our very human battles end without killing or wounding each other. So the obvious task before us, in a world engulfed in so much conflict, is to *increase* the use of more peaceful means of resolving those human conflicts. Given the terrible costs and consequences of the world's dreadful level of current conflicts, learning the art and science of conflict resolution is absolutely essential for the common good.

Here is where our religious traditions should help us, rather than merely providing more ammunition for the conflicts, as religion at its worst often does. What can religion, at its best, teach us about being peacemakers, who Jesus says are the children of God?

Jesus's instruction to love our enemies does not mean we simply submit to their demands and domination over us. In fact, what he means by loving them, in light of the courses of action he suggests, actually implies a strategy more like nonviolent resistance than weak submission. When Jesus instructs his followers to turn the other cheek, go the extra mile, or give their adversary their cloak, he is suggesting that these can be effective tactics to shame and confront the Roman soldiers who are the occupiers of the Jewish people. When you can't defeat your enemy militarily, there are other ways to embarrass him, reveal his hypocrisy, and even force him to think about what he is doing. Theologians Walter Wink, in *Engaging the Powers*,[1] and Glen Stassen, in *Just Peacemaking*,[2] have eloquently described this in their exegesis of the Sermon on the Mount.

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Paul's words are fascinating when he suggests we "heap burning coals of shame on their heads" (Rom. 12:20). What? Is that kind of talk consistent with loving our enemies? Yes indeed; it means to *surprise* them with our love in ways that could even make our enemies reconsider what they are doing to us and others. If our enemies are hungry, feed them rather than acting to make them hungrier and angrier. If they are thirsty, give them something to drink instead of policies that cause their loved ones to die of thirst and that further turn them against us. Paul's approach here is not some naive pacifism but rather a shrewd way to change the situation, turn the tables, and change the outcome of conflicts.

The leaders of international relief and development agencies, on the ground in situations of conflict, sometimes suggest that if the United States were to drop massive amounts of food and medicine into enemy territories, it could have a far greater effect than our bombs do. Bombing an enemy population usually unites them against us and can even pull them together around the terrible governments and dictators who are often the real targets of our attacks. People working every day in those places suggest that filling those countries with the things they desperately need (food, medicine, etc.) could change their attitudes toward us and even toward their governments, who are often failing to meet their needs. And ultimately, food is cheaper than bombs.

Many have learned—on a personal, familial, and communal level—how a surprising warm or understanding word or "soft answer"[3] can sometimes dispel anger, when a different kind of response might just create another confrontation. Serious listening and even absorbing some of the anger behind the understandable and even legitimate grievances that people have will often ultimately defuse anger and conflict, whereas fueling it more with a hostile response will escalate it. How to de-escalate conflict is something we have learned in community and pastoral situations, and it may be time to apply those same concepts to the political and international arena. The field of conflict resolution is doing this all over the world.

1 Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992).
2 Glen H. Stassen, *Just Peacemaking: Transforming Initiatives for Justice and Peace* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992).
3 .Prov. 15:1.

How to Overcome Religious Extremism in the Middle East and the United States (p. 144 - 148)

Most of our discussions of US foreign policy and the Middle East say more about politics than they do about the fundamental issues we must confront if we want to see substantial change. So let's look at the basic issues and fundamental choices we need to make.

Today the Middle East—where about 60 percent of the population is under the age of twenty-five—is a region dominated by humiliation and anger. Failure plus rage plus the folly of youth equals an incendiary mix.

The roots of anti-American hostilities in the Middle East run deep (literally and figuratively). We can start with the fact that our oil (we seem to think it must be ours to sustain *our* oil economy) lies beneath *their* sands. Couple that with US support of repressive and backward regimes, the continual presence of foreign troops on their land and in their holy places, and the endless wars waged there, ultimately fueled by the geopolitics of energy. Add to that explosive cocktail the unresolved Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which continues to drive the deepest emotions of mutual frustration, fear, and retaliation throughout the Middle East and the rest of the world.

Injustices and violence caused by the oil economy have sparked a reaction from dangerous religious fundamentalists in the Muslim world. Fundamentalism—in all our faith traditions—is both volatile and hard to contain once it has been unleashed, and it is hard to reverse its essentially reactive and predictably downward cycle.

