

ISSUE 32

# faith

## INITIATIVE

EMBRACING DIVERSITY

"I dream of giving birth to  
a child who will ask,  
"Mother, what was war?"

Eve Merriam

inner resilience

Children of War

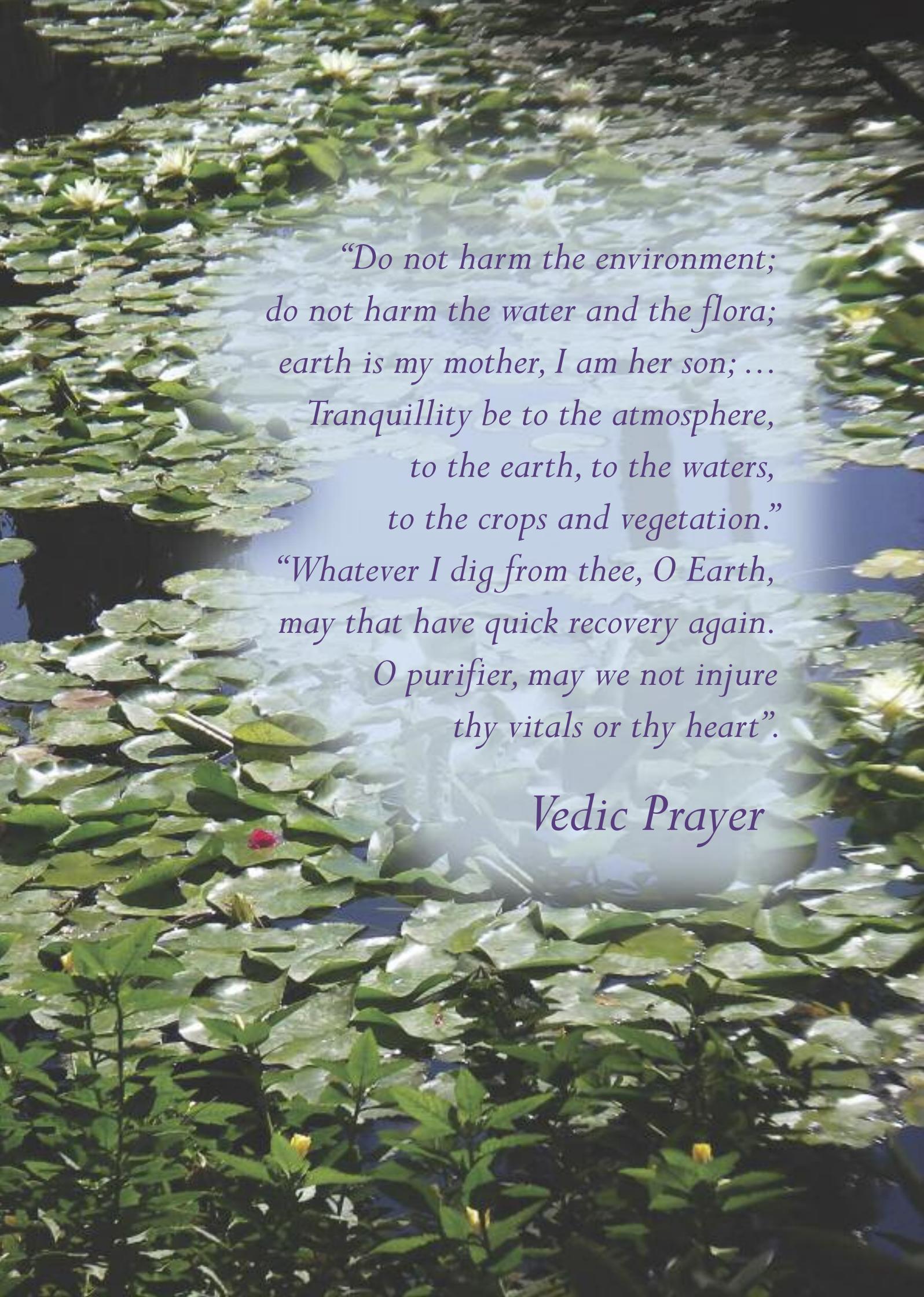
coloured by faith

Hopeful Conservation

reinforce or reinterpret?

Taking Offence

**WINNER:**  
SHAP AWARD 2011

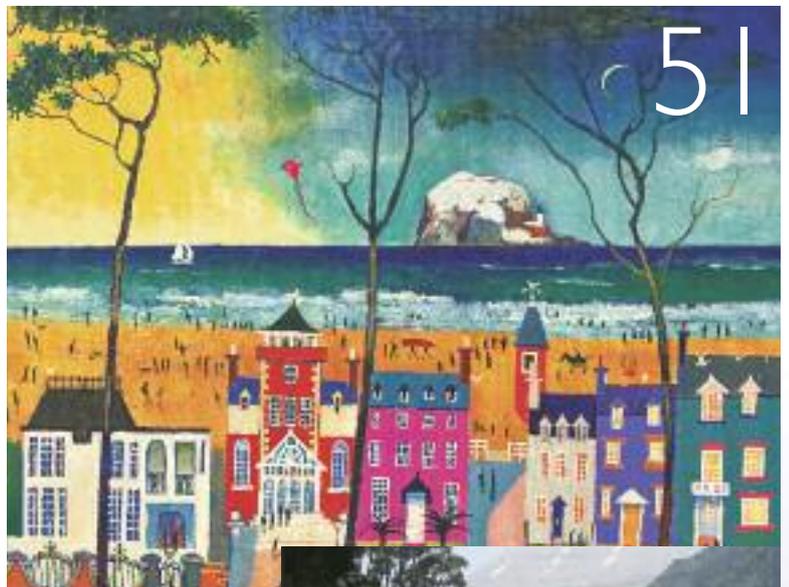
A photograph of a pond filled with green lily pads and several white water lilies in bloom. The water is dark blue, and the scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day. The text is overlaid on the center of the image.

*“Do not harm the environment;  
do not harm the water and the flora;  
earth is my mother, I am her son; ...  
Tranquillity be to the atmosphere,  
to the earth, to the waters,  
to the crops and vegetation.”  
“Whatever I dig from thee, O Earth,  
may that have quick recovery again.  
O purifier, may we not injure  
thy vitals or thy heart”.*

*Vedic Prayer*

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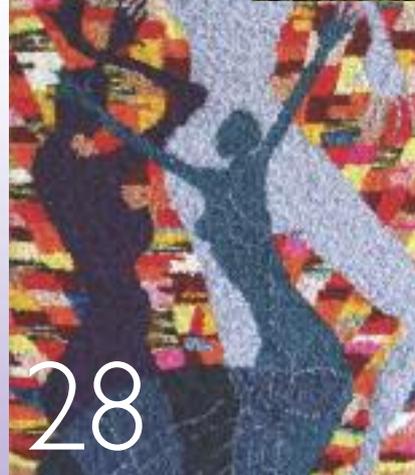
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# editorial

All children are born with the right to be nurtured in a spirit of peace, and yet every day we read of events around the world that demonstrate, all too tragically, that millions of children are suffering from the effects of war and conflict motivated by the greed or fanaticism of adults. Many of these children grow up believing that this is the norm, and any small respite from the sounds and sights of conflict is merely the light and shade of their normality. One of our writers, relating to his childhood experiences of WW2, suggests that small children the world over accept the surroundings they are born into and, provided they are with adults who care for them, will find opportunities to be playful. Indeed, we only have to see children on our TV screens, clamouring to engage gleefully with the war journalist's camera, or playing happily in crowded, desperately inadequate refugee camps, to recognise that children have remarkable resilience, and a desire to extract an element of fun and happiness wherever they can find it. But these moments are transitory and each of those children will have a story to tell. Many are traumatised by their experiences, especially when the adults who care for them are killed or unable to cope with a situation that is beyond their control. Then their small world comes crashing down and their sense of loss is profound as all that is familiar disappears. Many are forced to flee their homeland alone, becoming exiles in a foreign land where their sense of loss is increased tenfold as personal 'belonging' and 'identity' is questioned. Our writer from the Baobab Centre, a non-residential therapeutic community based in London, provides a graphic insight into the difficulties faced by children and young people caught up in such circumstances, where their background experiences are often beyond our comprehension. The Centre provides them with a place of safety, where, with the professional help of psychologists and therapists, trust and confidence can be nurtured and strategies developed for working through the grief of all that has been lost. A young activist in the so called 'Arab Spring' spoke recently of a childhood growing up in a conflict zone accepting tanks and soldiers on the streets as the norm. It was only when she travelled as a young woman that she came to realise that life did not have to be like that, that it is possible for people to live in peace. She was then inspired to work creatively for change within her own country showing, again, the remarkable resilience and courage of youth. These same qualities are conveyed by Eimear O'Callaghan, who experienced the Troubles in Northern Ireland as a teenager, and has gone on, as an adult, to publish her teenage diary providing an insightful reflection of the challenging world in which she grew up; where an uneasy semblance of normality is interwoven with violence, division and death. In such people lies hope for the future.

## Heather Wells

**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.



[www.faithinitiative.co.uk](http://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

#### Editorial Panel

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**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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Email: [hf\\_wells@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:hf_wells@yahoo.co.uk)

#### Issue 32 Themes:

- Sacred Music
- Religious Charities

**Front cover:** Painting: *Children under Siege* by Jeroo Roy

**Back cover:** Poem: *Finney* by Rebecca Bilkau  
Painting: Úna Murphy

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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





# A Charisma of Hope

*'There is a lovely road that runs from Ixopo into the hills. These hills are grass-covered and rolling, and they are lovely beyond any singing of it.'*

So opens Alan Paton's lyrical but tragic novel *Cry The Beloved Country* (pub.1948). It is a beautiful piece of writing and has a haunting poetic quality about it. It springs, however, from Paton's tragic perception of the direction in which South Africa was moving at the time. Paton was principal of Deepkloof Reformatory in Johannesburg. During his fifteen years as principal he introduced controversial progressive reforms and perhaps his most notable achievement was the building of trust with those under his care. Fewer than 5% of all those boys who were given leave to return home, ever broke their trust by failing to come back to Deepkloof.

I suppose I was about eighteen years old when I first read Paton's classic novel. Only months later I embarked on Trevor Huddleston's autobiographical reflection, *Naught For Your Comfort* (pub.1956). Still imprinted on my mind is the superscription in the book in which Huddleston quotes from G.K.Chesterton's *The Ballad of the White Horse*:

*'I tell you naught for your comfort,  
Yea, naught for your desire,  
Save that the sky grows darker yet  
And the sea rises higher.'*

As with Paton's novel, Huddleston's lyrical but sometimes angry biographical piece told of the growing injustice and racial mistrust which would erupt in the Sharpeville shootings and the assassination of the Prime Minister, Hendrik Verwoerd. Yet despite the somber background of both books, each breathed also an atmosphere of hope, sometimes even despite the brooding climate of human desperation out of which they had grown. They were both books that inspire, and give hope. The source of this hope was ultimately the essential heart of Christian theology rooted in atonement and resurrection, combined with an unusually deep resonance in the humanity of both men.

The apartheid days in South Africa ironically produced a generosity of reaction amongst many individuals who sought for a more just and humane society. The lives and witnesses of both Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu testify to a similar generosity of spirit. It is the stuff of sainthood for many people. In each of these personalities too there was that intangible quality which we call charisma or even 'presence'.

Such charisma is somehow capable of kindling in our wider humanity a response which makes it seem possible that things can change. I read Paton and Huddleston at an impressionable moment. It was in the 1960s, I was in my late teens and the world was charged with the fears of mutual stand-off in the Cold War. It was cloaked with the knowledge that one failure of statesmanship could trigger the release of nuclear weaponry capable of destroying our planet as we knew it. It was the atmosphere that would stimulate novels like Neville Shute's *On the Beach* and later on Raymond Brigg's *When the Wind Blows*. The climax of that fear-charged world was made most manifest during the Cuban missile crisis in 1962.

All this charged many of my generation with a wish to see a world transformed. It was this that energised the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. It was this that also fuelled the post Second World War consensus politics which prevailed on both sides of the Atlantic. In the U.S.A., John Kennedy, Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King were among other charismatic figures who could engage a new generation in searching for a better world: the forces of evil clearly saw them as a threat – all three were assassinated. At one point this almost pressed me to consider a life in politics. Surely, as a politician I could help change the world. But ultimately it was figures like Huddleston and Paton, alongside a re-awakening of my spiritual life through contact with a religious community, that put me on a rather different path and convinced me that I should offer for ordination.

Now, so far there has been plenty of reference to charisma in those who help inspire us. But charisma should be handled with care. Like lots of volatile material it can be a force for good or for evil. The twentieth century was dominated – in every sense of that word – by charismatic leaders. Old newsreel clips of Adolf Hitler show all too clearly how an evil use of charisma can have a catastrophic impact. Hitler was responsible for the death of six million Jews in his single-minded attempts to destroy an entire race. Josef Stalin, clearly charismatic for some, despite his most uncharismatic personality, allowed fourteen million Kulaks to die through enforced starvation in Ukraine. Mao Zedong was responsible for the death of at least twenty million Chinese people following the 'Cultural Revolution'. Charism worked its devastatingly evil charm to tarnish the hopes of many in the last century.

But charisma, or perhaps better, *inspiration*, can also be more than a force for good. To inspire is to breathe spirit into others to stimulate new life. What then is the distinction between my first four or five examples and those who, like Hitler, followed the evil paths of tyranny, ethnic cleansing and genocide? Ironically enough, at a time when religious understanding gets a mixed or even negative press through the exploits of *Al Qaeda* and *Islamic State*, the contrast above is between religiously motivated charisma and nihilistic creeds. There is, of course, always good and bad religion. However, Paton, Huddleston, Mandela, Tutu, Luther King and the Kennedys were rooted in a powerful faith.

In each of these cases it was Christianity, but other religious traditions have been equally capable of breeding hope in humanity. The most oft quoted example in the twentieth century was perhaps Mahatma Ghandi, with his roots in an ascetic Hinduism. In the present day the Dalai Lama's Buddhist roots continue to offer hope. Muslim Sufis and other eastern religious traditions have also produced figures whose charisma, conviction, courage and integrity have opened up the gates of hope. Also it is not only political and religious leaders who inspire. Jean Vanier and his work with *L'Arche* and Richard Carr Gomm in founding *Abbeyfield* and working with those who cannot safely live without support are just two examples.

Earlier on I mentioned contact with the religious life as one of those currents of the Spirit which took me down the road towards ordination. Soon after leaving school, I was keen to meet up with one of my erstwhile school friends. He was at Newcastle University and he suggested that we might meet up and stay at the Anglican Franciscan friary at Alnmouth in Northumberland for a weekend. On arrival I was terrified – I had never met a friar or monk before, let alone spoken to one. Add to that silent meals with reading accompanying them, followed by the Greater Silence, and one can imagine the reasons for my terror. But I stayed on for a fortnight – and – I returned every year for almost ten years. These years were a turning point and it was the inspiration of both the community and one friar in particular to which I can be most grateful, one Brother Edward.

Edward's story is in itself interesting. His father, Hastings Lees-Smith had been a Liberal MP in the 1920s. With the decline of the Liberal vote he became a Labour MP, and, successively Postmaster General, President of the Board of Education in the 1930s, and then leader of the party for a year or so in the early 1940s, immediately before Clement Attlee. Dying young, his wife later married again - Ambrose Woodall, later Lord Uvedale, a noted surgeon. Edward was one of three sons, and the one survivor of twins. One of the youngest colonels in the Second World War, he proposed to follow his father into politics. On being demobbed, however, he decided instead to offer for



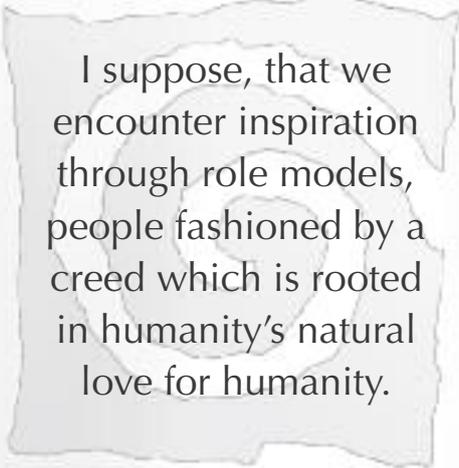
To inspire is to  
breathe spirit  
into others  
to stimulate  
new life.

ordination. After a curacy in the dockyard parish of Pallion in Sunderland, Edward found his vocation as a friar in the Society of St. Francis.

Thereafter, it is a fascinating story of someone born into considerable privilege leading the relatively frugal life of a friar. He had a remarkable ability to inspire others with the essence of the Christian life. Unlike many of us who can see life all too clearly with its difficulties, Edward had the amazing gift of communicating to individuals and groups the essential goodness of the world into which God had placed us. He was never naïve about humanity's capacity for evil, but this never overcame his ability to celebrate God's world and our part within it. This spirit of enthusiasm for God's world was manifest in all he did. So, leading a party to collect 'sea coal' from the beach in Alnmouth with the Land Rover he had learned to drive in the war; holding a telescope to his eye as a voluntary coastguard observer; offering cake and counsel to those afflicted with drug and alcohol addiction; celebrating the eucharist in the

friary chapel; acting as recruiting officer for the Third Order – in all of this Edmund inspired hundreds, perhaps more, to find ways in which our world might become more humane.

Edmund had charisma, of that there is no doubt, but it was a charisma fashioned by the essence of Christian belief in incarnation, redemption and resurrection. It was a charisma of hope. That charism for Edmund was seen uniquely in Jesus Christ. An encounter with Edward convinced you that our world could be transformed. You knew too that you had a part to play in that process of transfiguration. The essence is, I suppose, that we encounter inspiration through role models, people fashioned by a creed which is rooted in humanity's natural love for humanity. Such a love never loses hope. It is indeed a pattern of life of which the poverello, Francis, the little poor man of Assisi was a unique exemplar and one of the greatest inspirers. A brief prayer, ascribed to St. Francis, captures that spirit perfectly:



I suppose, that we encounter inspiration through role models, people fashioned by a creed which is rooted in humanity's natural love for humanity.

*'May the power of your love,  
O Lord, fiery and sweet as honey,  
wean our hearts from all that is under heaven,  
that we may die for the love of your love,  
you who were so good as to die  
for the love of our love.'*

*Eternal God, we pray for the coming of the day when all Your children will live together in peace and friendship; when oppression, discrimination and prejudice will be relics of the past, and all humanity will be filled with Your spirit. May that day come soon: the day foreseen by our prophets; the day for which we have longed during the course of a hundred generations, when all men and women will know and understand that they are brothers and sisters, and be united in humble reverence before You, and in mutual love and respect.*



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Siddur Lev Chadash, (Union of Liberal and Progressive Synagogues, 1995), p.194; slightly adapted from a prayer by Rabbi Chaim Stern, Service of the Heart (Union of Liberal and Progressive Synagogues, 1967), p.265

Blessing given at the Interfaith Service to Commemorate Holocaust Memorial Day at Lancaster Priory Church 25th January 2015

# Embedding the *Story of Love*

Sermon given at an Interfaith Service to Commemorate Holocaust Memorial Day at Lancaster Priory Church 25<sup>th</sup> January 2015



As Quakers in Lancaster much of our early history in this town concerns stories of persecution, imprisonment in the castle, followed later by stories of Quakers prospering and developing as a religious community. The particular story in relation to the Priory church involves the founder of our movement George Fox. Fox was a man committed to a deep inner seeking – who challenged the authorities of his day. In 1652, as a part of his spiritual search, Fox was travelling throughout Lancashire and Cumbria and had been staying in Ulverston at Swarthmoor Hall with the Fell family. He visited Lancaster on market day and preached in the market place and supposedly denounced what he perceived as the hypocrisy of the traders. Later that day he came up the hill to the Priory church and as was his wont he started preaching and challenging the words of the local clergyman. Fox was not one to stand in the pulpit but rather he started preaching from the pews. His words unquestionably caused offence to some and after not too long a time he was removed from the church and then, according to Quaker tradition, hounded and stoned down Church Street to Leonardsgate where he was quickly taken in and briefly hidden by John Lawson – a local sympathiser and merchant; who later became a Quaker.

What had Fox said that had so offended? We have no record of his words on this occasion but we do know that earlier that month he had been thrown out of Ulverston parish church for saying “Christ saith this, the apostles saith that, but what can thou say? Art thou a child of light that has walked in the light – and what thou speakest is it inwardly from God?”

Fox had offended because he believed, as Quakers do today, that we have no need of an intermediary between us and God. We can each express our own faith, we are the priesthood of all believers and therefore have no need of priests. In a seventeenth century society laden with hierarchical authorities this was both revolutionary and, for many, blasphemous. It took power away from the clergy and put too much power in the hands of the ordinary people. It meant faith was personal and transformative.

This simple story of Fox encapsulates some of the powerful issues we are grappling with today in our contemporary society – issues of faith and offence. So my questions to you are –

- **What would I be saying about God that could offend you today?**
- **Would you ever throw me or someone else out of a place of worship?**
- **And what can you say in relation to your experience of God?**

The God I perceive, through my own religious practice, does not need to be defended by violent, paranoid actions. The God I know cannot be threatened by mockery or abusive cartoons. The God I know does inspire in me, however, a respectful delicacy in relation to my own faith and the faith of others. It knows that offence can be inadvertently caused and created by small actions and therefore always tries to minimize such incidents.

Rowan Williams has recently stated:

*“For a sane religious believer, God does not need defending. People of faith may be hurt and offended by mockery of their convictions, especially if they already feel threatened or powerless. Think of the nasty history of anti-Semitic ‘humour’ through so much of the twentieth century, not to mention the resurgent anti-Semitism after recent events in Paris, and the intensified fear it has aroused in Jewish communities throughout Europe. But we need to be clear the problem is our’s, not God’s.”*

Despite the fact that the problem of taking offence is our’s and not God’s – there are still times when we need to speak out. The story of Fox tells us clearly that when there is a greater truth at play...

- **You can speak out and state your truth, and this may cause offence**
- **You can, non-violently, challenge authority - religious/political/social/economic**
- **You may be attacked and persecuted for doing so**
- **You may also be given refuge and discover unexpected allies**

The way in which an individual responds to challenging experiences, however, will depend much on their personal history and the nature of their memories. Our definition and understanding of memory is currently changing. We now know that it is not just the storing of stories that can be retrieved at will. But rather, the reality that memory can be influenced by personal trauma and intergenerational trauma, as well as by deep joy and connections. **Memory is not just a cognitive process but lives in the body and may include physical sensations, behavioural patterns and surges of emotion.**

When we, or our tribe, are attacked the explicit and implicit memories live for generations through the stories we tell, and the memory patterns our bodies hold. In the re-telling of these stories it is always the lived experience that brings authority. Early Quakers understood this and established a Meeting for Sufferings in which the suffering of friends was recorded and witnessed by others. Today and throughout all the Holocaust Memorial events we remember the stories of persecution and are witness to the authority of this experience.

But to be witness to this experience is not enough – if our witness does not change our actions nor indeed demand we tell a new story.

**‘See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up – do you not perceive it’ says the prophet Isaiah**

And so we must do a new thing – we must be telling and retelling the stories of unity, of friendship between faiths, of diverse communities gathering, of love and friendship in the face of difficulties. Sadly we are fear based creatures and so the negative stories may imprint themselves more strongly into our psyche whilst the stories of love, joy, generosity and sharing – may take longer to embed and be harder to remember especially when we are threatened.

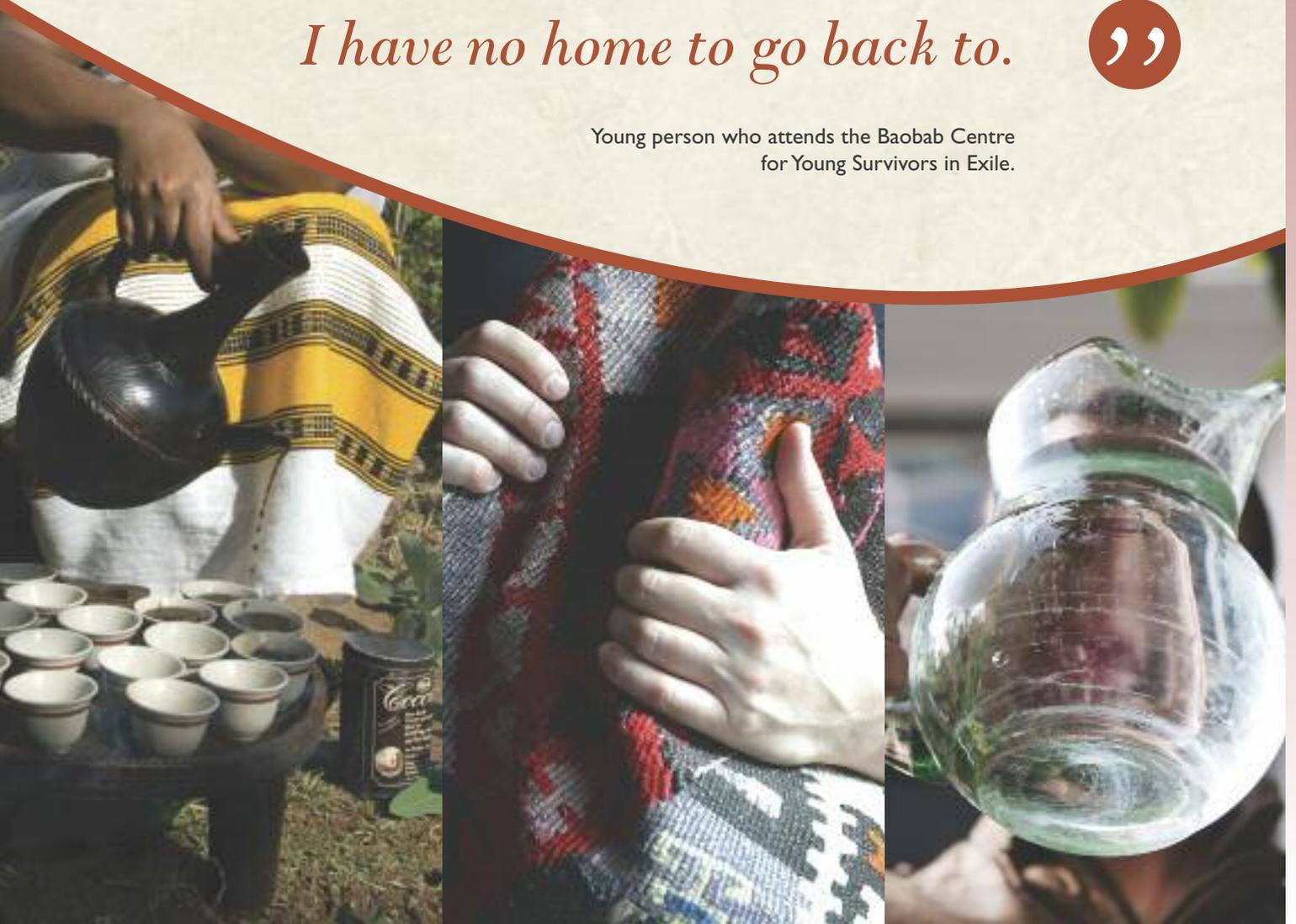
Now is the time for us to each work with our memory to embed a story of love. I invite everyone to think of a moment in their lives where the divide of difference has been bridged, and to remember that story but more importantly be willing to re-tell it and live it. Re-tell it in as many places as you can. Try to write love, respect and generosity into the fabric of your heart. To finish with a quote from young Quaker Friends who met in 1985 from over 35 countries:

**‘We have come together from every continent, separated by language, race, culture, ways to worship God and beliefs about God. Our differences are our richness but also our problem. We must let our lives mirror what is written in our hearts – to be so full of love that we can do no other than live out our testimonies to the world of honesty, simplicity, equality and peace, whatever the consequence.’ (Quaker Faith and Practice 29:17)**

# Resilience *Old and New*

“ *When people tell me to go home  
it hurts twice because it reminds me  
of everything I lost and also that  
I have no home to go back to.* ”

Young person who attends the Baobab Centre  
for Young Survivors in Exile.





Children frequently suffer most in conflicts and war. When violence erupts in communities, the structures that protect children quickly break down. Children and adolescents may experience violence indirectly or directly; as victims, perpetrators, collaborators, bystanders and rescuers. Some may be forcibly recruited to government or rebel armies and made to perpetrate violent acts; Some may be imprisoned and tortured, most frequently because of the beliefs or activities of their parents; Some will be trafficked for domestic labour or for sex; Many will have witnessed the humiliation, rape, torture, or murder of their parents or siblings; Rape is ubiquitous. In these situations of violence, the centre of a child's experience is very often a sense of powerlessness and a fear of annihilation.

Paradoxically, young people who have experienced interpersonal violence often feel responsible for the perpetrators' actions. Feelings of having failed to protect your parents, or of being complicit in the human rights abuses perpetrated by adults against you can cause shame, guilt, torment, self-loathing and despair for many young survivors. Experiences of violence, loss and unplanned change lead to huge changes in each young person's relationship with themselves and with the external world. Truly letting go of such inappropriate feelings of responsibility and rebuilding trust in yourself and others is a long, and often painful process.

The Baobab Centre is a non-residential therapeutic community, based in North London, which offers a specialised holistic and integrated child and adolescent centred approach to supporting young asylum seekers and refugees. It supports 110 young people who have experienced child and adolescent specific human rights abuses. Approximately 90 per cent of the young people who attend the centre have arrived in the UK as unaccompanied minors. The centre offers them individual and group psychotherapy, arts and sports-based therapeutic groups, music and philosophy groups and a regular community meeting. It holds holiday projects, a residential therapeutic retreat and offers practical support through the complicated asylum system and beyond.

The abuses that these young people have endured took place in their home countries and on their arduous journeys into exile, during which many of them have been exploited and their basic needs neglected. Difficulties are often reinforced by the vicissitudes of the UK asylum system where their asylum claims are regularly refused and their credibility is challenged. The majority of the young people supported by the Baobab Centre have had to wait for years in a state of suspended animation for the final outcome of asylum claims, having been initially refused asylum, but

then winning, years later, on appeal. Many young asylum seekers are offered no substitute parental care, forcing them to attempt to care for themselves in a country they know nothing about.

The experiences of the young people combined with an unfamiliar culture and isolation, leave them initially hopeless, bewildered and lost. All suffer difficulties in bereavement due to the traumatic loss of familiar adults, siblings, friends or community members. Mourning is often blocked. Most have no-one to reflect back cultural expectations and acceptable identities. They often show uneven emotional development which is likely to have become stuck at the developmental age at which they experienced community violence. They want to be like their peers, but feel different and uncomfortable, unable to share their true experiences for fear of rejection.

The strategies that these young people have for coping with the impact of violence, change, loss, separation and mourning depend both on their internal resilience and on their relationships with specialist psychotherapists and friends; people in their external world who enable them to find old resiliencies and build new ones and who help them to reflect on nourishing and destructive experiences and find ways to make connections between their past and present lives. After some time, they are able to face and acknowledge their extreme histories, which strengthens their sense of identity and allows them to sustain hope and move on.

The Baobab Centre offers these young people a sense that they are protected, acknowledged and part of a community to which they belong and can contribute. In its regular community meetings each young person has the opportunity to develop their own ideas and thoughts. They experience others sharing, collaborating and debating. In the safety of the Baobab community, they are presented with alternative ways to explore conflicts over beliefs, values and resources without the use of violence. After their experiences of rejection from their home communities, the Baobab Centre tries to give each young person the opportunity to develop trust and self-confidence, and to participate initially in Baobab's transitional community and later in the community of exile.

#### Contact Details:

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Tel: 020 7263 1301

Book Extract

# Belfast Days

## A 1972 Teenage Diary

Eimear O'Callaghan Merrion Press 2014

This diary, written through the experiences of a seventeen year old girl, chronicles, in a strikingly honest and matter of fact way, the escalating troubles in Northern Ireland in 1972.

The everyday ordinariness of some of the diary content is punctuated by the extreme circumstance within which Eimear is living. The political situation becomes interwoven into the very narrative of Eimear's life, luring the reader into the normality of her existence, only to be jolted into the horrific reality that is 'the Troubles'. Although the focus of the book is Eimear, her diary also tells a story of the individuals who died, of the parental stress of bringing children up in Belfast during this time and of divisions in community, and of solidarity.

The familiar narrative of the life of a seventeen year old – such as going to school, studying for exams, wanting new clothes – as told in the diary, stands in stark contrast to her listing of the daily

dead, of explosions, gun shots and increasing army presence. This incongruity feeds a tension that ebbs and flows throughout the book, as fear builds and terror sets in, and realisation dawns of the vulnerability now placed on Eimear, her family and her community. The tension becomes palpable, even for the reader, and it is a relief when Eimear visits her Grandparent's house in Cooley, providing her (and the reader) with a 'head shower' from the escalating terror and anxiety of life in Belfast.

With 40 years of hindsight the writer, Eimear O'Callaghan, accompanies the diary entries of her younger self with a historically informed account, and deeply honest reflection, on the Troubles. She tells an incredibly poignant story of a period of Irish and British social history that is in great need of documentation and analysis.

**Lorna Douglas**

### Mon, Jan 31

*In a very tense atmosphere, went out to school. Normal till 11 a.m., then rumours of bombs etc. began and parents from Andersonstown came down to collect their daughters – because of the rioting and no buses.*

*School was in sheer chaos – almost everyone went home. Finally, at 1.45, Sr. Virgilius called Assembly and we were all sent home because fear of what was to come was so strong. At the hospital, hijacked lorry was in flames, so was Falls Road Co-op, and the Broadway cinema.*

*Not a sign of a soldier – all too scared. When we reached the barracks, we were greeted with jeers from the military of 'Why did you have to walk girls? Ha, ha, ha!' It took me all my time to restrain myself from saying something to those British bullies and thugs.*

*Hijacked lorries in Fruithill, barricades set up. We went over to see remains of Co-op, Lipton's supermarket etc. Still smouldering – a terrible sight.*

### Tues, Feb 1

*I was very doubtful as to whether or not I should venture into school. Finally, at a quarter to 10 I decided to go, after the four boys had been sent home and their schools closed, because of shooting.*

*Got a lift down – no buses – only to find hardly anyone at all in. In my 3c class, 18 people were absent.*

*Buses came back on but two were hijacked and so, at 3.35, we set out walking. Frankie and Eleanor got lifts, Lizzie and I had to walk – and what a walk!*

*As we passed Beechmount, a hundred or so boys waited for the army, armed with bottles, stones, petrol bombs etc. and let fly as we passed because a Saracen had arrived. Soldiers jumped out and we fled up the road – Liz and I in front, followed by the rioters, then the soldiers!*

*At Donegall Road, lorry set on fire as we passed and then more Saracens. Dived for cover. At Whiterock, everyone got free ice-cream from hijacked lorry, then we got a lift home. Shooting all night. Army up and down trying to dismantle barricades. One soldier killed.*

### Wed, Feb 2

#### NO SCHOOL – TAOISEACH DECLARES DAY OF NATIONAL MOURNING FOR 13 DEAD

*Really was mourning. Went to 10.00 Mass, the church was packed. Requiem Masses all over province.*

*Listened to the funerals of the 13 dead on the radio and I just couldn't restrain myself from weeping continuously as the 13 names were read out, giving ages – as young as 16, as old as 41, a father of seven children.*

*The weather suited the atmosphere – torrential rain all day, dark and stormy. On the radio even the reporter, who was also in tears, commented on how the sun broke through the clouds as the coffins were placed in the earth.*

*However, Andersonstown's hooligans were soon at work. By 2 o'clock, army had been attacked several times, and Christie's wallpaper shop had been burnt down. Caroline Records shop was burnt down last night. Man shot dead by the army in Ballymurphy, cars hijacked for barricades. Liz's birthday – went up to her house for a while.*

Dignified, respectful mourning turned to violent rage. Protesters in Dublin vented their fury by burning down the British Embassy. In Andersonstown and on the Falls, hordes of youths went on the rampage, attacking the army with anything they could lay their hands on, hijacking vehicles and laying waste to local businesses.

Soldiers stood on every street corner along a tense Falls Road as we made our way to school. Public transport was of course

withdrawn. The roadway was strewn with riot debris and with the charred remains of makeshift barricades and burnt-out cars. An acrid smell hung in the air as shops, which had been set alight by petrol bombers a couple of days earlier, still smouldered along our route.

Within a mile of our home, rioters petrol bombed shops, a cinema and supermarkets. 'Caroline Records', where my brother and I had bought our first music 'singles' two Saturdays earlier, after our parents purchased the family's first record-player, was burnt to the ground. Being a young romantic, I had bought 'Softly Whispering I Love You' by Congregation, while John opted for America's 'A Horse with No Name'. It was our first and only opportunity to shop at the store.

## Thurs, Feb 3

*Once again, there are no buses on the road. Walked to school and arrive late. A lot absent. Reports came in of trouble up in Andersonstown again and shooting at Divis Street. Four gunmen were shot by the army, although apparently not dead.*

*Mammy and I walked round to the shops after school. Army Saracen pulled up beside us and in soldiers' idea of a joke, poked their rifles at us through the slits in the side. Mammy nearly collapsed with fear.*

*Christie's and Caroline Records both smouldering ruins and all other shops on that side are closed (except Brian's) because the electricity supply had been affected by burnings. Using candles.*

*Most shops were open again after yesterday when there wasn't even one sweet shop open. All had closed – and black flags hung from all houses.*

Within the space of a week, the world we knew had begun to collapse around us but our exam date was immovable, despite our pleas for mercy. Belfast may have been burning, but the Troubles stopped at the entrance to the school.

The rate at which events were deteriorating meant that none of us could predict how and where we might be when our A-levels actually came around in a year's time. We no longer had any interest in our 'mocks' and we resented our principal Sister Virgilius' insistence on 'business as normal'. It seemed that the Dominican sisters, cloistered behind the solid red-brick walls of our nineteenth-century convent school, simply 'refused to recognise' the Troubles.

Every morning, we passed in single file through a narrow, black, wrought-iron gate in the six-foot-high stone wall which separated the school from the chaos on the Falls Road. A row of ancient, towering, horse chestnut, beech and sycamore trees shielded six hundred teenage girls, in maroon-coloured uniforms, from the mayhem outside. The wall enclosed our five-storey, red-brick school, its lawns and cherry-blossom trees, its tennis courts and hockey and camogie pitches. At lunchtime and after class, solitary nuns, in their cream Dominican habits, passed silently and serenely along the leafy corridor formed by the trees, fingering their rosary beads, and rapt in prayer.

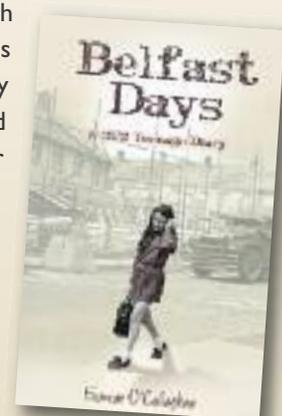
When we managed to arrive in time for morning assembly, the nuns appeared to show no interest in whether we might have had to walk a couple of miles to get to school that day. They didn't openly acknowledge that we had possibly run a gauntlet of rioters and burning vehicles on the way home the previous evening. They seemingly made no allowances for the impact that a night-time backdrop of shooting, bin-lid banging, sirens and army helicopters might have had on our studying, nor did they blink when dozens of girls were recorded as absent during the morning roll call.