Here are three principles that may help us navigate a path out of this mess. *First, religious extremism will not be defeated by a primarily military response to it.* Ample evidence proves that such a strategy does not work and often makes things worse. Religious and political zealots prefer huge military responses to the threats created by Islamic extremism. Ironically, this holds true on both sides of the conflict; the fundamentalist zealots also prefer the simplistic military approach because they are often able to use it effectively. The shock-and-awe strategy of military might simply has not worked. Fundamentalists actually flourish and win the most new recruits amidst overly aggressive military campaigns against them.

Second, *religious extremism is best undermined from the inside rather than smashed from the outside.* The answer to bad religion is not secularism, as all the "new atheists" like to say; rather, it is better religion. And the best antidote to religious fundamentalism of all stripes is—in every case—the genuine faith tradition that is alive and well in most world religions. For example, the best thing that moderate and progressive Christians can do in the struggle with fundamentalism in other faith traditions is to make powerful alliances with the moderate and progressive leaders in those other faith communities. Fundamentalist religion must be countered with prophetic religion, and a new alliance between prophetic religious leaders across our many faith traditions is the best way to defeat the threats of modern fundamentalism.

Third, while the use of force to protect our security and bring perpetrators to justice is justifiable, *defeating the mind-set and motives of terrorists will come with much broader and more creative strategies.* This third principle goes back to Paul's strategy of feeding your enemies to "heap burning coals on their heads" (Rom. 12:20). What the modern Muslim world most needs today is education (especially of its young women), the building of technology and infrastructure, and a principled focus on economic development.

The Middle East in general most needs precisely that kind of assistance from the West, not more weapons and money poured into the coffers of corrupt regimes. The West has not been on the side of democracy or development in the Middle East, and that fundamentally must change. Altering policies in the West will help alter destructive patterns in the Middle East.

But the change most needed in this volatile region must come from within—with the right kind of support from without.

During the summer of 2012, Sojourners worked with local interfaith communities in Joplin, Missouri, to put up billboards that read "Love Your Muslim Neighbors" just blocks from where a mosque had been burned to the ground a few weeks earlier. Sojourners erected another billboard in Oak Creek, Wisconsin, to support the Sikh community after the deadly shootings at its gurudwara in August. And a third sign went up in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, to show our solidarity with our Muslim brothers and sisters there embroiled in an ongoing controversy about a local mosque.

As I was finishing this book, global tensions between Christians and Muslims were high as we witnessed reactions to a very crude and stridently anti-Muslim film rage in many countries. Most of the world heard about this amateurish, hateful video and saw the media coverage of the protests and violence, including a terrorist attack on the eleventh anniversary of 9/11 that took the life of an exceptional US ambassador to Libya, Christopher Stevens, who was mourned in both the United States and Libya.

In the midst of all this, an organization often deemed a hate group decided to run ugly anti-Muslim ads—implying that all Muslims are uncivilized "savages" and jihadists—in New York City subways. Many people of faith from across the nation spoke out against the ads, which NYC transit officials labeled as hate speech and tried to block before a federal judge ruled that the ads are protected by the US Constitution. Sojourners tried to bring a message of love—a light in the darkness—to counter the hate by launching a "Love Your Muslim Neighbor" ad campaign also in the NYC subway system.

These love-your-neighbor ads helped create good and healing conversations in the media and faith communities of those cities where the ugly actions and words were taking place. What we are finding is that such simple and positive peacemaking messages (especially in situations of religious conflict) strike deep and responsive chords in many people, religious and nonreligious alike.

When Jesus said, "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:39), he didn't add stipulations. He didn't offer any extra addendums or qualifiers. Christians around the world need to put those words into action as often as we can, especially where we see hatred like this. And, as we have already described, the Hebrew Scriptures have the same message about loving our neighbors as ourselves, and the Qur'an calls for the same ethic.

Everyone—regardless of race, religion, or creed—deserves to feel welcomed and safe when riding public transit in America or driving through the streets of their hometowns. The reminder of our religious obligations to love our neighbors can bring out the best in people when messages of hate try to bring out the worst. When tensions across the world are especially high, the faith community should do what it can to promote nonviolence in our own backyards and project that message of peace around the world.

Changing the policy. Changing the message. Both are essential if lasting change is to come to the Middle East and the rest of the world.