Sometimes, when the 'boom' of an explosion shattered the soporific boredom of a lesson, the teacher would pause for a few seconds while we tried to work out the direction from which the sound had come; we would use any excuse to stop class. The girls nearest the windows might be given a moment to check for plumes of smoke but, almost immediately, our noses were back to the grindstone.

My schoolmates and I seized on the prevailing turmoil to try to escape the daily drudgery of classes, homework and revision but we were granted no respite. The pressure to achieve academically was relentless and the staff – religious and lay – were unstinting in their commitment to the demands of both timetable and syllabus. The regimented school day, the focus on exams and the insistence on full uniforms were the only constants in our otherwise turbulent lives. School provided us with a rare but secure anchor in a very unstable world, but the wisdom to see that eluded us in Lower Sixth.

Mother Laurentia, a severe but saintly old nun, who squinted out at us from under her wimple through round, wire glasses, repeatedly warned us that if we didn't settle down and apply ourselves to our work we would 'end up working on the buttons counter in Woolworths'.

Secretly I would have been happy to take a part-time job anywhere – even in Woolworths – if it helped me to get out of Belfast and away to France that summer.



# “I am Eimear”



**E**aster Sun, Apr 2: Exhausted after Midnight Mass. Mummy was cross because Jim and Paul breakfasted on Easter eggs before going to 8.00 a.m. Mass and as a result they broke their Communion fast...'

Reading those lines from my teenage diary for the first time in 40 years brought memories flooding back of the customs and practices that formed the backdrop to my Catholic childhood: Sunday Mass, Holy Days of Obligation, Lenten self-denial, Corpus Christi processions and the gentle murmur of my parents' voices as they recited the Rosary in their bed at night.

Being Catholic and nationalist, my family were part of Belfast's religious and political minority. The city where I was born — fourteen years before the start of what we euphemistically call 'the Troubles' — was deeply divided. It had distinct Catholic and Protestant working-class areas and segregated housing and schools; even businesses and pubs were defined as 'Catholic' or 'Protestant' depending on the owner's religion. The ancient Irish name which my parents gave me — reflecting a culture they held dear — identified me immediately as a Catholic.

The American civil rights leader Martin Luther King wrote that, "People fail to get along because they fear each other; they fear each other because they don't know each other..." My mother and father were both Catholic as were all my relatives, neighbours, teachers and friends. I spent seven years at a Catholic primary school and another seven at a convent grammar school without ever getting to know, let alone befriend, a Protestant — but I was content and relatively secure.

We lived in Andersonstown, a huge sprawling Catholic estate in the west of the city, surrounded by families like ourselves. I had

little reason to question what my parents, clergy and teachers had instilled in me from an early age: that human life was sacred and we all must love our neighbours as ourselves.

The outbreak of the Troubles changed that. By 1972 - the year I recorded in my diary and less than four years after the first civil rights protestors took to the streets of Belfast and Derry - a peaceable, churchgoing society with the lowest prison population in western Europe found itself hurtling to the brink of civil war.

Across Northern Ireland, people gave their backing to either the overwhelmingly nationalist clamour for civil rights or to the unionist demand that the political status quo be upheld. A small minority in each camp, all ostensibly believing in the same God, resorted to the use of guns and bombs in pursuit of their political beliefs. When violence erupted on an unprecedented scale in 1972, claiming nearly 500 lives in that year alone, 'Catholic versus Protestant' became the all too simplistic shorthand for a vicious and complex constitutional conflict involving republicans, loyalists and the British Army.

Thousands of unexceptional families like my own struggled to protect themselves and maintain a semblance of normality as the situation around them deteriorated violently out of control. Entire communities of ordinary, decent, hard-working Catholics and Protestants found themselves suffering and brutalised as violent extremists in their midsts claimed life after life and they suffered the consequences.

Within the space of a few months, I realised that being a Catholic didn't just mean I attended a particular church on Sundays. It meant I was part of a community that certain forces — both State and paramilitary — believed should be demonised and 'punished' as a whole, for the actions of its most extreme members.

...the events of Derrys Bloody Sunday showed me that being young and innocent afforded no protection.

It meant lying in bed in terror at night while gun battles raged outside between the IRA and the British Army. It meant getting down on my knees to plead with God that my family would be spared from the threatened 'Protestant backlash'. It meant being terrified of finding myself in a Protestant area after three Catholic acquaintances — a young neighbour, a relative of my father's and the 14-year-old son of a doctor friend — were shot dead by loyalist gunmen for doing just that. I was afraid of every passing British soldier after the events of Derry's Bloody Sunday showed me that being young and innocent afforded no protection.

The most mundane routines became fraught with danger. Rioting, burnings and hijackings turned the journey to school into an ordeal that often wasn't worth the effort. City centre shopping expeditions were abandoned for fear of being caught in an IRA explosion that wouldn't discriminate between Catholics and Protestants. My teenage social life was confined to visits to my friends' homes. I became wary of saying my Irish name aloud in the company of strangers.

As the violence escalated — alienating our nationalist and unionist communities more than ever — my feeling of vulnerability increased. At 16 years of age, for the first time in my life, I found myself struggling to adhere to the Christian principles by which I was reared.

I became almost inured to the obscene loss of life as the tally of violent deaths soared on a daily basis. I listened in disbelief when a loyalist leader said he was sorry that more people hadn't been killed on Bloody Sunday. I was terrified when my mother fled home after a woman in the east of the city told her it was a pity that all the Catholics hadn't been killed in 1969. Exposed to such hatred and multiple attacks on my community, I was aware that my own attitudes were hardening in a manner that I noted in my diary as "frightening".

As a teenager who was taught by parents and teachers to uphold the sanctity of human life, I instinctively condemned the IRA members who planted 21 bombs on 'Bloody Friday' and killed nine people as "murderers". Yet I guiltily confided, in the secrecy of my diary, that I felt "an unchristian type of satisfaction" when an explosion wrecked a Protestant bar and injured innocent customers. I knew it went against all I had been taught to harbour such thoughts but, feeling vulnerable, fearful and unprotected, I wanted the 'other side' to share what I was experiencing.

Looking back at that dark period in Ireland and Britain's very recent history, I continue to be saddened and appalled by the unforgivable loss of three and a half thousand lives. I am eternally grateful that nobody in my family was killed or injured although no

one can tell how much our lives were affected by the experiences we came through during 30 years of conflict.

It shocks me to look back and reflect on how cheap life became during that time and how circumstances and events brutalised ordinary Christian people. I can't help thinking how the course of my life or my four brothers' lives might have been different if a close relative had been taken from us. Before rushing to condemn those less fortunate than ourselves, I wonder how we might have chosen to react to such tragedy.

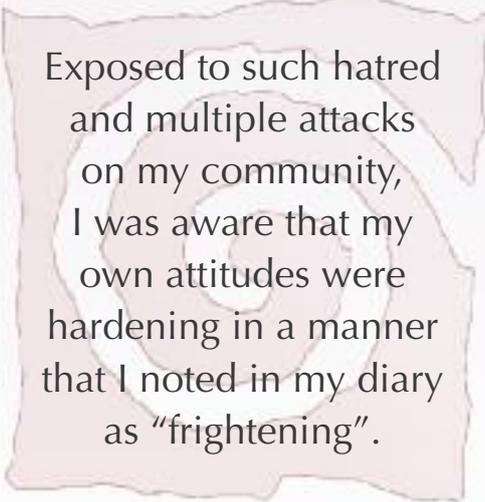
Many innocent people were killed simply because of their faith although our conflict was fuelled by political, constitutional and cultural difference rather than by religion. Terror and the instinct for self-preservation forced communities to turn in on themselves and seek refuge alongside their 'own sort', alienating themselves even further from their neighbours.

The humanity and love that held these communities together shone out through the bloody mayhem. I marvel at the commitment and resilience of the tens of thousands of ordinary men and women on all sides — people like my parents, their friends, our teachers and members of the clergy — who struggled heroically, day after day, to nurture and protect during a conflict not of their making.

Some commentators will readily lay the blame for Northern Ireland's problems at the foot of its segregated education system but schools didn't teach us to hate; quite the contrary, in fact. For children throughout the conflict, they were often the only anchors in a very turbulent time and, like our churches, played an important role in preventing a bad situation getting worse.

Thanks to the education I received, I was open to forming relationships and lasting friendships with people from other and no faiths when I reached university and entered the world of work. My own children were educated at a Catholic school, grew up among and became friends with as many Protestants as Catholics and regard the religion of people they meet as irrelevant. The new political accommodation that unionist and nationalist politicians have reached allows them to look forward to a much brighter future than I ever did as a young person.

Although a tiny minority persist in believing that using bullets and bombs is justified, Northern Ireland is undeniably a better, safer, more peaceful place than it was when my generation was growing up. The legacy and pain of our violent past still lingers. It is only by remembering the violent depths we plumbed, listening to each others' stories "with the ears of our hearts" and truthfully acknowledging the hurt caused by all sides that we will move beyond it.



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# The Blitz

## A COMIC BOOK ADVENTURE

I was born in Glasgow on 9th July 1936. Hitler invaded Poland on 1st September 1936 and Britain declared war on Nazi Germany on 3rd September 1939 so I was three years and two months old at the outbreak of World War II. The day did not hold great significance for a three year old but I do remember my parents and neighbours sitting around the large wooden radio cabinet in our living room listening to speeches, first by the Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain and later by King George.

My Father volunteered for the Royal Air Force in January 1940 and we did not see much of him for the rest of the War, except for brief periods of leave and a slightly longer period of compassionate leave for the birth of my twin brothers in November 1940. I was very proud of my Mum, since not long after the birth of the twins she volunteered to become a munitions worker and I have vivid memories of her leaving for work early in the morning in her brown overalls and her hair in a turban; travelling on a 6 mile tram journey to Yarrow in Clydebank, where she trained and worked as a turner making shell casings for the army. I spent most of my young life in the company of my Granny, who lived in the same tenement building and fed and looked after us - and most of the other local kids whose Mums were also out at work driving trams, working in factories etc. to take the place of the men who were in the Forces.

I have often been asked by younger people here in the U.K. and by people of all ages in the United States, where I travelled extensively during my working life; "What was it like to be a child in Britain during the war, were you scared during the Blitz?"

I have no recollection of being scared in the early part of the war, like all wee boys I was more interested in collecting cigarette cards with the names of famous footballers or of Spitfire and Hurricane fighters. I recall it as a pretty exciting time for wee boys. The government decided to cut down all of the iron railings in the City, including those around tenement buildings, churches, gardens, parks etc. which gave us almost unlimited access to previously prohibited areas. They also built structures called "baffle walls" in front of every tenement entrance or close in the city, they consisted of a metal frame covered with corrugated iron and filled with sand. The theory was that in the event of a bomb exploding



*Me with my Mother and twin brothers.*

inside the building the baffle would prevent debris from the blast blowing out of the close into the street and impeding subsequent rescue activities. The real attraction of these objects for kids was the SAND that was in them. We soon discovered that by climbing on top we could extract vast quantities of this magic substance not normally available to east end kids in Glasgow, and normally only found at the seaside (if you were ever privileged enough to go). It was soon transported to back courts to be used for a variety of games and also became flour, sugar, salt and many other commodities in the lassies' pretend shops. We would often go to open ground and parks, where the Home Guard manned the barrage balloons. Wire cables attached to large winch drums raised and lowered these huge gas filled silver giants to varying heights each day in order to confuse the Nazi bombers when they came. They would often let us help (more likely hinder) to turn the great winch handles. Sometimes we would walk to the sites of local anti aircraft gun emplacements to watch as the gunners went through their practice drills. Needless to say in this case we were not allowed to participate but it was nevertheless very exciting, especially when they fired blank practice shells WOW, can you imagine. When it got dark in the evenings we would watch the searchlight crews sending huge beams of brilliant light far into the night sky.

We were also taught at primary school how to recognise the different air raid siren signals, what they meant and what to do in the event of them sounding. We all had gas masks which we carried around in a case, and were taught how to use them in the event of a gas attack. Even the very small kids had "Mickey Mouse" gas masks.

I personally hated the smell of the rubber, the claustrophobic feeling and after a few minutes you couldn't see anything for condensation. The fact is that I don't think I ever wore one during an actual air raid. In the event no side used mustard gas so it was all a waste of time. So you see life was something of a comic book adventure for wartime 5 year olds like me, and my pals.

Although Glasgow was bombed on numerous occasions during the course of the War nothing before or after compared to the savagery of the Nazi attack on Glasgow and Clydebanks known as The Blitz.

The night of the 13th March 1941 was a crystal clear frosty night with a full moon. The entire city of Glasgow was fully blacked out. The incoming attack of 260 Luftwaffe bombers, which had taken off from Nazi occupied airfields all over Europe and assembled in formation over the Irish Sea, converged on the Firth of Clyde. They had no problem following the silvery reflection of the river all the way up to Clydebanks. Their navigators had been provided

with colour coded maps, supplied by Nazi intelligence agents, that pinpointed in detail the exact location of vital shipyards, engineering companies and munitions factories, vital to the war effort. Their plan was executed with ruthless precision. The initial bombers dropped phosphorous incendiary bombs, not designed

to destroy but to start fires and light up a path of fire from Bowling through Clydebanks and into the heart of Glasgow. The heavier and more destructive bombs which followed, as a bonus, hit one of our largest distilleries sending thousands of gallons of flaming alcohol into the Clyde. The onslaught continued for 9 hours with high explosive bombs and land mines. Besides our own anti aircraft fire the Polish Destroyer ORP Piorun, was in John Browns Shipyard, under going repairs. She joined the defense firing a tremendous barrage at the Luftwaffe. A memorial to the ships crew can still be seen in the Solidarity Plaza in Clydebanks.

On the following night, with rescue work still underway, a further 200 bombers returned, their raid lasting for more than 7 hours. Over the two day onslaught, 528 civilians were killed and a further 617 were seriously injured, many of whom later died from their

When it got dark  
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into the night sky.



*My wife with her Grandfather in 1940*

injuries. Several housing schemes were completely destroyed and 48,000 people lost their homes.

On the first night as soon as the sirens sounded we were up and running, Mum told me to get dressed as quickly as possible while she got the twins wrapped up, a neighbour arrived to carry one of the twins. My job was to carry a wee bag containing bottles and nappies for the babies. My Granny had a friend who worked in Reeves chocolate factory, which was very close to where we lived, and had arranged for us to use their staff air raid shelter; this was in the basement of their three storey factory. So off we went as fast as our legs could carry us, me running behind with the nappy and bottle bag. We could already hear the drone of the bombers and explosions in the distance (obviously from the initial attack on Clydebank). We reached the factory safely and were ushered down

to the basement shelter, which was much better than we ever expected. There were large tea urns and sandwiches for the grown ups, lots of tables and chairs and even cots for the small children and wonder of wonders we each got a bar of Reeves chocolate - yummy! My Granny's friend was also an air raid warden and asked me and another wee boy if we would like to come up on the roof, where they had an observation post. My Mum was a bit worried but he assured her we would be quite safe. He even gave us tin air raid helmets - yippee - and off we went up onto the roof. This time the drone of the

aircraft was deafening. The post was surrounded with sandbags and in the small gaps between them we were able to look out across the city. What confronted me was the most spectacular sight I have ever seen in my entire life. The whole sky was completely lit up by searchlights, exploding anti aircraft fire and tracer bullets. As far as I could see the sky was lit up bright red and orange from the distant fires that I later found out were from Clydebank.

I was later told that you could see the fires as far away as Perthshire. We were only up there for about 5 minutes but every second of it is indelibly stamped in my mind. Was I afraid? NO, I was just excited. We were whisked back to the basement - much to Mum's relief - and eventually my excitement calmed down and like most of the kids I fell asleep. It was early morning by the time the all-clear siren sounded. We made our weary way home, together with many other local families, worried about what we might find, we were still aware of the smoke and smell of burning. By the grace of God our building appeared totally untouched. Granny made us a lovely breakfast and the grown ups switched on the radio to hear about the carnage of the previous night.

On the following night with rescue operations still in full swing

the Luftwaffe returned, this time with 200 bombers, concentrating on maximum damage via heavy high explosive bombs and land mines. These were designed not to explode on impact but to smash through the roofs of buildings, usually penetrating all the way to the ground before a delayed time device exploded sending bricks and rubble in every direction. The blast effect of these bombs was horrendous and could damage other properties within a square mile. The raid lasted for an agonising seven and half hours.

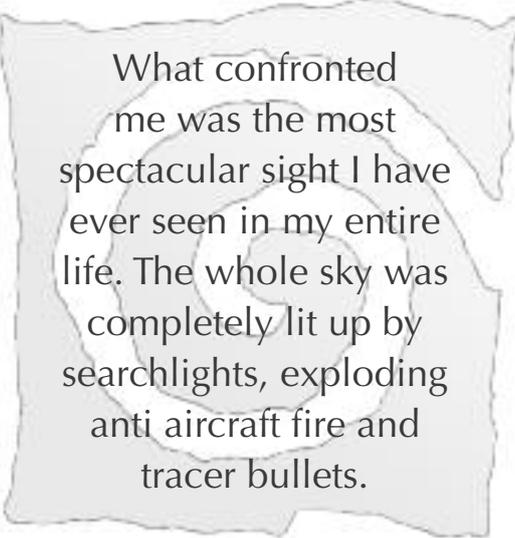
We went through the same drill as the night before but this time, even as we exited our close, we could hear the drone of the aircraft and could hear nearby explosions. Several of the men in our group of neighbours made the decision that it was too dangerous to try to run the half mile to Reeves shelter, and we all ran into a nearby one storey building and yard which was the

property of one of the largest coal merchants in the East End. Workers who were still on duty herded us into the main building and offices, where we all took shelter. Here there were no beds or cots and sadly - no chocolate. But we were made as comfortable as possible and they mustered up blankets and loads of tea and biscuits. In true Glasgow fashion a few drams magically appeared for the grown ups - just to settle the nerves!

In those days all of the coal lorries were pulled by large Clydesdale horses which were stabled next to the main building and although the

stable boys did their best to calm them down, we could hear them neighing in terror after every explosion, and, when they were rearing up, the sound of their great hooves crashing down shook the building even more than the bombs did. It was a long night and some of the ladies organised games for the kids. Again, in true Glasgow fashion, the adults started singing all of the wartime hits by Gracie Fields and Vera Lynn. Eventually the all-clear siren sounded and the lights were turned on. This created a real surprise, as being a coal merchants, the rafters and ceilings of the buildings were covered in coal dust. Between the explosions and the stomping of the Clydesdale's hooves most of this had been dislodged and all of the adults and children were covered in the coal dust.

We did not have far to go as our building was only a few hundred yards away. The building itself seemed untouched although we could see that many of the windows had been smashed by blast impact. We climbed the stairs to our first floor flat and that was when I was confronted by my greatest outrage of the War. We had a pair of wee budgies called Peggy and Joey which were in a cage lovely on a stand by the windows of our front room. The cage itself was still standing but there was broken glass all



What confronted me was the most spectacular sight I have ever seen in my entire life. The whole sky was completely lit up by searchlights, exploding anti aircraft fire and tracer bullets.

*“I would like to emphasise that I never felt afraid during the war and neither did any of my pals. I think that small children, the world over, accept the surroundings they are born into provided they are with adults who care for them”*

around and poor Peggy and Joey were lying on their backs with their wee feet in the air. I was absolutely outraged, for the next few weeks telling the world that “Hitler killed my budgies”. It is still a family joke and every time Hitler’s name comes up a chorus goes up “Hitler killed Jim’s Budgies”.

My wife was also born in 1936 and is just 2 months older than me and although she lived on a different road just a few miles away we never met as children, we met at night school when we were both fifteen years old. My wife says that she too never felt afraid during the war. Her experience of wartime childhood was very similar to my own but from a girl’s perspective. Over the same 2 nights of the Blitz like me she never felt in danger, she was with her Mum and Dad and big brother whom she knew would look after her. On the second night, like our family, they did not have time to seek an air raid shelter; they lived on the third floor of their building and by the time they reached the ground floor bombs were starting to explode. An old lady who lived on the ground floor told them to come into her small flat, which she said would be safer because she had installed wooden shutters to the inside of her windows. So in they went, bombs had been landing quite close to them and her Dad decided to go out of the building to see if he could be of any help, he headed down Dalmarnock Road towards Allan Street. About 10 seconds before he reached Allan Street, a landmine, which he had heard crashing through the building detonated and tons of bricks and rubble from the explosion flew into Dalmarnock Road. Another few steps and he would never have survived. The target for this particular bomb was Dalmarnock power station which supplied electricity to the entire east side of the city, so an important missed target for the Luftwaffe but of little consequence

to the poor residents of Allan Street. He picked himself up and headed back to the flat to make sure his family were OK. He was just back a few minutes when another bomb landed close by. The blast from this one blew the old lady’s shutters off, they went flying over the heads of my wife and her brother and landed in the “bed recess” of the flat. Everyone was thrown on the floor and in

the dust and confusion nobody could find my wife’s Mum. They finally found her under the table, she had been hit full on by the shutters which finished up on the table with her Mum below. She was taken to hospital. My wife, her Dad and brother went to nearby Ruby Street, to make sure Mum’s older sister was OK. On the way back home they came across a children’s clothes and toy shop. The windows had been smashed and there was glass and kiddies clothes lying in the street, hanging from the window was a beautiful fully dressed mannequin doll. My wife decided

she would have to rescue it and picked it up only to be told by her Dad that it was not hers and she would have to put it back in the shop window. How’s that for Glaswegian integrity.

I would like to emphasise that I never felt afraid during the war and neither did any of my pals. I think that small children, the world over accept the surroundings they are born into and provided they are with adults or parents who care for them they will continue to play and interact with other children of the same age. I am not of course including or speaking for those children who were actually maimed, bereaved or traumatised in war zones like Glasgow, Clydebanks, London and Coventry, or, other cities throughout the world both past and present at war. These children will tell a different story. One of fear and terror, of being afraid and scared.



I was absolutely outraged, for the next few weeks telling the world that "Hitler killed my budgies".

# Fallen Flowers

**D**ecember 16th 2014 was a woeful day in the global calendar. The deliberate, and rigorously planned, massacre of children in a school in the city of Peshawar, Pakistan - known as 'the city of flowers' - confounded us all. Every room in the school chronicled a disturbingly bloody visual. At the close of day several hundreds of parents were either mourning their precious dead or praying that those alive would not succumb to their bullet wounds. Others were attending to the physically unhurt but traumatized children who escaped death...and lest we forget, some children had lost their teacher-parent who put themselves in danger to protect their charges.

The killers believed themselves to be Muslims. But they were 'Zalims' meaning oppressors. They did 'Zulm' meaning oppression of an infinite magnitude. What does the *Qur'an*, the Holy Book Muslims swear by as bearing Divine commandment, say about oppression and evil doing? The *Qur'an* says:

**"...there is cause to act against those who oppress people and transgress in the land against all justice – they will have an agonizing torment..." [42:42]**

**"If the evildoers possessed the earth's assets twice over they would offer them to ransom themselves from the terrible suffering on the Day of Resurrection: God will show them something they had not reckoned with, the evil of their deeds will become plain to them, and they will be overwhelmed by that..." [39: 47-8]**

The killers targeted children. Islam regards the soul of a new born to be innocent, untainted and wholesome. Children are regarded as a blessing entrusted to us to protect and cherish, to enlighten and to give good manners in order to prepare them for the life ahead and beyond. It is our duty to facilitate the growth of a child's soul in the manner in which the Creator has fashioned it. Any act of man should not re-arrange the innermost dwelling of a child or interfere with its innocence. **As I write, I am thinking of how ISIS are managing to rearrange the souls of children by indoctrinating in them hatred, brutality and revenge killing.**

The killers struck at a seat of learning, a place which, as Muslims, it was their obligation to protect. The school pupils they targeted were receiving education - that very sacred of obligations for every Muslim - and educators who were fulfilling their sacred duty of imparting knowledge.

**"Read! In the name of your Lord who created: He created man from a clinging form. Read! Your Lord is the Most Bountiful One who taught by [means of] the pen, who taught man what he did not know. [96:1-5, regarded as the first revelation of the Qur'an]**

**But man exceeds all bounds when he thinks he is self-sufficient... Have you seen whether he is rightly guided... Have you seen whether he denies the truth and turns away from it? Does he not realize that God sees all?... We shall drag him by his forehead - his lying, sinful forehead." [96:6-16]**

The commandment above encapsulates the obligation for gaining knowledge, giving it the same religious endorsement as any other obligation. The clinging form refers to an embryo; it also indicates our state of total dependence. But the contrasting verse that follows shows the transgression of man and the awaiting punishment.

For the bereaved parents there is consolation and recompense in the midst of tragedy and emotional void: the following extract is from a letter of condolence that the Noble Prophet of Islam **صلى الله عليه وسلم** wrote to a father when his child passed away.

*"Surely, our souls, wealth and families are wonderful gifts from Allah which He has loaned to us so that we may take benefit from them for a set period; and He takes them away after the termination of that period. Thus, gratitude becomes binding upon us when He gives, and patience becomes obligatory upon us when He takes away."*

*Your son was also from among the wonderful gifts of Allah and a loan from Him... in return for great reward, mercy and forgiveness... He has taken him away from you. So do exercise patience and do not let your bewailing and complaining destroy your reward, ... Know that bewailing and complaining does not help bring back anything, nor does it repel grief and sorrow. And whatever is to happen is set to happen. May you be in peace."*

- Of the c. 1100 total students and staff members, 132 students and 10 teachers were killed including the school's female Principal.
- 121 students and 3 teachers were wounded but some critically wounded adults died overnight.
- The rescued staff and students were 960.
- Many older children were saved by their presence of mind in feigning death.
- The bravery of the Principal and teachers made moving headlines.
- The killers were not interested in taking hostages. Their mission was to kill as many children and staff as possible. Starting from the school's auditorium they started shooting indiscriminately from the time they breached security to arrive in the school premises.
- The all-day rescue operation concluded by 'Maghrib' the evening prayer time in Islam, with explosive clearance of the school grounds and the school handed over to school management.
- None of the killers were alive to narrate how they could do what they did to innocent children. Fitted with suicide vests and explosives they came prepared to die.
- However, the focus of their attack – an Army Public School – gives clarity to their motive as revenge, targeting the more vulnerable families rather than the Army itself.

# Atheism: On Shifting Ground

At the turn of the century, a group of thinkers on both sides of the Atlantic authored several popular books promoting atheism. Writers including Christopher Hitchens, Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris and Daniel Dennet were swiftly dubbed 'New Atheists'; the name, a product of journalistic commentary on their works. While this movement was not entirely unprecedented in a philosophical sense, New Atheists became notorious for their antagonistic approach. This was underpinned by the assertion that religion should not be accommodated on any level, given that it was morally corrupt, socially destructive and intellectually void. They set out to counter and criticize religious groups, rooting their claims in empirical science, and contending that beliefs could not be legitimate unless grounded in concrete evidence.

But why write as if New Atheism were a historic pattern of thought? While atheism is still with us, there is scope to suggest that the landscape of non-belief has shifted in recent years. In support of this, let us consider three key pieces of evidence. Firstly, the writers central to New Atheist thought have failed to form a lasting narrative. While the success of this small group of authors appeared to herald a strong new movement, Theo Hobson contends that 'the movement that threatened to form has petered out.' This could be attributed to several factors. Hitchen's death in 2011, Dawkin's numerous Twitter controversies (most recently, a combination of ill-advised racist and misogynistic comments) and the publication of Harris's latest work, *Waking Up: A Guide to Spirituality without Religion* (which indicates a move towards greater recognition of the 'transcendent' and 'spiritual') have all contributed to the splintering of a group which once appeared formidable. Indeed, Jonathan Sacks suggests that New Atheists have become embroiled in a kind of fundamentalism, which has led to the failure of their attempts to 'impose a single truth on the plural world.'

Concurrently, a fascinating phenomenon has begun to emerge amongst other advocates of atheism, namely a renewed interest in (and respect for) religion from a secular perspective. In his book *Religion for Atheists*, Alain de Botton draws on the structures, rituals, habits and celebrations of Abrahamic faiths for secular use. One particularly vivid paradigm, exemplified by the Passover Seder, is communal eating. Secular communities might adopt the practise

of eating together, while reading from guidebooks reminiscent of the Jewish Haggadah. Rituals would include discussion about relationality and forgiveness. Although de Botton is not pressing for a Judeo-Christian revival, he is acutely aware of the cultural value of religion, and its potential for practical application. Likewise,

Julian Baggiani observes that gratitude is widely lacking as a concept within secular culture. He suggests that humanists might draw on religious practises, such as fasting, in order to rectify this. Andre Comte Sponville also acknowledges religion as an important part of human history. As such, it is entirely possible to retain an atheistic standpoint without engaging in malicious, anti-religious rhetoric.

A third element of this shift is evident in the growing popularity of the Sunday Assembly movement. Founded in early 2013 by comedians Sanderson Jones and Pippa Evans, the SA constitutes a self-

defined 'godless congregation that celebrates life.' Dubbed a 'church for atheists' by the media, it has captivated congregants worldwide with an innovative mix of popular music, poetry and TED-style talks. While the majority of attendees label themselves 'godless', the space created at Sunday 'services' is intended to be accessible to anyone. Indeed, one of the SA's central stated aims is to be a 'radically inclusive' secular group. This marks a clear deviation from the abrasive, combative agenda of the New Atheists. At present, there is space within this new and developing movement to accommodate a multitude of standpoints. An emphasis on 'celebrating life' cleverly averts attention from matters dogmatic. It remains to be seen whether such tactics will stave off internal confrontation in the long term. But for now, it stands as evidence that the landscape of non-belief has undergone some significant changes.

What implications might this 'shift' hold for interfaith work? The fragmentation of New Atheism has given way to the rise of a more accessible form of godlessness - one which does not prohibit respect of religion, or advocate segregation of the spiritual from the secular. For political scientist Phil Ryan, this opens out a range of possibilities for dialogical conversation, particularly between faith groups and self-appointed secularists. Working together, there will be opportunities to move forward, grasping at commonalities and shared social interests, rather than that which divides us. The ground has well and truly shifted. And for those with an interest in co-operative faith dialogue, this could be very good news indeed.

New Atheists have become embroiled in a kind of fundamentalism, which has led to the failure of their attempts to 'impose a single truth on the plural world.'

# Sensing the Soul of the World



Flourishing on a former brownfield site, amongst the Victorian splendour and vibrant community of Glasgow's Pollokshields, lies The Hidden Gardens. Since 2003 Scotland's first sanctuary gardens dedicated to peace have provided sanctuary, nurtured community and hosted biodiversity in one of Scotland's most ethnically diverse postcodes. In addition to being a beautiful greenspace where people can relax away from the busy city streets, the Gardens are a place of learning and exchange where people can come together and share stories, skills and histories.

Arts organisation NVA (an acronym which expresses the Ancient Greek ideal of a lively democracy, where actions and

words shared among a community of equals bring new thinking into the world) created the Gardens as their first permanent public artwork. Artistic Director Angus Farquhar hoped the space would also act as a positive creative response to the global turmoil and xenophobia arising from the 2003 Iraq War. *'We did over 300 face to face interviews with people and really began to get a feel for what a garden could represent for different faith systems and to see how it might connect to very diverse traditions that historically have been against each other. And where at community level there might be tension between different people, that the garden could be a way to supersede some of these issues and again find the commonality of how the form of a garden has been used across almost every religious text ever written and is a metaphor for something good and of real profound value on earth.'*

The meticulous community consultation identified the need for a safe, neutral, apolitical space for people of all faiths and backgrounds to come together. Transforming the scraggy derelict piece of land adjacent to emerging arts space Tramway took three years, and made use of ideas fed back from the community consultation. The design team utilised these ideas alongside a conceptual, creative and multi-layered approach which referenced the site's many historical past uses. The north to south borders echo the layout of the site when it was a tree nursery in the 1800's,

whilst the retained tram lines and the chimney reflect its industrial past. The square route of Caithness stone that delineates the front area of the Gardens echoes sacred paths around hills, stupas, temples, mosques and monasteries. Many of the historical features have become integral design features and sit cheek by jowl with newer developments such as the artworks and plant collections.

The planting is both native and exotic and seeks to represent the diverse spread of global cultures in the surrounding neighbourhoods of Pollokshields and Govanhill. Pines, rowans and hawthorns of both Scottish and Asian origin are planted side by side. Bamboos, rowans, magnolias, hazels and winter flowering plum trees were all suggested as cornerstones of the planting scheme by local people and, in the old factory floor, similar species of native and

exotic trees are planted together in blocks to highlight their common and unique qualities. The plant collection is always growing and evolving, taking into account new migrant communities such as the Roma population who settled in the area since the early 2000s through the 2013 'Plants of Meaning' project.

Within the central open space a Ginkgo Biloba tree is planted. Ginkgo Biloba grew worldwide some 160 million years ago, including in Scotland. It is therefore both exotic and native. The Ginkgo, now virtually extinct in the wild, exists here as a monument to common origins. It is planted on top of three stones from the summit of Mount Sinai, a place sacred to Islam, Christianity and Judaism.

The Gardens have a number of artworks integrated into the

Over time it became clear that the Gardens' role in relation to faith was to reflect, rather than represent.



2004's Festival of Light

‘...a garden has been used across almost every religious text ever written and is a metaphor for something good and of real profound value on earth.’

overall design which were devised by a team of artists working together, listening to the many and varied opinions expressed during the community consultation. Examples are Gerry Loose’s Inscribed Texts - a series of poems and texts carved into five sandstone waymarkers inspired by Islam and Hinduism, and Alex Finlay’s Xylotheque - a library of the Scottish woodland reminiscent of the traditional Japanese renga platform. A spiritual overview for the development of the Gardens was provided by Mumbai-based artist and theatre producer Divya Bhatia.

The engagement with the community extended beyond the design development process to the opening and continued use of the Gardens, and from the early days the Gardens sought to act as a venue for celebration and cohesion. It became clear that certain groups within the locale of the Gardens, whilst enthusiastic and engaged in the process, might still require encouragement to participate and use them. A year-long programme of organised events ‘The Festivals of Light’ were planned from before the Gardens opened. The initial event, to which all participants in the Gardens’ development were invited, marked the opening to the public on 21 June 2003. Subsequent events marked Diwali, Eid, Vesak and Christmas. The value of these events, beyond celebrating the first year, was to reinforce the principles set out at the conception of the project that The Hidden Gardens must become a space in which all local people feel comfortable.

Over time it became clear that the Gardens’ role in relation to faith was to reflect, rather than represent. As such, the large scale community events became more creative and thematic, favouring a multi-faith multi-layered approach.

Most recently interfaith work has centred on working in partnership with Interfaith Glasgow to host a series of interfaith meals to bring together people from different places of worship in an informal, social setting to get to know each other better. The inaugural Interfaith meal took place at The Hidden Gardens in November 2014 and saw members of local faith groups share a delicious meal lovingly prepared by The Hidden Gardens Men’s

Cultural Cookery group. Subsequent Interfaith meals took place in faith venues across the city before returning to the Gardens for the final meal in March 2015.

Such projects help to sustain the Gardens’ mission to celebrate the universal spirit of nature through horticulture and human culture, a dialogue, which at its most sublime, can help us to sense the soul of the world and the joy of being part of it.



*Participants from the Men’s Cultural Cookery Group serving diners at the inaugural Interfaith Meal, November 2014*



*2005’s Fragrant Festival*

# Lifting the Cloud

## OF FRUSTRATION

*“ In 2012, I developed health problems with my left eye and found myself unable to keep painting. ”*

Since 2003, I have been constantly painting, reading and questioning the plight of countless women, children, and displaced communities across the world, with my main subject being **Violence against Women and the Girl Child**. My work was first featured in this magazine in 2008 (issue 19) when I had completed my series of paintings **Children Under Siege** in which I aimed to illustrate the powerful resilience often demonstrated by children whose life experiences are horrendous, and yet their strongest ally for survival seems to be their innocence.

Addressing these themes is my passion and painting for 8-12 hours almost every day was very normal for me. However, in 2012, I developed health problems with my left eye and found myself unable to keep painting. I was also in the midst of Print Making, Lino-cuts and Monotype which I also had to stop because the fine dust created by the cutting of the lino irritated my eyes. For almost a year and a half I experienced great frustration, feeling at a complete loss as to how to continue with my work.

In 2013 I visited New Brunswick, Canada, and a friend took me to Nova Scotia to see the works of a well-established Rug Hooker, Deanne Fitzpatrick. At a distance the Rugs hanging on the walls of her studio looked like paintings, and I was struck by their intriguing beauty. I found myself thinking that if I am unable to paint my pictures with a brush, I will paint my pictures through Rug Hooking. The insight I gained into this art form truly inspired me and I felt the cloud of frustration lift.

As I embarked on Rug Hooking I experienced a thrill, and a deep gratitude that I could once again fulfil my passion to highlight the injustices to women and children.

The finished effect is extremely satisfying, with its depth of colour and texture, but the technique necessitates frequent breaks for hand exercises as my wrist and finger joints become very painful. As a result it takes me about three months to complete a piece, but each one encompasses my desire for justice for women and children suffering oppression in all its forms.

LANGUAGE



The reverse side of the Rug Hooked image where I have sewn a patch with details (this is done on all the hooked rugs). My last step is to pass a sprig of lavender through the stitched-on patch to deter moths.

“ I have been constantly painting, reading and questioning the plight of countless women, children, and displaced communities across the world. ”

### Barefoot Noble

My Hooked Rug image based on the painting from the series 'Children under Siege' in which a wounded young boy is walking away from burning and ruined buildings still holding on to his dignity – symbolised by the shoes painted onto his bare feet.

### **Pantheism / Zoroastrianism.**

I am a Zoroastrian and since a young girl, I have been aware that our prayers are in an ancient language which I do not understand to this day. But the one aspect of my religion which I have always understood, is thanking the Creator for our world through prayers dedicated to natural forces, that is the Fire, the Sun, the Moon, Water, Flora and Fauna, and this pantheism aspect of my religion is very dear to me.



### **No More, Enough is Enough**

My Rug Hooking interpretation of a painting taken from my series 'Violence against Women' which symbolises the power of women to say "No...."



# Papaji's Curry Garden

In our oblong garden there is a lawn  
bordered with trees, shrubs, flowers,  
roses and vegetables nicely drawn,  
our Papaji's labour measured in hours.

The vampires flee, scared off by the garlic,  
being chased away by the runner beans,  
onions, coriander, fenugreek; so aromatic,  
plants dotted about; tiny pods of chickpeas.

Applemint and peppermint everywhere,  
green leafy spinach and firm mustard,  
white flowered radish pods waving in the air,  
burgundy rhubarb; so tasty with custard.

Pumpkins' vigorous vines sprawl and creep,  
streaked courgettes' golden flowers gleam,  
his passion shows when he digs soil deep,  
Papaji is lost in his world of earthly dream.