Since the attacks of 9/11, we have seen a *theology of war* coming from some political leaders in the United States and even from some of our religious communities. It attempts a theological justification for the "war against terror" and even for the particular role of America in prosecuting such an endless war. But, at least for Christians, the words of Jesus at the beginning of this chapter stand directly in the way of that theology of war.

In a world wracked with violence and war, the words of Jesus, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God" (Matt. 5:9), are not only challenging; they are daunting. The hardest saying of Jesus, and perhaps the most controversial in our post–9/11 world, is indeed, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matt. 5:44). Let's be honest about the question we raised at the beginning of this chapter: How many churches in the United States have heard sermons preached from either of these Jesus texts in the years since America was viciously attacked on the world-changing morning of September 11, 2001? Shouldn't we at least have a debate about what the words of Jesus mean in the new world of terrorist threats and wars of occupation?

The issue here is not partisan politics, and there are no easy answers to the important and complicated questions of national security. No one has a monopoly on the truth. But there is reason to worry about an increasingly religious tone in formulating an aggressive foreign policy that is more nationalist than Christian. Another concern is the use of fear, which is a dangerous basis for foreign policy. Effective campaigns of fear too easily convince anxious people and could lead our nation to decades of virtually endless wars.

The words of Jesus are either authoritative for us or they are not. And they are not set aside by the very real threats of terrorism. They do not easily lend themselves to the missions of nation-states that would usurp the prerogatives of God. Our confession of Christ warns against the demonization of perceived enemies and the assumption that those who fundamentally question American policies must side with the "evildoers." Christian ethics challenge any idea that the world is divided into forces of absolute good and absolute evil.

The Lessons of Humility (p. 151 - 153)

My son Jack was born just days before the war in Iraq began. So, for those eight and a half years, it was very easy for me to remember how long that horrible conflict had been going on.

The initial feelings that rushed over me after hearing the White House announcement that the troops would be home for Christmas in 2010 were of deep relief. But then they turned to deep sadness over the terrible cost of a war that was, from the beginning, wrong: intellectually, politically, strategically, theologically, and above all, morally.

The war in Iraq was fundamentally a war of choice, and it was the wrong choice. From the outset, this war was fought on false pretenses and for false purposes. The war literally was sold to the American public with the claim that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction. Many believed it at the time, and an invasion was mounted on what turned out to be false information. A decade of sanctions and United Nations inspections had already undermined the allegations. And in the almost nine years of war, not a single weapon of mass destruction was found in Iraq.

The invasion began with triumphal claims that it would be a "cakewalk" and that US forces would be welcomed as "liberators." That proved to be initially true with the unexpectedly easy removal of Saddam Hussein from power, which led to the famous picture of a flight-jacket-clad George W. Bush on a US aircraft carrier six weeks after the invasion began, standing under a banner that read, "Mission Accomplished!" The invasion, however, turned into an occupation, and nearly five years of vicious and deadly street warfare, sectarian violence, and constant terrorist bombings were the result.

By the time the heaviest fighting had died down, the Iraqi people were bitterly divided, huge parts of their country had been devastated, and corruption and fraud were rampant. As US combat troops returned home, they left behind a badly damaged nation that will require years, if not decades, of assistance and humanitarian development. And our responsibility did not end simply because our military presence in Iraq has.

Near the end of the war, I met US Representative Walter Jones, a nine-term Republican congressman from eastern North Carolina and a longtime member of the House Armed Services Committee. When he spoke to my students at Georgetown University, he called his decision to give President George W. Bush the authority to go to war in Iraq a "sin."

Even then, he didn't believe or trust the intelligence being used to support a war with Iraq, but confessed he feared the response to a "no" vote among his constituency in a district that includes Camp Lejeune and sixty thousand retired members of the military.

Jones's transformation, which he narrated to the students, came from personal encounters and growing relationships with families who lost their precious loved ones and from the convictions of his own Christian faith. It began when the congressman, attending the funeral of a young man who had been killed, sat next to the deceased's widow and young son, who would now be without their husband and father. It was the first of many funerals and hospital visits.

"We were lied to," Jones told my Georgetown students, and went on to describe his journey to find the truth. For people of faith, "truth matters," he said. Jones learned how the intelligence on Iraq was "manipulated" and "distorted" to justify going to war, and that this was a completely unnecessary war. We were "misled" into war, Jones said, and, so far, nobody has been held accountable for it. There are wars that could be considered "just," he said, but this war was not one of them. Outside Jones's office on Capitol Hill is a wall of "the faces," as he puts it, of those who paid the ultimate price for the manipulation of the truth. And when Jones talks about these young soldiers, you can see how deeply their loss has affected him.