Doesn't have knowledge of the flowers' names,  
he calls them by character, colour, shapes,  
"Laal, peela, neela, hara," Punjabi fun'n'games,  
nurtured, enveloping mesh. Nothing escapes.

But kids want to play football and cricket,  
furious Papaji bellows his often repeated call  
to the birds, fat pigeons, kids running for a wicket:  
"My plants! Don't kill them or I'll kill you all!"

Kuli Kohli

*Laal, peela, neela, hara: red, yellow, blue, green. (Panjabi)*

Cited: WE'RE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER: ENVIRONMENTAL POETRY FROM THE WEST MIDLANDS  
Ed. Nick Pearson and Jane Seabourne Pub.Offa's Press 2012

# Lamentation for

# Lebanon

At the end of December 1961 I set off on a ship from Port Melbourne towards Piraeus, Greece. Most young Australians go abroad after finishing their studies, and I was no exception: it was my intention to visit a Palestinian family in Beirut who became refugees during the 1948 war between the Israelis and the Palestinians. That year they had sent their son, Khalil, to Australia as it was a safe place to study, far away from the fighting. Khalil had made friends with my cousin, Peter, during his first year studying medicine at the University of Adelaide. I was a little girl of about nine at the time and was fascinated by the way Khalil wrote from right to left in Arabic and spoke with a French accent. Khalil had been made so welcome by my parents over the years that all members of my family had a long-standing

invitation to stay with his family in Beirut. My parents had visited them in 1953 on their way to England. Naturally I wrote to them when I was planning my trip and they kindly extended their hospitality to me, too. I disembarked at Piraeus and travelled across to Beirut on a small Greek ship.

The children often walked down to the olive groves and beyond, or even to the next village and usually only came home when they were hungry.

Khalil met me at the harbour and showed me a few of the sights as we drove from the port towards Hamra and Ras Beirut (then the most fashionable part of Beirut), where he and his family lived. They had arranged for me to live with distant relatives in the old Jewish quarter, a bit further towards downtown Beirut. They also organised a job for me as a teacher in various schools. I had not been there long when I met my husband to be, a

German, living in Kuwait who had come to Lebanon for a visit. At the weekends, we went sightseeing and for picnics in the



mountains with Khalil and his friends - to picturesque Lebanese restaurants in Zahleh, the Bekka valley, Shemlan and other mountain resorts. All along the coast there were fish restaurants too, where fresh fish and sea-food straight out of the Mediterranean were on the menu.

It was spring and Karl and I fell in love – a coup de foudre as the Lebanese say - and became engaged very soon afterwards. We married in June, travelling to Kuwait a month later. My husband had the intention of establishing a language school in Kuwait, at first teaching English, French and German, later branching out. We worked extremely hard during the first years to get it established, literally giving lessons around the clock. Later, we were able to expand our syllabus, hiring teachers to teach Arabic to foreigners as well as computer studies. Our family came along quite soon, our son being born in Kuwait in 1964 and our first daughter in 1966. A second daughter followed in 1967, born in England when I had to leave Kuwait at the height of my pregnancy during the six day war between the Arabs and the Israelis.

Over the years we were able to establish a chain of language schools from Kuwait, to Bahrain, Dubai, Doha and even Iran, as well as carrying out teaching contracts for various oil companies. In the late 60's a small language school was set up in Beirut and when it was well-established we decided to return there. We moved back to Lebanon at the end of July, 1971.

It was a wonderful heady feeling to be in Lebanon again. As we drove out of the city to the mountains in the direction of Aley, inhaling the intoxicating smells of the Mediterranean pines, we could hear the crickets and cicadas in the trees. Soon the Beka'a Valley, where we planned to spend a week's holiday, was spread out before us: a vast plain cultivated with orchards as well as sunflowers and cereal crops. We could see right across the valley to the next range of mountains called the Anti-Lebanon, which divides Lebanon from Syria. The whole scene, with its clear air, was magical. After a short holiday we eventually found a pleasant apartment in Shemlan, in the mountains above Beirut, built on a hillside with a magnificent view over the city. The house and garden looked over terraced hillsides, where the leaves of the olive trees shimmered in the sun. We could see the coast all the way from southern Lebanon to Jounieh and beyond.

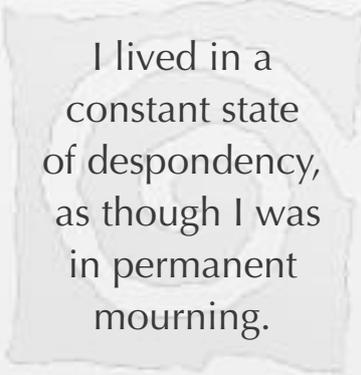
We enjoyed our years in Lebanon tremendously. As well as administering our contracts with various oil companies, my husband was very busy setting up a new school in Shemlan to teach Arabic to foreigners. The students, from Germany, Canada, the US, Australia, China and Japan, were diplomats, bankers and the senior staff of companies with interests in the Middle East and, by their very presence, encapsulated the flourishing nature of commerce in the region. Our children had plenty of other children to play with in the village, both Lebanese and other nationalities. In fact, in the summer during the school holidays, they simply ran wild: perfectly safe in the village. Everyone knew them as they went visiting from morning until evening, roaming around in

good-natured groups. They often walked down to the olive groves and beyond, or even to the next village and usually only came home when they were hungry. They took part in Lebanese life to the full and particularly enjoyed it when the villagers went out at night after it had rained, armed with torches and buckets to look for snails for their soup pots!

Spring in the mountains was a delight. As we walked among the hills we could smell the strong perfume of the flowers and blossoms in the orchards. The fields and terraces were full of miniature pink cyclamen, red poppies, wild irises and hyacinths. The fragrance of the orange blossom along the coast and in the valleys evoked the time of our honeymoon all those years before. However, in the spring of 1974 there were troubles in Beirut and the firing of light and heavy weapons could be heard at night. Later in the spring there were demonstrations and events became more violent. A few years before this, in September of 1970, the Palestinians had been expelled from Jordan, most of them arriving in Lebanon. The PLO and the Lebanese Army were fighting each other and the camps were a hotbed of unrest. As well as this, the Shiite and Sunni Muslims and Maronite Christians had each set up their armed militias. We did not venture down to Beirut at this time as there were road blocks and checkpoints. From our mountain eyrie we could watch the firing and see smoke rising from various parts of Beirut. It was almost like watching a film. We were observers without being involved at all, hearing the blasts of rockets and grenades and seeing tracer bullets light up the sky at night. Israeli planes had also bombed the Palestinian camps in October, during the 1973 Yom Kippur War. It all seemed very close to home as we observed the vapour trails of the aircraft as the Syrians and Israelis fought for the Golan Heights. When the camps were bombed, we were able to see every detail from our balcony. It was a very strange feeling to see this all taking place, knowing full well that people were being killed and their homes destroyed. I wondered what I would do if the fighting came closer to home.

By the time the summer came, the fighting seemed to have ceased and it was as though nothing had happened. Once again, we drove down to Beirut to do our shopping, go to the beach or the movies, and everything appeared quite normal again. In light of events of the following year and the start of the civil war in Lebanon, which lasted for almost twenty years, I often wondered in hindsight if we had been completely blind and unaware.

The following spring troubles started again in Beirut. On April 13th 1975, a Sunday morning, some unidentified gunmen fired on people coming out of a Maronite church in the Christian village of Ain al Rummaneh. Later that day, a Palestinian bus carrying mainly women and children was shot at when being driven through the same village. Many of the passengers were killed or injured. As soon as people heard about this, shooting began in Beirut, and Palestinian guerrillas, aided by Muslim militias, fought against Christian militias in the streets of Beirut. This situation turned out to be the beginning of the civil war. Even though after this incident there was



I lived in a  
constant state  
of despondency,  
as though I was  
in permanent  
mourning.

heavy fighting in Beirut, we still did not take it as a sign of anything more serious than usual. It had, however, started off the fighting in earnest. Nevertheless, we merely thought that the skirmishes were going to be intermittent, similar to the year before, and that eventually in the summer it would all calm down again. My husband even went ahead with his plans to go on a promotion tour to the USA to promote his Arabic courses in Lebanon, and we planned a holiday in England. We left Lebanon in July 1975.

By the time September came, I realised that it would be impossible to return to Lebanon. The children and I were staying with friends in Sussex at the time, and my husband was still in America. I decided that we should go to stay with my mother-in-law in Germany until the fighting subsided, after which we could decide whether to go back to Lebanon or not. My husband arrived in Germany shortly afterwards. We had to make a quick decision about our students, who were ready to begin their studies in Lebanon. We had to offer them a safe venue where they could take up their studies undisturbed. We left Germany for England at the beginning of November, leaving our children with their grandmother. They had already started school in the small village where she lived, having to learn German: another new language for them.

Karl and I moved into a basement flat in Hampstead. The weather was getting colder and I froze most of the time. We had only taken summer clothes on holiday, although I had a few pullovers and a leather coat. It was an extremely bleak period of our lives, without our family and bad news arriving every day from Lebanon. We heard that various people had left Shemlan; that teachers who drove to the mountains from Beirut every day to teach were unable to get past the roadblocks and had to stay in Beirut. At least some of them were able to leave Lebanon before anything really tragic happened. All kinds of appalling stories filtered through, which made us more determined than ever that we would not return until the situation had calmed down. My husband was certain he could achieve more by remaining in London and setting up the school there. He hoped that eventually students and staff could be re-located. As the situation worsened and became more complicated we began to wonder who was fighting whom. However it was still only 1975 and we had no idea that the war would continue for seventeen long years. At that stage we still hoped to return to Shemlan in the not-too-distant future. We listened to the news religiously every morning and read the newspapers, but with the worsening conditions the scenario became more and more complicated. Christians fought against Muslims, Muslims against Christians, Christians against Christians, the Druze against the Christians, the Communists became involved, and the Syrian army came in during 1976 and stayed.

I lived in a constant state of despondency, as though I was in permanent mourning. I grieved for my children, the house in Shemlan, our dogs, the whole magic of Lebanon and a way of life

which seemed to have ended forever. We had few personal belongings and were now living in furnished accommodation, admittedly in a pleasant part of London. However, it was a basement flat and quite dark, although it had French windows looking onto the garden. Nevertheless, gardens in England in November can be triste and when your whole outer framework has collapsed, it is difficult to keep your inner life on an even keel. I experienced the anonymity of life in a big city and felt desolate. Gone were the mountains of Lebanon with their umbrella pines, olive groves and fragrant gardens, whose owners called out to us, 'Ahlan, ahlan', welcome. Come in and drink coffee with us!"

Nevertheless, we were grateful to be alive, our children were safe even if they weren't with us and we were capable of working hard and long hours. As the war continued, we realised with increasing awareness that our life in Lebanon was over. It was the end of an era and we had lost everything. However, other people hadn't been so fortunate. We heard the most gruesome stories about what was happening all over Lebanon. The situation had turned into a free for all and was to become much worse. Over the months more teachers began to surface as refugees from Lebanon, our offices began to look like a refugee camp with people sitting around on suitcases, drinking coffee out of plastic cups from the sandwich-bar downstairs, wondering where they were going to live. We went through a difficult few months, working hard until late at night trying to find an alternative for our students to begin their courses. We would normally have begun in September, but we had to wait until we found suitable premises. The whole matter of finance was like a Damocles sword hanging over our heads.

At the beginning of the summer holidays 1976, the children arrived. We were all relieved to be together again after a separation of almost eight months. We found a larger flat in Kensington suitable for a family. The children were to go to the German School in Richmond in September, where they could continue with their German education.

On our walks through London in the summer we often saw Gulf Arabs. We recognised the women from the Emirates with their burqas and masks which we called 'beaks'. When I heard their guttural Arabic, it was like coming home. I was reminded of the pleasant time we had spent in 1968 when we had set up the new school in Dubai and, indeed, of our whole way of life in the Middle East which was irrevocably at an end.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The burqa worn in the Emirates and as far as Oman, consisted of a long cloak or abaya and a leather or metal mask, which distorted the voice. Nowadays women wear abayas and face veils (niqab), which look more elegant and are, no doubt, more comfortable.

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# *Faith in Conservation*

*The sounds of the explosions could be heard for miles. Even at night it was possible to spot the giant plume of water shooting up into the air, casting up its bounty into the night sky. Then, like sharks, the little boats would swoop in and trawl up the dead and dying fish – and not just fish. For anything that was swimming in the waters off the coast of Tanzania on those evenings when the dynamite fishermen went fishing, died in the blast.*

Lebanon: one of the sacred forests of the Maronite Church, now protected by their commitment in perpetuity to protect the forest and its bio-diversity.

For centuries, the Muslim fishermen of the Tanzanian coast had fished these waters. Based on islands such as Zanzibar or Masali, they depended on the sea and their harvests for their livelihoods and for the survival of their communities. Deeply religious, these poor communities eked out a living generation after generation. Then someone introduced dynamite. The results were dramatic. For centuries the fishermen had had to hope that they were casting their nets in the right places, deep enough and wide enough to make a decent night's catch. Now, by throwing sticks of dynamite into the sea, they could haul in almost guaranteed catches and it took so little time.

What they did not know (and did not think was their business) was the terrible destruction they were doing, not just to the fragile ecosystem of coral and reefs but also to their own long-term survival. Dynamite wreaks havoc on the delicate balance of nature – of which fishermen are part. It indiscriminately takes out the young fish along with the mature ones, whereas traditional fishing leaves the young to slip through the nets and breed later. The explosion also destroys the very environment within which the fish live. It kills plankton, breaks up reefs and corals, and wipes out the vast array of plant life and other species upon which the shoals of fish depend for their survival. Ultimately, the fish shoals die away and the fishermen and their communities are left with decreasing catches or have to travel much farther out to sea in order to find any fish at all. No one benefits in the long run.

But it was dramatic and fun and for a while yielded high returns. The question therefore became how to help the fishermen understand the long-term problems they were causing, and then stop them. It was the kind of environmental issue that many governments around the world were, and are, trying to address. At first, the Tanzanian government and associated environmental agencies went the usual route: they launched an education program. But like the majority of people in marginalized communities (or indeed perhaps any communities), few fishermen either read or pay much attention to government leaflets, and even fewer looked at those produced by NGOs, no matter how worthy. Then came legislation: dynamite fishing was officially banned by the government. But again, such communities take quite a pride in ignoring or outwitting such laws. Then a group of scientists, sent by an international body concerned with species loss, arrived on one of the main islands. They brought all their own food and tents and camped out in the wild rather than living with any of the fishing communities. After three weeks spent studying the issue they came to an extraordinary conclusion. The only solution, they said, was for the government to have armed patrols capable of hunting down, or at the very least deterring, the dynamite fishermen.

These scientists ostensibly focused on the survival of species, but they made only passing reference to one of the most important species of all: human beings. In part this was because in choosing where they stayed and what they ate they had not made any effort to know the fishermen and their families. But partly it sprang from a strange problem that bedevils certain approaches to ecology and environment: that of ignoring human communities, which are of course as much part of the environment as plants and animals. To its credit, the Tanzanian government only half-heartedly applied the draconian measures – not particularly wanting to shoot its own citizens, even if they were acting illegally. So the problem dragged on. Then a solution of startling simplicity was developed.

The fishing villages of the East African coast are almost all Muslim, and as such they are organized under a religious leadership of sheiks who have enormous authority in the communities. And unlike government officials in far-off capital cities (and particularly unlike well-meaning foreigners from European and American NGOs), the sheiks are very much part of those communities. The basis of the lives of these fishing families is Islam, with its Qur'an, its Shari'ah laws, and the traditions and customs of the faith. This is what holds the lives of the people together, and this is what provides the worldview they consider to be paramount.

In 1998, in a joint venture with several NGOs (CARE International, WWF International, ARC, and the Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Science), the sheiks on Masali Island came together to explore Islamic teachings about the appropriate use of God's creation. From these studies the sheiks drew the conclusion that dynamite fishing was illegal according to Islam. They used Qur'anic texts such as "O children of Adam! ... eat and drink: but waste not by excess for Allah loveth not the wasters" (Surah 7:31). Stories about the Prophet Muhammad's own actions denouncing waste (see chapter 5) were told to convince the fishermen and their communities that what they were doing was against the express wishes of God.

In 2000, the Muslim leadership of Misali and surrounding smaller islands banned dynamite fishing and taught that anyone who ignored this ban risked incurring the wrath of God and endangering their immortal soul. Dynamite fishing was dramatically curtailed. By 2003, in collaboration with scientists and ecologists but guided by the profound insights of their own faith, the communities were developing sustainable fishing. What government laws and the threat of violence failed to do, Islam in partnership with the environmental insights of conservation bodies managed to achieve. And it did so for the simple reason that it made sense within the people's culture and worldview, and it drew not just upon ecological information but on a profound understanding of human nature in the sacred texts.



Mongolia: the unveiling of one of the sacred stele - rededicating the area to the deities who protect it - as part of the recovery of the Buddhist sacred landscape tradition after decades of Communist rule. This project was co-funded by the World Bank.

## Whose world?

We all want to change the world for the better. The question is, whose world is it and how can it be changed? We live in many worlds. I am sure you will have had the experience of the differing worlds of the pessimist and the optimist: two people see the same drinking glass, but one sees it as half empty, the other as half full. But it goes much deeper than that. For example, let us take the example of a fox. What do you think a fox is?

To some people, it is simply a reddish-coloured mammal; to others it is a classic example of urban adaptation by wild animals; to yet others it is something to chase on horseback. To some animal lovers, the fox is a symbol of the survival of nature against urbanization and the cruelty of hunters; to others, who have fed foxes in their gardens with bread and scraps, it is a beautiful creature appearing almost by magic with its cubs. To cartoon makers and storytellers in many lands, the fox is a wily, cunning creature; to the chicken farmer, the fox is a predator who can wipe out a livelihood. To Hindus and Buddhists, the fox is a soul just as they are, and may even be someone they knew in a former life. To many Japanese, the fox is a fearful sight, because they believe that it is inhabited by evil spirits intent on taking over human beings.

So let's ask the question again. What is a fox? Our answer has to be: "It depends on what you believe." This is true of everything around us. We understand things because of what we believe. If you believe that hunting is wrong, you will see animals such as the fox, bison, or tiger in one way. If you are a hunter, then you will see them in a different way. If you like sausages, then you will see the pig in one way. If you are a vegetarian, you will see the pig somewhat differently. If you believe the world is there to be used as you want and when you want, then you are not likely to treat it the same way as someone who believes it is the loving manifestation of a Divine Being or that all life is itself part of the Divine.

What you believe gives meaning to what you see. It determines how you use, treat, and respect the rest of the world. The challenge to those seeking to make the world a better place is how to help different visions and different experiences of the world to work together. If you do not realize there are different worlds, but insist everyone should see the world as you do, you can lose key potential allies who feel their world has been ignored. Seeing and respecting other worlds opens up vast possibilities.

*What is a fox?*

*Our answer has to be:*

*"It depends on what  
you believe."*



Mongolia: Buddhist monks and conservation projects.



Lebanon: the Maronite sacred forest of Harissa.



The Assisi meeting in 2011 when the Green Pilgrimage Network was launched along with a range of conservation projects - it was the 25th anniversary of the first Assisi meeting of 1986 where major religions and major conservation bodies first met to discuss working together.

## Two versions of a forest

The coastline of Lebanon has been massively developed in the past 20 years. Towns have spread north and south, creating an almost unbroken line of urbanization along the seashore and covering the hills behind with vast stretches of concrete homes and roads. At times, driving along the coast can seem like driving on a long highway cutting through suburbia. As a result, the natural environment of the Lebanese coast is under unprecedented pressure. It is one of the most dramatic examples of something that is happening all around the Mediterranean: the coastlines are being built upon, destroying rare ecological systems and running the risk that the Mediterranean will soon be a sea ringed by concrete.