Clearly, religious communities must reach out now more than ever to returning veterans to make sure they have the physical, emotional, and spiritual support they need. One of the most unjust aspects of an unjust war is that such a small minority of Americans have borne the brunt of the impact and cost of this war.

Despite this tragically mistaken war, the sacrifices made by many servicemen and servicewomen have been extraordinary. And even in the midst of war's brutalities there have been many acts of real heroism, soldiers risking and giving their own lives for their fellow soldiers and for the lives of Iraqis, who also paid a heavy price. No matter what our view of the war, it is our collective responsibility to be healers for those who are coming home—and for those still left in Afghanistan. The only redemption from the war in Iraq would be to learn from it, from our horrible and costly mistakes.

Representative Jones has become one of the war in Afghanistan's most outspoken critics and has reached across the aisle to coauthor, with Democratic congressman Jim McGovern of Massachusetts, the McGovern-Jones Amendment, introduced in July 2010, which calls for a clear timeline for the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan. Here are a few excerpts from an interview I did with Jones about the things he has learned—and that we have to learn as well.

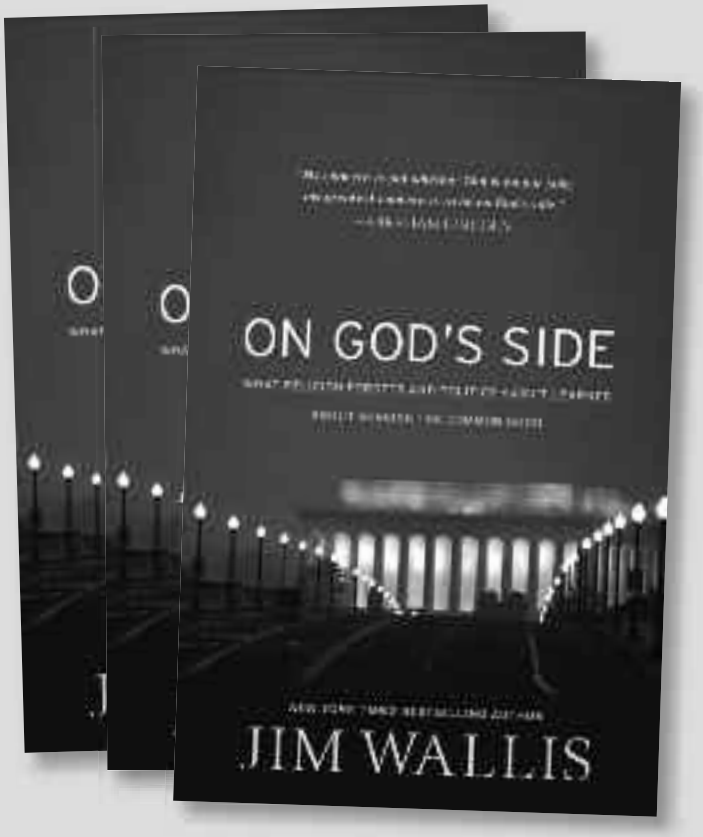
God wanted me to take away from that funeral service [the first he attended of a fallen serviceman, at which he sat with the deceased's widow and child] the pain of a family that lost a loved one for going into a war that never had to have been fought. I realized my mistake and my weaknesses for not voting my conscience.

In 2003, I started writing letters to the families and extended families of people killed in the war. All told, we've written well over ten thousand letters to families and extended families now. This is my penance.

If half the American people could visit Walter Reed [Army Medical Center], we would've been out of Afghanistan five years ago.

I think God wanted to humble me, quite frankly, for not trusting him on that vote. God wanted me to come back to God because I didn't listen. I needed to understand that the world I live in is a world of arrogance and Christ was a man of humility, and in the world of arrogance you will accomplish nothing with arrogance. You have to be humble.[4]

When it comes to how we are going to engage our enemies, humility might be the lesson that we most need to learn.



4 Jim Wallis, "A Convert to Peace," *Sojourners*, September/October 2011, 30–31.

Within my Soul

Words that changed my life:
May Peace Prevail on Earth

The story of a Romanian international Peaceworker

I was born in Resita, a city in Western Romania, and grew up in the town of Sighetu Marmatiei, the birthplace of the Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Ellie Wiesel.

I owe everything I learned about Peace and the values of Peace to my grandparents who lived through the era of communism in my country, passing away a few years ago and now living forever in my heart. They always maintained that "Peace is the most beautiful and most precious thing" and I kept these words in my soul. From my mother I learned tolerance and the respect for difference; to understand that everyone sees things through their own eyes and I have to respect that whilst focusing on their goodness and virtue.

The town where I grew up, Sighetu Marmatiei, is multicultural, and an example of interfaith understanding. Here are Orthodox churches, the Catholic church, the Jewish synagogue and other places of worship; and here people are living together in friendship with good relationships, respecting each other's holidays and traditions.

Over the years, different religious leaders from my country came to visit my town, and I was present at these events. I witnessed a very beautiful interfaith, inter-cultural dialogue in the town where I spent my childhood, and this played an important role in my wish to see peaceful coexistence and cooperation between different nationalities and religions throughout the world.

The lines of my desire for Peace have been contoured, the wish was born in my heart, I knew what I wanted to do in my life, but did not know from where to start, and I had other priorities.

> Anyone can do something for peace, even the smallest effort matters.

Then 2001 arrived. I was shocked when I saw what happened with the Twin Towers in the USA, it was a terrible time for us all. I decided I must to do something for peace, I wanted to join those who were working for promoting Peace and the Values of Peace. I searched on the internet for everything related to world peace and peace promoting organizations. At the end of 2002 I joined the World Peace Prayer Society (USA), an NGO which promotes Peace through spreading the universal Peace Message: May Peace Prevail on Earth, and the projects Peace Pals and *Peace Poles, the celebration of the International Day of Peace on the 21st September, and other activities for Peace.

The first time I saw this glowing chain of words: ***May Peace Prevail on Earth***, I was astonished by the simplicity and, at the same time, the power of the message. Instantly, I decided to accept this message of Peace and Unity in my heart, and to share it with others too, through all the possibilities and means I have.

My grandmother - who raised me - and my mom and father, on the day I was baptized, 20 May 1979.

*A Peace Pole is a monument that displays the message "May Peace Prevail on Earth in various languages and can be made of different materials in varying sizes. The Peace Pole reminds us to act peacefully and in a harmonious way every day. Peace Poles have been planted all around the world. The Peace Pole Project is the official Project of The World Peace Prayer Society, started in Japan in 1955 by Masahisa Goi.

13th International World Peace Festival

I applied for the position of volunteer/representative within the World Peace Prayer Society, and I was happy to be informed that my application was accepted, and in 2003 August I was appointed by Deborah Moldow, Executive Director of the WPPS as Peace Representative for Romania.

This nomination changed my life. I had my job which required many hours of work, but my free time was dedicated to the translation of materials and guidelines for contests - painting and essay writing on Peace - so that more young people could participate to make known the International Day of Peace, and the projects of the WPPS, and I found lots of people interested in creating a better and peaceful world.

I was very busy, but despite this, every year I have done something to promote the celebration of the International Day of Peace. There are many more people thinking and dreaming of peace than we can imagine, only that the problems of daily life do not allow them to realize that they too can get involved in building peace. Anyone can do something for peace, even the smallest effort matters.

At the end of 2003 I joined the United Religions Initiative as an affiliate member. United Religions Initiative is a global interfaith organization promoting peace and interfaith dialogue, and here I had the opportunity to participate in telephonic conferences, to talk with people from various spiritual paths, to deepen my respect for the differences, and acquire even deeper the feeling of oneness.

I joined the Aloha Fellowship from Hawaii (USA) as well, which brought into my life teachings on the importance to bless the environment and people, and to focus on the power of the blessing. In 2011 something fantastic happened. I was invited to Scotland, to the Allanton World Peace Sanctuary where I volunteered for one month, and took part in the 13th International World Peace Festival. It was an unforgettable event. I learned many new facts and ideas on the concept of Peace and Oneness and on international cooperation.