In response to this rapid development, the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) and other environmental agencies identified the Mediterranean coast as a priority for preservation and set up a task force to help it. WWF International counts the survival of Mediterranean shrub lands and woodlands on its list of the 200 most important world ecosystems to be protected. Aerial photos taken in the late 1990s highlighted the degree to which development had already reduced shrub lands and woodlands in countries such as France, Greece, Turkey, and, perhaps most dramatically, Lebanon. The one bright green spot of hope was discovered to be a sizable ancient forest north of Beirut covering three hills. The researchers from the task force were surprised and delighted to discover this remaining block of forest, the forest of Harissa, and immediately took steps to ensure its protection.

They contacted the landowners of this rare and crucial forest, and sent them a forty-eight-page scientific, economic, and legal document demanding a promise to abide by national and international laws to ensure the protection of the forest. In the worldview of the people in the taskforce, these laws and the weight of the scientific evidence were paramount. They wanted to do good and were anxious to help the landowning organization fall into line with the good that they wanted done. They got no reply. It took the wisdom of a local environmental group, led by a Druze and a Maronite Christian, to work out why.

The forest of Harissa belongs to the Maronite Church of Lebanon. The church has owned this forest for centuries, perhaps as long as fifteen hundred years. Its priests and decision-makers were not ignorant of the forest's beauty and environmental importance, but it had a deeper significance for them. It is known as the "Holy Forest of Our Lady of Lebanon", and at its heart is the Cathedral of Our Lady, with a giant outdoor statue of the Virgin Mary, whom many see as the Protector of Lebanon. Yet in the document from the task force – written in that strangely unappealing language that so dominates the utterances of the environmental movement and scientists – no mention of the

forest's spiritual, cultural, historic, and emotional significance was made. Its authors simply did not see that world of the Harissa forest, and as a result they were unable to communicate with the Church and its followers.

A new approach was needed. ARC and WWF already had a joint program called "Sacred Gifts for a Living Planet", designed to recognize commitments to the environment made by communities based on people's religious traditions and their beliefs about the natural world. Protecting the sacred Harissa forest seemed to be an ideal example of a Sacred Gift. With this in mind, representatives of ARC and the local Association for Forest Development and Conservation (AFDC), staffed by both Druze and Maronite environmentalists and volunteers went to meet the head of the Maronite Church. The palace of His

Beatitude the Maronite Patriarch lies within the sacred forest of Harissa itself. Within half an hour the Patriarch had committed the Church to protect the forest in perpetuity. By drawing upon the Church's sacred understanding of the forest and experiencing the world through the insights of Maronite theology, culture, and tradition, the decision – and pledge – made sense locally as well as internationally.

It is worth comparing the first document sent to the Church, which they ignored, with the document the Church later drew up with the help of AFDC and ARC. The differences

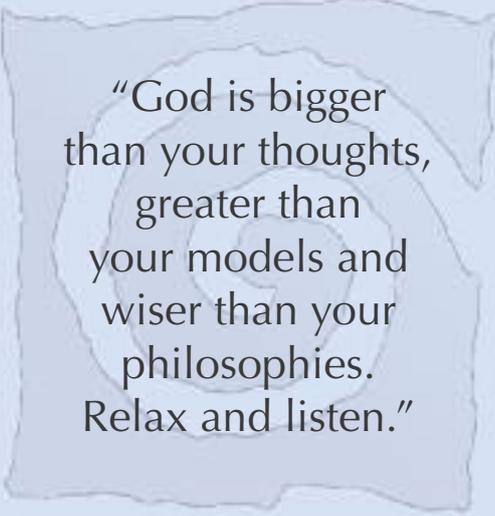
between the documents reflect the huge differences between the two worlds, even though both share a common concern and now a common commitment to protect this rare forest. The following dictatorial definition of why the task force thought the Church would want to work with it is a classic example of a view of human nature, commitment, and intentions that sees the glass as half empty:

*Dedication to biodiversity protection – i.e. is the area especially dedicated to the protection and maintenance of biodiversity and associated natural and cultural resources?*<sup>2</sup>

*To satisfy this test, the area's custodians must have protection of biodiversity as a first order management objective. If other objectives take precedence over biodiversity protection, then the area as a whole, or those parts of the area where other objectives take precedence, should not be classified as a protected area. Forests managed for other environmental functions, such as soil or watershed protection, will not qualify as protected areas where these other functions are higher order objectives than maintenance of biodiversity. Forest areas dedicated to environmental protection functions other than biodiversity should be distinguished from protected areas and labelled differently (e.g. as protected forests).*<sup>2</sup>

In contrast, this is how the Maronite Church expressed its commitment to protect the forest and its "biodiversity," and perhaps more important, why:

*For centuries the Church has defended the natural beauty and Godliness of the forests and hills of Harissa, as well as so many other*



"God is bigger than your thoughts, greater than your models and wiser than your philosophies. Relax and listen."

holy places in Lebanon.... In so doing, we observe that the land and the flora and fauna on it, do not ultimately belong to us. We are simply the guardians of what belongs to God. It is in this spirit that the Church has for centuries protected such sites as Harissa. But today, new threats endanger this holy site and so many others. Harissa is now surrounded by the growth of buildings and just as the Basilica [cathedral] is a boat floating on the mountain so Harissa floats like a ship of nature above the tide of modern development. Therefore the Church must speak boldly and make clear to all that the Holy forests of Harissa will remain, protected, managed and owned for God by the Church... It is this conviction which leads us to consider the forests of Harissa registered under the name of the Maronite Patriarchate as a Maronite Protected Environment of Harissa.

In protecting this area, the Church will continue to ensure that the diversity of plants, trees, animals and birds given by God, nurtured by the Church will be maintained.... We are aware that not only does the world need to know why we are making this clear statement, but our own faithful need to understand that this action springs from our faith. St Maron [the fifth-sixth century hermit saint after whom the Church is named] sought God in the wilderness of creation, amidst nature itself. Today, in the spirit of St Maron we need to rediscover why God wishes His Church to care for nature, through education, through teaching and preaching. Through looking again at the life of St Maron and the thousands of hermits who sought Christ in the forests and valleys, we can become true believers, caring for all aspects of God's creation.

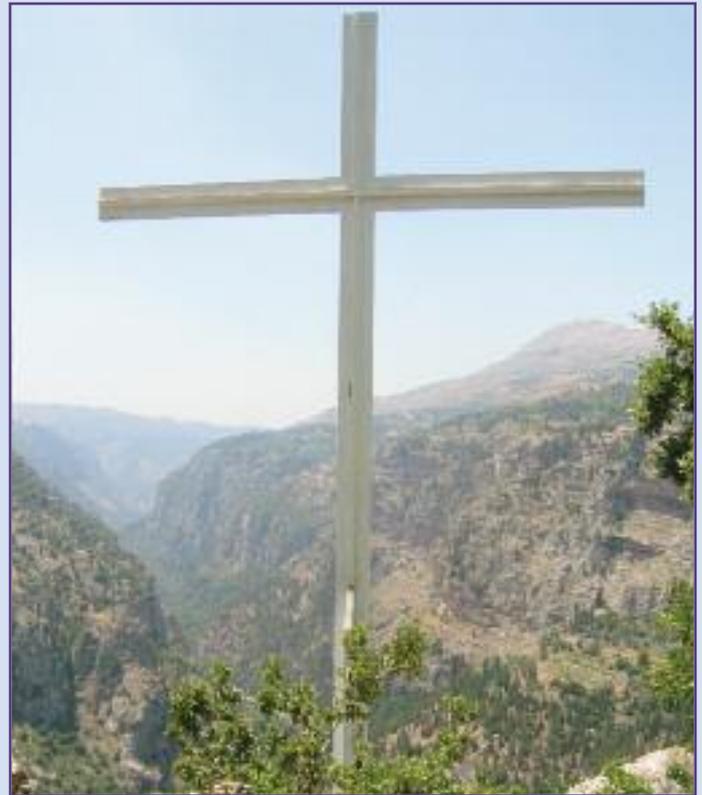
That is why the forest is now protected formally as well as spiritually. That is also why, since the declaration of the protection of the forest in 1999, the Church has created an ecology center for young people, protected several other major woodland sites, and developed a program of environmental education and action in nearly a hundred villages and towns, becoming one of the key advocates of environmental protection in Lebanon. Why have they done it? Because they believe in it.

How sad it would have been if these two worlds – that of the evangelizing environmentalists with their awareness of the importance of this forest in the wider picture, and that of the Church with its tradition of protection which needed reawakening – had not been able to meet. By insisting that people adopt their view of the world, many campaigning groups cut themselves off from natural allies, who may see things differently but no less compassionately.

## Seeing many truths

Many people are actually rather scared of being told that their worldview is just one among many. We like to think that unlike so many others, we see “the real world”. Yet the world we see is a construct of our minds, our backgrounds, our training, and our assumptions. The world is, thank goodness, bigger, more exciting, and more diverse than that which we alone see.

My co-author, Victoria Finlay, tells a story about how her worldview was turned upside down. She was nineteen and spending a university summer teaching math and English in a Tibetan refugee camp in India. She was living in one of the children's homes, with about twenty children and a young housemother. One evening she was sitting with some of the children, telling them



Qadisha valley of the hermits in Lebanon

stories and singing songs before they went to bed. A bedbug crawled up her bare ankle and she casually squashed it against her skin. And then she looked around and saw the unmistakable expressions of horror on the children's faces. “It was as if they had seen me pick up a kitten and strangle it while in the middle of a song: it was a horror of casual violence that was beyond their comprehension.” At that point my friend realized that the way she had seen the world was not the only way. After that summer she switched her university course from economics – “which was just one way of seeing human behavior, a way that I wasn't sure I believed” – to social anthropology, so she could understand the concept of pluralism that she had seen so vividly.

Most people in the West grow up with the notion that truth is monolithic: that there is only one true way to explain how the world evolved – evolution – and only one true faith, whether that is Christianity, Islam, atheism, or something else. In the West we tend to want there to be one pathway and one right answer, whether this is “one true way of democracy” or “one true model of economics” or “one true way of bringing up your children” or “one true way of dealing with terrorism”. But the rest of the world sees this as rather childish and not very helpful.

I found this out on my first visit to India, when I was in my early twenties. I was working with people of different faiths – Hindus and Jains and Muslims – helping them develop educational resources so that European schoolchildren could learn how their religions worked and what they meant. At a personal level this caused me some confusion. If Christianity were true as I had been culturally taught then the others de facto could not be. Yet I was moved by much of what I was seeing. I raised this problem at a meeting with Indian Christians. They gently pointed out that perhaps it was not “the other religions” that were the problem,

but me! It was my assumption that my tradition was ultimately the best and therefore the only serious model that was the problem. It had nothing to do with other people's different beliefs and ways of seeing. "Relax," they said. "God is bigger than your thoughts, greater than your models and wiser than your philosophies. Relax and listen."

It broke apart my inherited worldview – thank goodness. It forced me to see that maybe I was the problem. It is like this for all of us. We have to have a worldview, otherwise we cannot function. As the psychiatrist Carl Jung wrote, we have to inhabit a worldview that explains most things for us because if we didn't "we would be crushed by the sheer awe-ful-ness of the universe." The problem comes when we think that this is actually the only reality, or that it is any more than a helpful way of looking at something that is actually rather complex. The world is so much more exciting than that, and in order to make it a better world we need to realize this and then create structures that enable diverse and even conflicting worldviews to work side by side.

## Constructing a future

An illustration of how worldviews can differ is provided by the extraordinary story of the rebuilding of the statue of Avalokitesvara in Mongolia. From 1924 to 1989, Mongolia was a communist country. Indeed, after Russia, it was the second country to go communist. The government committed all the terrible actions of Soviet communism, including the suppression of religion: in the purges of the 1930s and again in the 1950s tens of thousands of Buddhist monks were murdered and virtually all monasteries destroyed. A few were kept as museums, and in 1989 just one monastery in the capital city Ulaanbaator was kept open as a "functioning" monastery to show visitors from abroad that religion was not oppressed. It is said that by 1989 there were just three monks allowed to work openly.

Mongolian people have traditionally believed that their country is under the protection of a deity called Avalokitesvara, who is the Bodhisattva of Compassion. In Buddhism, Bodhisattvas are beings who, through countless lives of exemplary goodness, have reached a point where they can slip the physical ties of rebirth and escape to Nirvana, never again having to suffer the troubles of existence. Yet these enlightened beings decide instead to help other souls escape the cycle of rebirth. Of these compassionate beings, Avalokitesvara is the most loved.

In 1911 Mongolia gained its freedom from the Chinese, and one of the first things its people did was to cast a twenty-six-meter

high statue of Avalokitesvara in bronze. In the 1930s Stalin ordered that the statue be destroyed, and legend says it was shipped in pieces to Russia where it was later melted down to make bullets for the war against the Nazis. In 1989 there was another huge shift in Mongolia's history. Communism collapsed and out of the mess arose a democratic movement. In this first non-communist government was a young politician named Enkhbayar, who headed the Ministry of Education. Or, as it was called in those heady days of freedom, the Ministry of Enlightenment.

The country was in disarray. Poverty, poor housing, the aftermath of forced collectivization, and settlement of the nomads meant the country was convulsed with problems. The euphoria of the fall of communism was soon replaced by the grind of making a new society. Aid agencies and intergovernmental bodies poured in with advice, plans, schemes, projects, and programs – as well as funding. They all knew what needed to be done: new educational priorities, development models, criteria for funding and sustainable growth and so forth. Yet what happened took them all by surprise, and – for those who were able to understand – it revolutionized their understanding both of Mongolia and of how to rebuild a country.

Enkhbayar and other key ministers decided what they needed to rebuild first, and made a public announcement to that effect. No outside agency would touch this project, considering it a waste of time and money. Yet ordinary Mongolians poured money in, giving what they could, even if it was only a few coins. Relying upon Mongolians themselves, rather than on international help, the project became the focus of social, political, and spiritual life in Mongolia and gave thousands pride and hope.

And what were they building, when they needed schools and housing so badly? They were remaking the 26-meter-high statue of the Protector of Mongolia, Avalokitesvara. From the worldview of the aid agencies it had at first seemed a colossal waste of money, yet from the worldview of so many Mongolians it was a massive success and the beginning of a new era. As Enkhbayar (who became both prime minister and president of Mongolia) explained, without pride in themselves or in the sense that they were once again protected, how could the Mongolians move on? What had he to offer his people if they did not value themselves? With foreign aid he could provide more schools, projects, and funds, but what would they be worth if people did not have a sense of who they were?

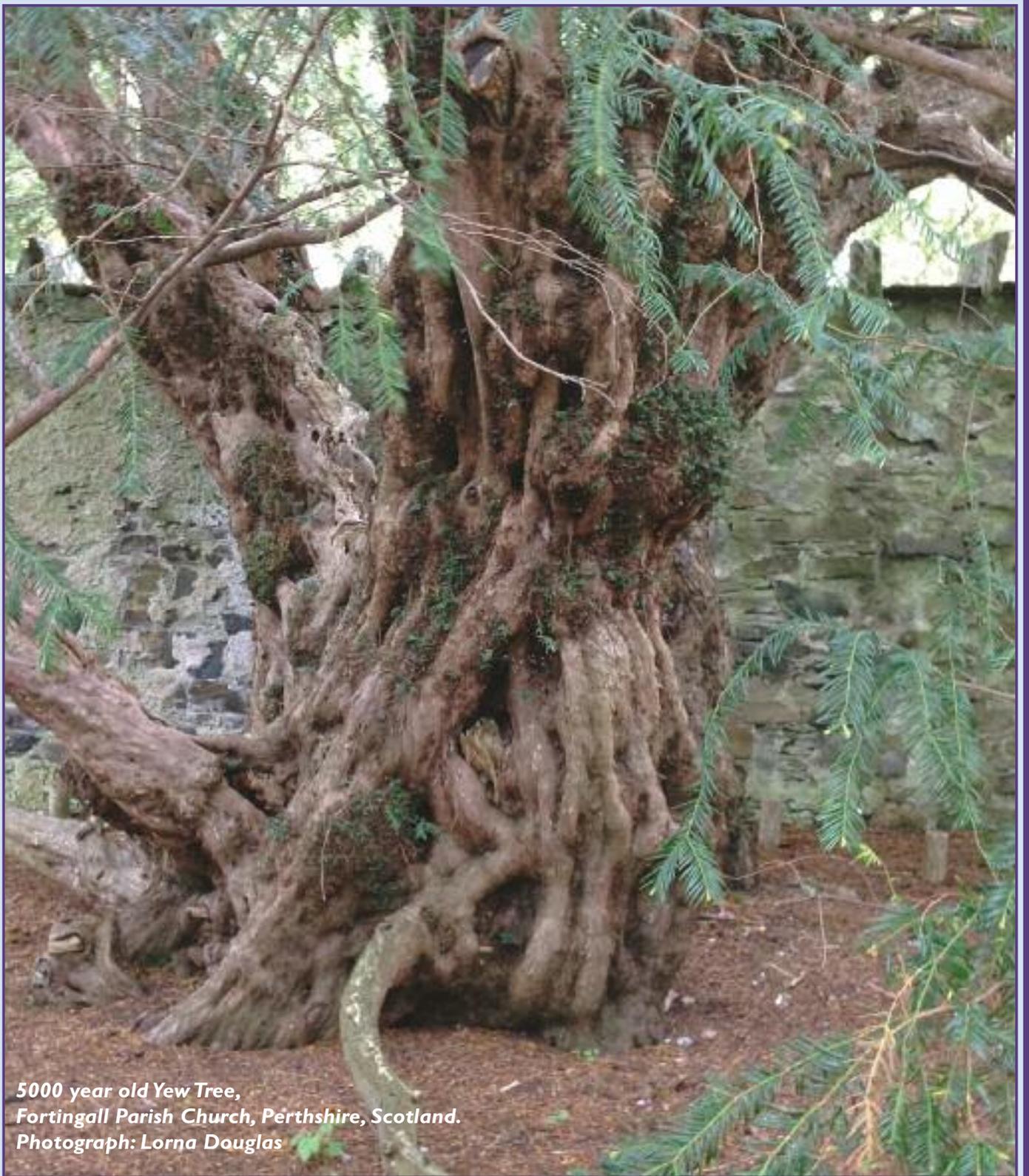
The statue changed everything. It also changed the worldview of a number of aid agencies with respect to what it is that helps people make sense of the world and thus change it. The world has so many more dimensions than many of us think, and, as soon as you start including different worldviews, the engines of change and of making the world better are fascinatingly diverse.

First chapter of *Faith in Conservation* by Martin Palmer and Victoria Finlay, World Bank 2002

Please see [www.arcworld.org](http://www.arcworld.org) and also to <http://www.arcworld.org/books.asp?sectionID=1> where you will find the remainder of the book.

<sup>1</sup> WWF and ARC summarized the notion of a Sacred Gift as "a practical, concrete and active expression of a religious tradition and its belief about the natural world. This initiative will honour what is already happening and through specific Gifts will indicate significant new commitments." From the Sacred GTTE Checklist pertaining to voluntary forest protection, WWF/ARC, November 12, 1999.

<sup>2</sup> From the document endorsed by the WWF Core Forest Advisory Group, October 1999.