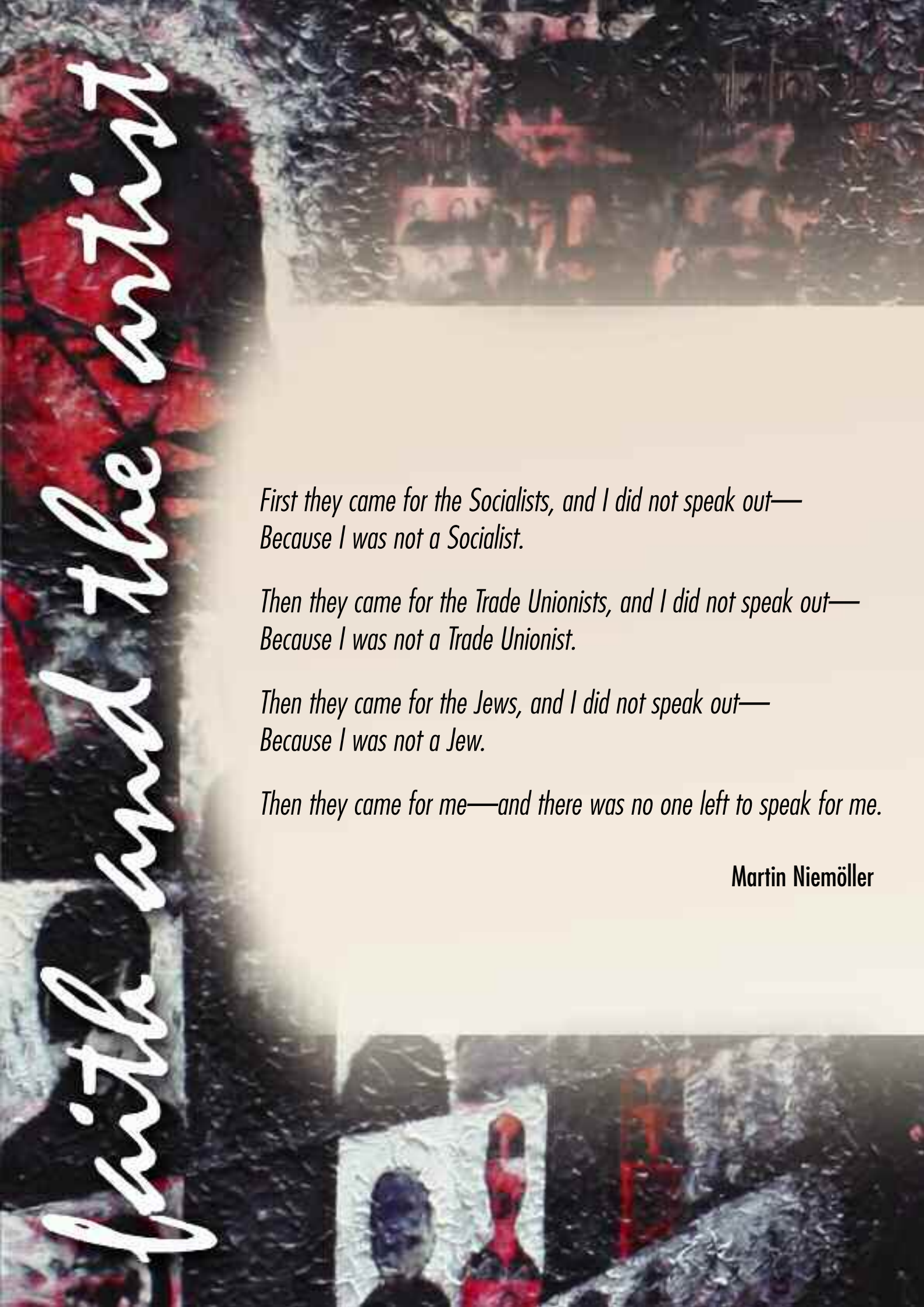
In September 2012 I came to UK again, and started a new chapter in my life as resident volunteer at Ammerdown, a Christian Retreat and Conference Centre open to people of all faiths and none, with a special emphasis on dialogue, reconciliation and renewal. Ammerdown is a fantastic place to visit and to live in.