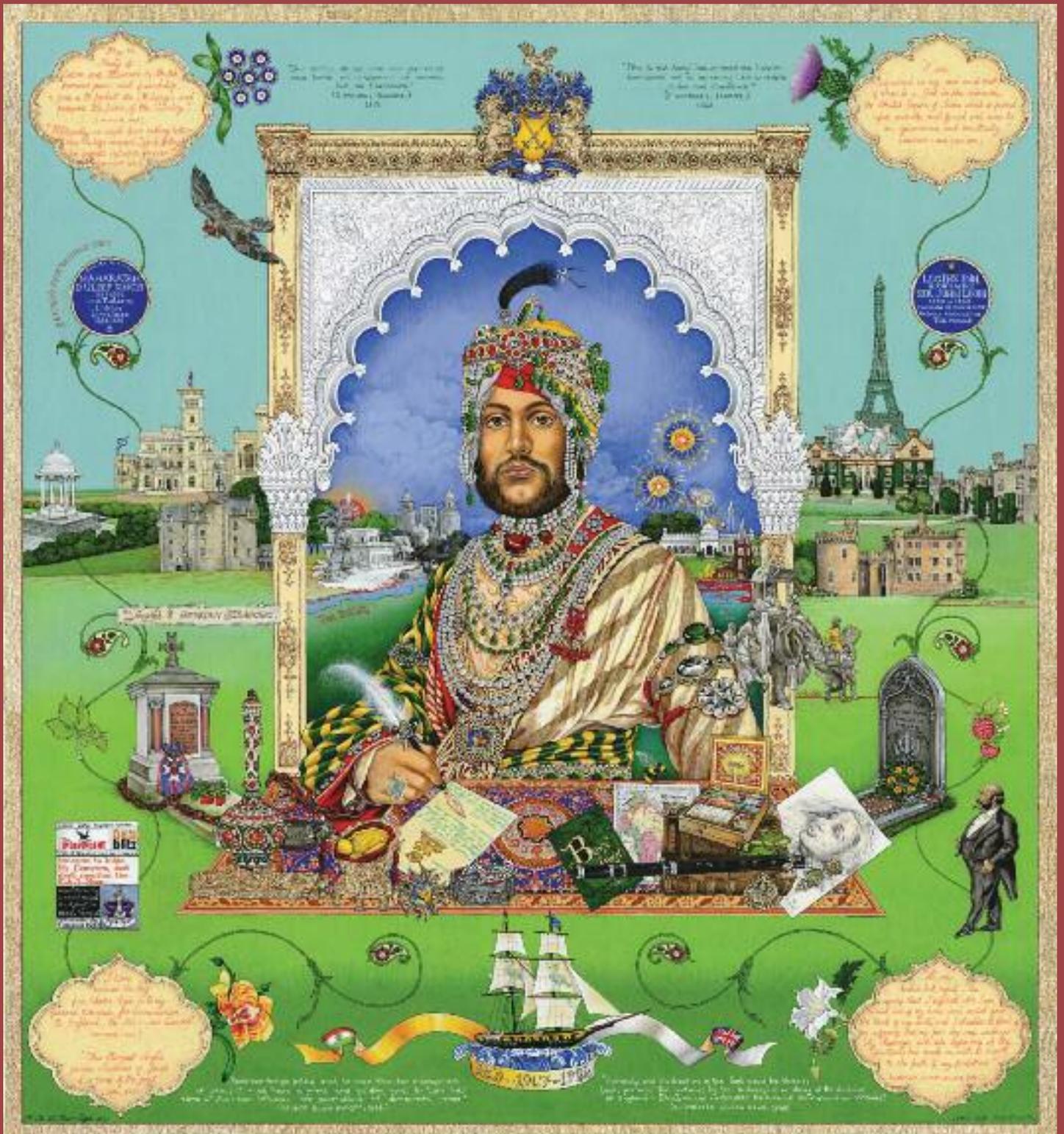
5000 year old Yew Tree,  
Fortingall Parish Church, Perthshire, Scotland.  
Photograph: Lorna Douglas

*We do not inherit the Earth from our Ancestors  
We borrow it from our children.*

Native American Proverb

# Duleep Singh:

## Historical Figure and Victim of Circumstance



This painting is inspired by a group of artefacts (mostly jewellery) in the National Museum of Scotland collections that are associated with the historical figure of Maharaja Duleep Singh whose life is intimately connected with British history. Essentially, it depicts the man behind these artefacts. But rather than being a straightforward portrait, it paints a narrative of his life, times and legacy to provide a context for exploring what these artefacts represent from different perspectives. That is, not just as the once personal property of a Sikh Maharaja now in public British possession, but as material objects belonging to a specific culture and time - namely, that of pre-Partition India, Colonialism and Empire. Interwoven into this visual history is Duleep Singh's special connection with Sir John Login, an individual who, possibly more than any other, influenced Duleep Singh's early upbringing. And whose involvement with the Maharaja, both as his guardian and as a key player in British interests in India, reflected the ambiguous nature of Duleep Singh's relationship with the British establishment.

On the one hand, it shows Duleep Singh's importance as an historical figure of tremendous significance and global relevance, whose life story is inextricably tied to and helped shape British-Indian, Punjabi, Anglo-Sikh history, politics and culture, past and present. On the other hand, it depicts Duleep Singh as the tragic, human figure. An innocent individual and victim of circumstance who became a casualty of war, caught up in the power games and politics of the British Empire. Overall, it is a tribute to the Maharaja who became Britain's first resident Sikh. Appropriately, this landmark event in Britain's history celebrated its 160th anniversary in 2014, the same year the painting was officially unveiled by the National Museum of Scotland.

Born 1838, in the Royal citadel of Lahore, Duleep Singh was the last ruler of the independent Sikh Empire of Punjab in North West India, which was established by his father Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1801. He ascended the Sikh throne in 1843, aged five, initially under the Regency of his mother Maharani Jindan Kaur. However, in 1846, following a military conflict known as the First Anglo-Sikh War, she was exiled from the Lahore Court and imprisoned by the British East India Company who, seeking to expand their trade and the territories they already ruled over in India, had seized the opportunity of Ranjit Singh's death to strengthen their military presence and power in Northern India; and to gain control of his Kingdom of Punjab - a region considered the gateway to India and, therefore of immense strategic and economic importance.

A British representative was placed at Lahore under a formal Treaty, which was to offer security for Punjab under British protection and ensure that the child Maharaja would be given full control of his domains when he came of age. However, in 1849, Sikh defeat in a subsequent military conflict known as the Second Anglo-Sikh War, resulted in British annexation of Punjab - one of

the richest Kingdoms of its times. Like his mother before him, Duleep Singh was exiled from his homeland. Removed from his family and the Sikh community, he was entrusted to the care of Sir John Login, a Scottish Surgeon in the employment of the British East India Company, with whom he resided in the Christian missionary centre of Fatehgarh before being taken to Britain in 1854 at the age of 16. There, he was bought up as an English Christian aristocrat under the continued guardianship of Sir John Login and the watchful eye of the British Government.

Duleep Singh soon became a curiosity of Victorian society and a favourite of Queen Victoria's household, dividing his time between Scotland and England where he remained for most of his life and eventually raised a family - but still very much under the control of the British authorities, as a political pawn. When the Indian Mutiny (or First War of Indian Independence, as it is now known) broke out in 1857, the British Government regarded Duleep Singh as a greater threat to their rule there, fearing that he might be adopted as a figurehead of the Indian Rebellion. After the Mutiny, in 1858, direct control of India was

transferred from the East India Company to the British Crown. And in 1861 the British Government finally permitted Maharani Jindan Kaur (whom they no longer considered to be a threat to their foreign policy in India) to meet and renew her relationship with her son again. She rekindled Duleep Singh's pride in his past Sikh heritage and influenced him to lobby the British Government to honour past promises and reinstate him as rightful ruler of Punjab. Although supported to some extent by Login and Queen Victoria, his petitions to the Government and through the press largely fell on deaf ears. After failed efforts to rally support from foreign European powers (as well as Indian Princes) and following the British Government's active sabotaging of any attempts he made to return to Punjab, Maharaja Duleep Singh left England for Paris where he died a couple of years later; a broken man, in ill health, alone and penniless in a Parisian hotel room in 1893.

**The work is a detailed, symbolic portrait of Duleep Singh, executed in our signature, eclectic, contemporary Indian miniature style.** Rather than being just a physical likeness of the Maharaja, it uses various imagery to say something about his character, life, times and legacy. At the centre of the work is the main figure of the Maharaja, depicted as we imagine he would and should have been had he not been deposed and exiled by the British - i.e. turbaned, wearing the imperial plume of kingship and bedecked in all the finery of the Lahore Court, including some of the most famous jewels of the Sikh Kingdom of Punjab (and indeed in history) such as the legendary Koh-i-nor diamond and Timur Ruby. He is framed by an archway composed of architectural details from Buckingham Palace and his UK residence, Elveden Hall, which he partly decorated in royal, Indian, style. This Anglo-Indian structure symbolises the dual cultural aspects of his identity and upbringing. Inside the archway are buildings and other details pertaining to his life in India, including a blood stained Sutlej River

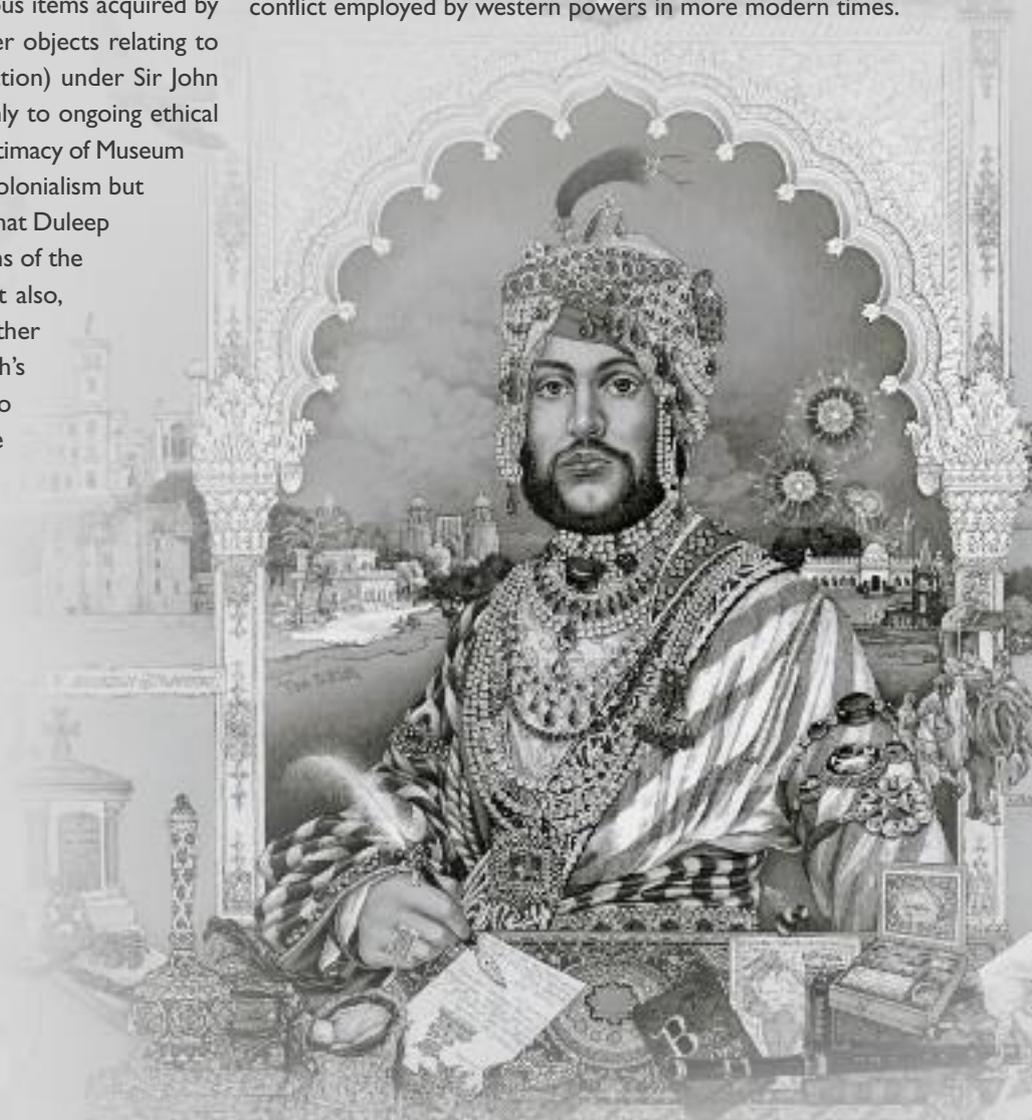


Like his mother  
before him,  
Duleep Singh  
was exiled from  
his homeland.

*Duleep Singh was a casualty of war  
- not just in terms of the loss of his  
kingdom and material wealth, but also,  
his cultural heritage and spiritual identity.*

(symbolizing the Anglo Sikh Wars that marked the beginning of the end of the Sikh Empire of Punjab). Outside the archway is an English landscape containing monuments, buildings and objects relating to the life Duleep Singh would come to lead as a young boy exiled from his Kingdom and eventually living as an English Christian gentleman under the influence and tight control of the British Establishment. In front of the Maharaja is a table laid out with various artifacts that once belonged to the royal treasury of Lahore (representing a fraction of the precious items acquired by the British as 'spoils of war') as well as other objects relating to his formal education (essentially westernization) under Sir John Login. Collectively, these details refer not only to ongoing ethical debates about cultural ownership and the legitimacy of Museum objects acquired as a result of Empire and Colonialism but also, the idea (implied by the painting's title) that Duleep Singh was a casualty of war - not just in terms of the loss of his kingdom and material wealth, but also, his cultural heritage and spiritual identity. Further details in the painting, such as Duleep Singh's shackles; the Brighton's Chattri memorial to the fallen Indian soldiers of WWI; the three dates on the tall ship banner (representing British annexation of Punjab, Partition of India and Operation Blue Star respectively); and various historical quotes around the composition, reveal something about the complex nature of Duleep Singh's

relationship with the British and how the politics of Empire and colonialism impacted not only on his own life but modern day multicultural Britain. The imagery in the work has many more levels of interpretation, which offer glimpses into Duleep Singh's personality and character, for example, or comment on the parallels between the kind of political intrigue and attitudes of western superiority surrounding British conquest of India during Duleep Singh's time and the political strategies and rhetoric of conflict employed by western powers in more modern times.



Casualty of War:  
A Portrait of Maharaja Duleep Singh  
(Collection, National Museum of Scotland )

Image copyright The Singh Twins:  
[www.singhtwins.co.uk](http://www.singhtwins.co.uk)

The work of The Singh Twins first  
featured in this magazine 2001/2 issue 3

# Taking Offence & Thinking Anew

By Jagoda Perich-Anderson

It can seem nowadays as if we have to muzzle ourselves to avoid offending someone. It seems as if people have lost their sense of humour, their sense of proportion, and their ability to tolerate differences. From the inter-personal to the social, and all the way to the global levels of human interaction, it feels like there are more 'egg shells' strewn on the ground than ever before. Step wrong - say the politically incorrect thing, make an innocent but ignorant observation, tell a poorly considered joke or satirize someone's cherished beliefs - and the consequences can be dire.

Take the example from a few years back in Kent, England. An elected official, Councillor Ken Bamber, was legally forced to pay thousands of pounds in compensation to Brian Kelly who took offence at an ethnic Irish joke the Councillor told at a public event.

That was just the beginning. Soon, British journalist Douglas Murray took offence in writing about the fact that Kelly's feelings of offence had been better compensated than privates in the British armed forces. Readers, including Irish journalists, took offence at Murray's exhortation to readers to send in more Irish jokes as a way of putting things back into proportion.

A tempest in a teapot? Perhaps but it quickly escalated into a perfect storm.

Why did Kelly take such offence? Put another way, why are ethnic jokes (or any that make fun of a select group) considered offensive? It is because they rely on exploiting negative stereotypes without the mitigating benefit of trusting that the joke teller appreciates the fullness - both good and bad aspects - of the group being lampooned. This is why people are allowed to make fun of their own kind but don't tolerate it well when others do so. When there's a power differential, as occurred between Kelly and Bamber, the instigating offence is compounded. It requires a response to rebalance the power. This is what Kelly did by taking Bamber to court.

Social scientists studying the origin and expression of moral emotions - our sense of dignity, fairness and justice - say that humans are wired to scan for and protect against possible harm to themselves, loved ones and affinity groups. Taking offence is a behavioural reaction to defend against a real or perceived threat. The threat is often initially felt as an insult and disrespect.

**humans are wired to scan for and protect  
against possible harm to themselves,  
loved ones and affinity groups.**

It might not be directly aimed at us yet we might feel a bond or empathy with the target and feel the insult as keenly as if it were. Whether intentional or unintentional, insults leave their mark, provoking a defensive response. As with the joke incident, once offence has been taken, escalation is sure to follow unless it's nipped in the bud.

**We take offence when we perceive that:**

- **We (or someone we care about) were not paid the proper respect we believe is due (threatens self esteem or positive identity)**
- **Our rights, rules or cherished beliefs were not respected (threatens traditions and core values)**
- **Our sense of right and wrong was disregarded (threatens our sense of morality)**
- **We were blocked from our right to achieve goals or access opportunities (threatens our well-being, self-determination and survival)**
- **Our personal or affinity group's behaviour is criticized or ridiculed (threatens our norms and legitimacy)**
- **We were unjustly blamed for misdeeds we either didn't commit or don't define as such (threatens our sense of justice or righteousness)**

Are people more disrespectful in these times? Have they truly become less tolerant? More prone to hair-trigger reactions at the slightest provocation? More likely to justify defensive, even violent, responses on the basis of real or perceived egregious offences?

According to social psychology professor Jonathan Haidt, the same evolutionary forces that make us cooperative also make us defensive and vigilant to insult.

*"Morality binds and blinds."*

– Jonathan Haidt

Haidt's research shows that human beings have developed strong group tendencies, what he calls "groupishness." Historically, from a survival perspective, group cooperation helped people obtain food and shelter more efficiently as well as defend against common foes. In modern times, groupishness explains our attraction to group-oriented pursuits such as sports, politics and religion. While binding us to these collective organizations with a shared morality and viewpoint, groupishness also sets us against those we perceive as being part of opposing groups.

Consider how our tendency toward groupishness is impacted by the global economy and World Wide Web. One result is fluid and pervious borders and boundaries. People all over the world can now peek into our back yard as it were. Once protected and cherished cultural practices are now open for all to see and judge. Furthermore, the forces of globalization require some groups to change in ways they don't like, may not be ready for or threaten their sense of identity, associated beliefs, and preferred way of life.

People who feel threatened tend to become defensive and entrenched. Ironically, the internet facilitates entrenchment even as it creates opportunities to expand our knowledge. It's easy to subscribe only to blogs, news feeds and websites that support our views and ignore the rest. This provides social proof that our beliefs have value and reinforces them.

When people feel threatened, they tend to close ranks and remain on high alert, constantly scanning for possible harm to themselves, their family or their group. This reaction is both a mental and physical state due to how the human brain works.

When our brain senses a threat - and we're wired to be especially alert to danger - it sends chemical messages to parts of our body that release stress hormones such as adrenaline and cortisol. These hormones hijack our ability to think. It all happens at a subconscious level before we have a chance to determine the seriousness of the threat. From an individual survival standpoint, this instantaneous physiological response can mean the difference between life and death. For an intact group, it can mean continuation or annihilation of that particular group identity.

## Once protected and cherished cultural practices are now open for all to see and judge.

Incidentally, positive stimuli - a reward or compliment, compassion and understanding - trigger the release of dopamine, oxytocin and serotonin which give us feelings of well being.