I have been blessed to meet wonderful, inspiring, amazing people. This year I had the honour and joy to meet Mr Uri Geller, an extraordinary peace worker: straightforward and approachable. He is wise and full of compassion, known for helping people who may be suffering a difficult case of sickness or trauma. He considers that health is the greatest richness, and a gift from God, along with peace of mind. I feel that many times we forget about these things, and do not appreciate the beauty and the value of life as we should. An important piece of advice I received from Uri Geller is to apply positive thinking in every aspect of daily life. To be grateful for what we have and to appreciate this, and to think of others who have less. If we are grateful for what we have, good things will come into our lives. Life is a beautiful path of learning.

Tatomir with Uri Geller

I will continue to spread the message of peace, and promote the celebration of the International Day of Peace, in the hope that the walls of separation will collapse and a way to freedom of understanding and brotherhood will emerge, so that we can celebrate the oneness and cooperation of all.

We are One:
May Peace Prevail on Earth.



First they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out—
Because I was not a Socialist.

Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I did not speak out—
Because I was not a Trade Unionist.

Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—
Because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me.

Martin Niemöller

Stewards of peace

Five years ago, as an American undergraduate student, I participated in an international field research seminar on human rights and international law. The experience began with a weeklong visit to the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda in Tanzania and continued with a month in Rwanda studying the country's culture and history before, during, and after the 1994 genocide. Our final week was spent in The Hague as guests at the International Criminal Court.

Returning home, I was unsure how to discuss my trip with the people I encountered daily. Often times we Americans—and perhaps human beings in general—are guilty of turning a blind eye to things that do not impact our everyday lives. We are often ill-informed and uneducated about world events that do not touch us, our loved ones, or our national interests. I found myself in many conversations with people who were not familiar with the definition of genocide, which was outlined in Article II of the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide. This article identifies genocide as "acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group." It is easy to fall victim to the idea that this could not happen "here"—this happens elsewhere, to other people, in other times—not here, to us, now. But history has shown us that genocide can happen anywhere. It has also shown us that there are multiple stages that lead to genocide and that the final stage is not inevitable. It is our job, collectively, to be stewards of peace and to speak out loudly and courageously when we see that progression beginning. I didn't know what to say to the people who seemed disinterested, who seemed to shrug off the subject of genocide as inconvenient, irrelevant, or even, somehow distasteful to discuss.

As an artist, when I feel lost, I always turn to visual expression to guide me. I knew only one way to both process my experiences abroad and attempt to communicate about these experiences to others; and so, selecting six genocides from the 20th Century, I began a series of mixed media pieces in an effort to bear witness and, in so doing, honor those who lost their lives. Each genocide piece is accompanied by a companion piece celebrating the diverse cultures that were targeted in these genocides.

It has been four years now since I have touched this series of art pieces. The project is incomplete as I need to include several more genocides for a comprehensive representation of

The Holocaust (1941-1945), 24" x 48", Mixed media, Moriah LeFebvre © 2010

The Armenian Genocide (1915-1923), 24" x 48", Mixed media, Moriah LeFebvre © 2010

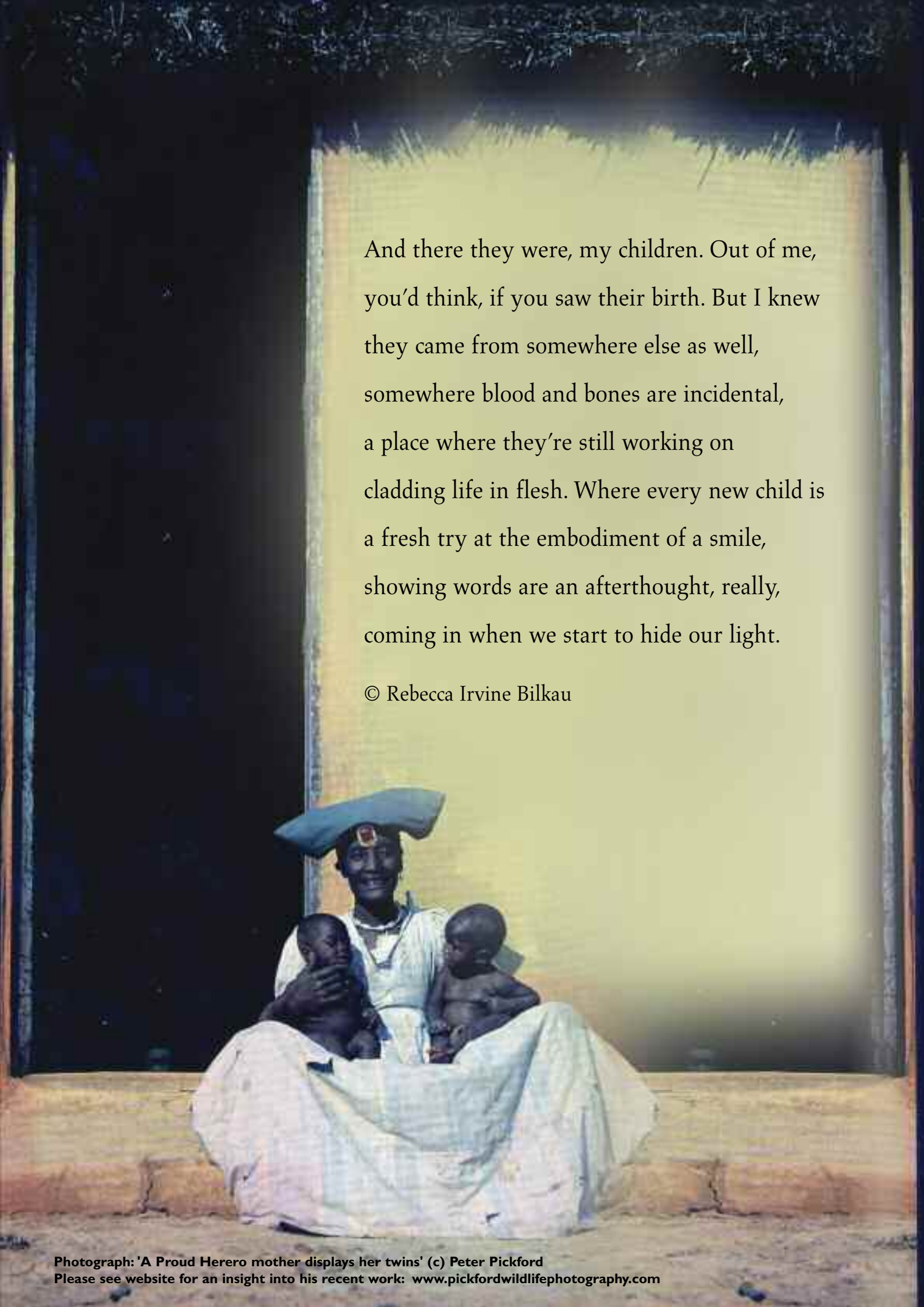
genocides of the 20th Century. I hope to complete this project in the future, and to have the opportunity to publicly display the series in its entirety. I am honored to have the opportunity to share a sampling of this work with Faith Initiative, and have chosen pieces addressing genocides in which victims were targeted, at least in part, on the basis of religion.

The 20th Century witnessed a shameful series of brutal genocides, and the 21st Century is only continuing this pattern of atrocities. In 1939, Adolf Hitler predicted that the invasion of Poland would be forgotten in historical hindsight, assuring his followers "Who, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians?" Let us respond to Hitler's words, and to those who would still have us forget what has happened and avert our eyes from what is happening, by saying: We do. We speak of the annihilation of the Armenians. We speak of the Herero and Nama tribes in Namibia; of all those massacred in the Holocaust and the Cambodian genocide; of indigenous Mayans in Guatemala; of Bosnian Muslims in Srebrenica; of Tutsis, moderate Hutus, and Twa in Rwanda. We speak of the ongoing murder of non-Arab Sudanese in the Darfur genocide. We speak of the Christians and other religious minorities being slaughtered in Iraq today. We speak out—because we know what happens when we keep silent. We will continue to speak out until something changes.

I didn't know what to say to the people who seemed disinterested, who seemed to shrug off the subject of genocide as inconvenient, irrelevant, or even, somehow distasteful to discuss.

Moriah LeFebvre

The Cambodian Genocide (1975-1978), 24" x 48", Mixed media, Moriah LeFebvre © 2010



And there they were, my children. Out of me,
you'd think, if you saw their birth. But I knew
they came from somewhere else as well,
somewhere blood and bones are incidental,
a place where they're still working on
cladding life in flesh. Where every new child is
a fresh try at the embodiment of a smile,
showing words are an afterthought, really,
coming in when we start to hide our light.

Photograph: 'A Proud Herero mother displays her twins' (c) Peter Pickford
Please see website for an insight into his recent work: www.pickfordwildlifephotography.com