Highly effective leaders intuitively understand how to tap into our emotional brain. They know how to stir us up and keep us that way. They encourage their followers to take offence in defence of their group. They inspire people toward a future vision greater than themselves. Rallying cries, reminders of former wrongs and insults, repeated stories of the greatness of their group and the evil that resides in the other, promises of glory or redemption - these and similar techniques all get those hormones flowing and help forge strong bonds of kinship.

The longer this continues, the more the brain forges neural pathways that reinforce beliefs and their supporting behaviours. The brain likes patterns and it rewards us when we add information that it can readily sort and store in recognizable mental file drawers. The reward is a feeling of comfort and of certainty. It feels right.

Most of us want to maintain that good feeling. We like consistency between our beliefs, perceptions and experience. New information that doesn't readily fit into our existing mental file drawers feels uncomfortable. We have to work harder to

## Even small gestures of conciliation can make the difference between escalation and communication

assimilate it even if we are interested and open to new ways of thinking.

Here is the question: is it possible, given our brain's physiology and proclivities toward groupishness, to moderate our behaviour to avoid escalating into unproductive conflict? The answer is yes.

We can learn how to manage our emotions and behaviour.

Over extended periods of time, each of us has the ability to either reinforce or reinterpret the original triggering event that led to feeling offended. Just as sub-conscious emotions can trigger behaviour, so can thinking change our emotions and the resulting responses. What we tell our brain is what it will do. The trick is to engage our neo-cortex, the thinking part of our brain, sooner rather than later to help us make prudent decisions if we wish to avoid or mitigate conflict.

The human brain is plastic - it is capable of learning and forming new neural pathways. It does this all the time. We are not only emotional creatures at the mercy of raging hormones. We are thinking beings. When we feel offended, we can pause and take a few deep breaths to rush blood to our neo-cortex so we can respond thoughtfully.

It is not too late to catch ourselves after a knee-jerk reaction to try to improve the situation. Even small gestures of conciliation can make the difference between escalation and communication: a change in our tone of voice; conceding that we shouldn't have said something or said it 'that' way; acknowledging we may have over-reacted to or misinterpreted the intent behind what was said or done. Taking a first small step just might trigger reciprocity in the other person.



Photo credit: Lorenzo Gaudenzi Creative Commons Licence via Photopin

## Some people will throw stones in your path. What you do with them makes a difference. Will you build a wall or a bridge?

Jagoda Perich-Anderson, M.A. is the author of [www.conflicttango.com](http://www.conflicttango.com), a blog aimed at helping people reduce stress and increase confidence in conflict situations. Jagoda brings over twenty years of experience facilitating work teams and diverse stakeholder groups to help them combine creativity and conflict management skills to empower innovative solutions to their challenging problems.

Source of Irish joke example: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1302662/People-joke-IS-offensive.html>

# Sharing Commitment

London, February 19<sup>th</sup> 2015



The text on the card we distributed as we walked...

## Why We Are Walking Together

*We are walking together as leaders and members of our different faiths, and as part of the family of humanity, to affirm our shared commitment to freedom, equality, democracy and respect for life.*

*We are walking together to express our common humanity, our concern for all people and our commitment to care for God's creation.*

*We are walking together to demonstrate our fellowship across our different faiths, for, though our paths may be different, our deepest values are the same.*

*We are walking together because we realise that injustice, cruelty and conflict find their opportunity when good people fail to stand up for justice, compassion and peace.*

*We are walking together because we understand that we are all responsible for each other's safety, dignity and freedom.*

*We are walking together in faith, knowing that the essence of faith is the service of God through the service of all life.*

In the dubious weather of a cold February morning we began to gather in the courtyard of London's Regents Park Mosque where we were warmly welcomed before setting off on our short pilgrimage. We came in our tens and hundreds, Christians, Muslims, Jews and supporters of all faiths and none to affirm our fellowship and demonstrate our shared commitment to the values of freedom, equality, democracy and respect for all life.

Our route took us from the Mosque along the city's main streets to the Central Synagogue and then to the precincts of Westminster Abbey and St Margaret's Church. At each venue we were greeted by a leader from the host faith with words of encouragement and teachings about co-operation and peace.

People of all ages came, strong walkers for whom the miles were easy, and young children and frail walkers who tenderly supported each other. People spoke to members of faiths they had scarcely encountered before. A couple of people said to me as we left the synagogue, 'That was nice; that was my first time ever inside a Jewish place of prayer'. For a moment the words of my teacher Rabbi Hugo Gryn went through my mind, when he reflected that, if only Jews and Christians had been inside each other's places of worship more often, then perhaps things would have gone differently when the Nazis occupied his home town of Berehovo in 1944. 'That I spend much of my time working for better understanding between religious groups', he wrote decades afterwards is 'because I know that you can only be safe and secure in a society that practices tolerance, cherishes

harmony and can celebrate difference'. His teaching could have served as our creed.

By the time we reached Parliament Square it was pouring with rain, but the numbers did not decrease. While most of the group was welcomed in St Margaret's, a delegation was received in the grounds of the House of Commons by the Speaker, the Right Honorable John Bercow MP. It was a fundamental aspect of our pilgrimage that we should affirm together the core values of democracy. It was therefore especially significant that it was the Speaker who welcomed us, since his very position symbolizes the essential importance of equality, the freedom of speech and the

creative engagement of contrasting points of view. The moment when we stood together with him, Christian, Muslim and Jewish leaders, by the doors of the world's most venerable Parliament, will always express to me the core ideals of respect for difference while working with and for each other, for our common safety, liberty, dignity and wellbeing: the hallmark of this country and all true democracy.

The last stage of our walk took us across the Thames to St Thomas's Hospital. We gathered in the room of prayer where we were offered organ donation cards as a way

of expressing our commitment to the sanctity of all human life. The pilgrimage ended with a silent meditation. I was touched as I looked at the full pews and dripping umbrellas to see how many people had followed us for the full four hours of our pilgrimage.

The press also accompanied us all the way. The BBC, the French, Italian, Arabic and Israeli media filmed and made interviews all

'because I know that you can only be safe and secure in a society that practices tolerance, cherishes harmony and can celebrate difference'

*“This was no time to stand silently by”*

along the route. ‘Don’t be disappointed if there isn’t as much coverage as you hope’, I’d been warned, ‘It is after all a “good news” story!’ But there was something about this particular good news which was evidently experienced as significant. It was as if, after Paris and Copenhagen, people were longing for an alternative, a narrative which would demonstrate not only that faiths could stand side beside, but also that their leaders and followers would show the courage and commitment to work together through thick and thin to preserve and deepen those values on which the safety and happiness of all of us depend. This was no time to stand silently by.

In fact, it was with this very thought that the walk originated. In the horror following the murders of the staff of Charlie Hedbo and Jews shopping for the Sabbath in a kosher supermarket in Paris a number of us began to reach out to each other across the boundaries of our religions. We had formed a friendship over the first two series of residential courses created by the Coexist Foundation for interfaith leadership. The time had come to put the trust created between us to the test: were we able to talk to each other in the wake of these shocking events, especially Jews and Muslims? The emails began tentatively, mainly at first among the Jewish participants. Our communities were shocked and afraid; what might happen next? Others began to join the conversation.

At first it was felt that we shouldn’t or couldn’t issue a joint statement. I wasn’t satisfied by this. What would it mean if we were silent now? I suggested a walk, rather than words. But the route had to be iconic: we had to visit those places which most powerfully represented our identities and values.

A leadership team soon developed. The Very Revd John Witcombe, Dean of Coventry, joined us because, in his words: ‘Bad things happen when good people don’t stand up and be counted’. Sheikh Ibrahim Mogra lead the Muslim community, expressing his conviction that ‘above our religions, ethnicities, cultures, social and financial standings is our common humanity and respect for life and care for God’s creation’. Reverend Margaret Cave, Team Rector in East Greenwich was a wonderful source of practical guidance. ‘It is good and right’, she said, ‘that in these troubled times people of faith show solidarity with their sisters and brothers as people of love and peace’.

As we were preparing for the walk, there came the news of the murders in Copenhagen. It was more urgent than ever to act.

What did we achieve? Those of us who walked measured out the contours of our moral and spiritual commitments: to stand by each other, and stand up for our deepest shared humanity whatever the circumstances. It is hard to know the effect of the walk on the thousands who watched us pass by. One man hectored me: didn’t I know that ‘they’ were murderers and rapists? How naïve and stupid could I be! But many greeted us warmly, and one woman simply wept.

We don’t change the world by pilgrimages, but by the actions we take afterwards.



Photographs: Richard Verber, World Jewish Relief

*I follow the Way of Love  
And where Love’s caravan takes its path  
There is my religion, my faith.  
Ibn ‘Arabi, Sufi saint and mystic*

*I am cognizant of the interrelatedness of  
all communities...We are caught in an  
inescapable network of mutuality, tied in  
a single garment of destiny.  
Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King*

*We cannot stem the tempest of evil by  
taking refuge in temples...Our task is to  
act, not only to enjoy; to change, not  
only to accept...What is it that makes us  
worthy of life, if not our compassion and  
ability to act?  
Rabbi Dr. Abraham Joshua Heschel*

# Sacrificing the self

Rob Hain

*“In relation to art, when we encounter something exquisite, it can often be the result of inspiration.”*

I was raised in a loving Christian home and never really questioned my relationship to God until my early twenties. I drifted along rather aimlessly, driven more by a desire for hedonistic pleasure than any real interest or grasp of why I was brought into existence.

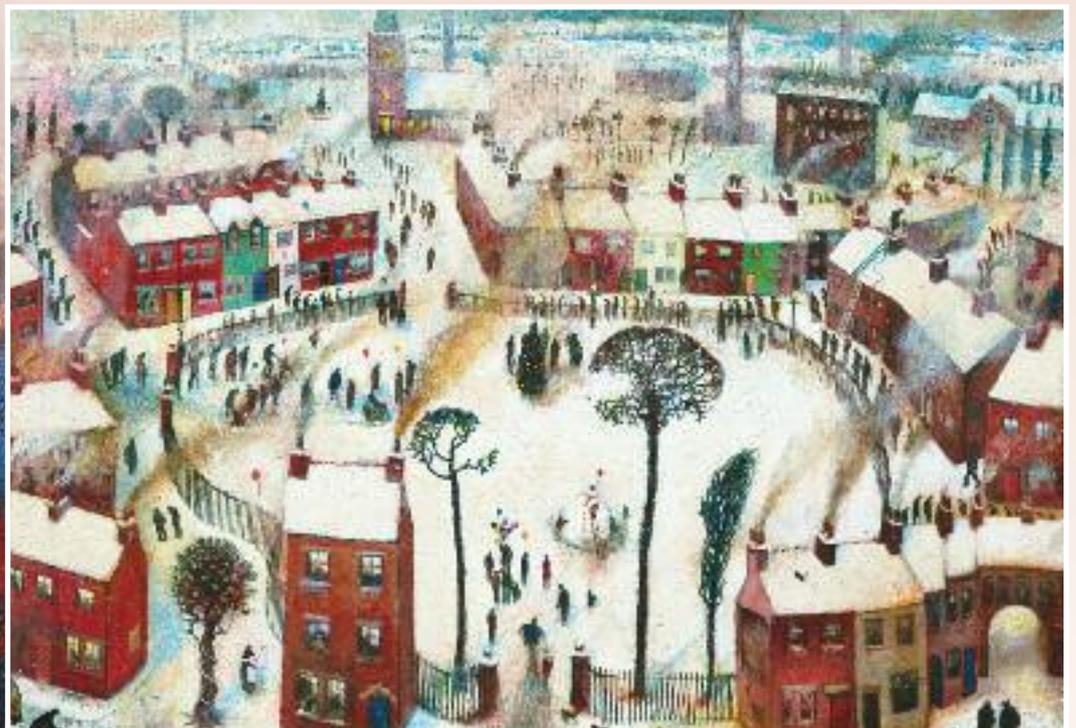
A near-fatal motorbike crash made me do a re-think, which led me to art college and shortly afterwards to the Bahá'í Faith. I studied at Banbury in the early seventies, in a post-hippie, pre-punk environment. It was in such a culturally turbulent time that I tried to equate my beliefs with my art.

Beyond the stories in the press about the persecution of my fellow Baha'is in Iran and other countries throughout the world, my faith is only recently coming out of obscurity and becoming a religion worthy of study, as well as an instrument of change, whether that be personal or universal.

The Bahá'í Faith embraces diversity. Bahá'u'lláh, the founder of the Bahá'í Faith, declared that there is absolutely no difference between the founders of the world's religions. The reason why they appear to diverge in their utterances is due to the varying requirements of the ages in which they appear, in an ever-advancing civilisation. In other words, God is not in competition with himself!

Everyone desires world peace and one way of achieving this would be to seek the path to unity. The divisions of class, religion, race and gender should not prevent this happening. Bahá'u'lláh foretells of a 'Most Great Peace' that will come in the future and has provided us with the blueprint.

In relation to art, when we encounter something exquisite, it can often be the result of inspiration. Divine inspiration excels because it sacrifices the self. Subjugation of the ego is a central part of my working ethos. Often children exhibit this quality effortlessly and it is this state that I am trying to re-establish in the way I approach every aspect of my life.



*The Finishing Touches*

faith and the artist

When I paint I try to do so by tackling a subject in as thorough a way as possible. I gather all the information I need before composing a drawing which will act as a guide through the painting process.

I admire the work of L. S. Lowry; an artist who elevated the industrial north of England into poetry through his urban landscapes. Lowry was particularly interested in painting figures; hundreds of figures, all with a part to play on the stage of life. Where I differ from him stylistically, it is in the use of strong colour and the employment of an aerial perspective, or bird's eye view.

There is a painting from 1986 entitled 'Embarkation', where I wanted to do several things but needed the right kind of compositional framework to achieve it. One of the intriguing things about numerology, as expressed in the Bahá'í Faith, is its relationship with the number nine.

Nine has many properties associated with it and I wanted to explore the possibility of a composition based on a nine-pointed star. 'Embarkation' has as its subject a gathering of people leaving from a harbour. The idea is a universal one: of passing from this life to the next; of recognising God and joining his followers; of moving from one state of being to another.

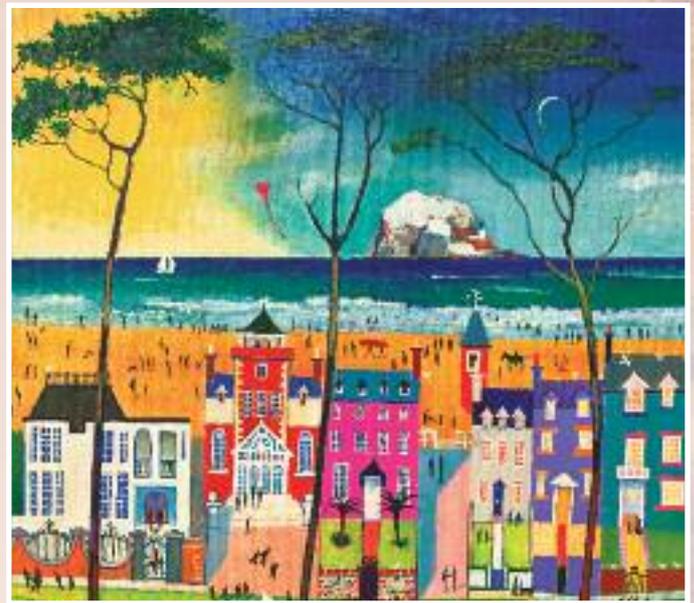
The device I have used to illustrate this transition is a boat, or more archaically, an ark. The figure on the donkey is representative of the divine Messenger, leading the followers to their point of embarkation. A crowd of people looks on in mute wonder at the spectacle.

I have a particular fondness for showing a chorus of onlookers, as in a Greek play, who are there as witnesses to the strange event. There is also fanciful architecture and exotic plants and animals. The compositional star dictates how the lines appear and what might be suggested by the angles that are created.

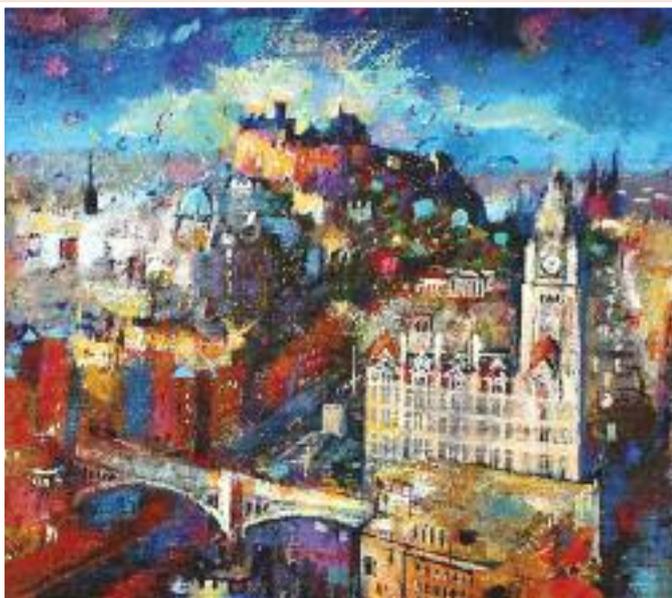
There is a surreal element to the painting which is entirely intentional. Sometimes dream language has the ability to take us to imaginary places that are symbolic of our desire to seek our true home.



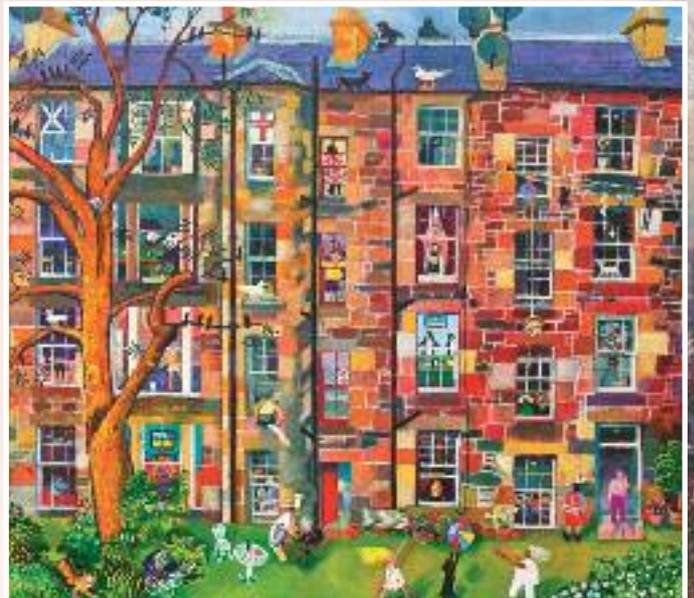
*Embarkation*



*Holidays, North Berwick*



*Festival City*



*Rear Window*

# Finney

No nights to speak of in the dim limbo  
of the prenatal unit. Outside, the orange  
London sky looks numb as my feet while I  
trace constellations on my counterpane,  
to keep my unborn son entranced with life.

The midwife brings a drink that tastes old  
and dirty as meteor dust, to do me good,  
exaggerates the brilliance of her own stars  
down under, flashing Latin names to my boy,  
as if the ancient tongue could charm him

into staying in my too small womb. He's bright  
as his name, my Finney we say, if we promise  
the stars, he'll know to hang on till he's born.  
But when he lies in his coffin crib, my universe  
is reduced to a quenched apology. I bury him

in the midwife's imagined sky, distant as the day  
before he died. Cry off living for twenty years,  
cringe from other people's kids as if they'd catch  
my son's death from me. If I want to see the heavens  
I look down. Avoid the thin atmosphere of hope,

almost. Until, my ghost child old enough to leave  
home, I follow him to earth's end. Look up.  
Corona Australis, a wreath fit to crown  
a stillborn boy shines back, a new glamour  
through old clouds, his ever expanding gap life.

**Rebecca Bilkau**