



ISSUE 33

faith

INITIATIVE

EMBRACING DIVERSITY

“Let us reflect on what is truly of value in life, what gives meaning to our lives, and set our priorities on that basis.”

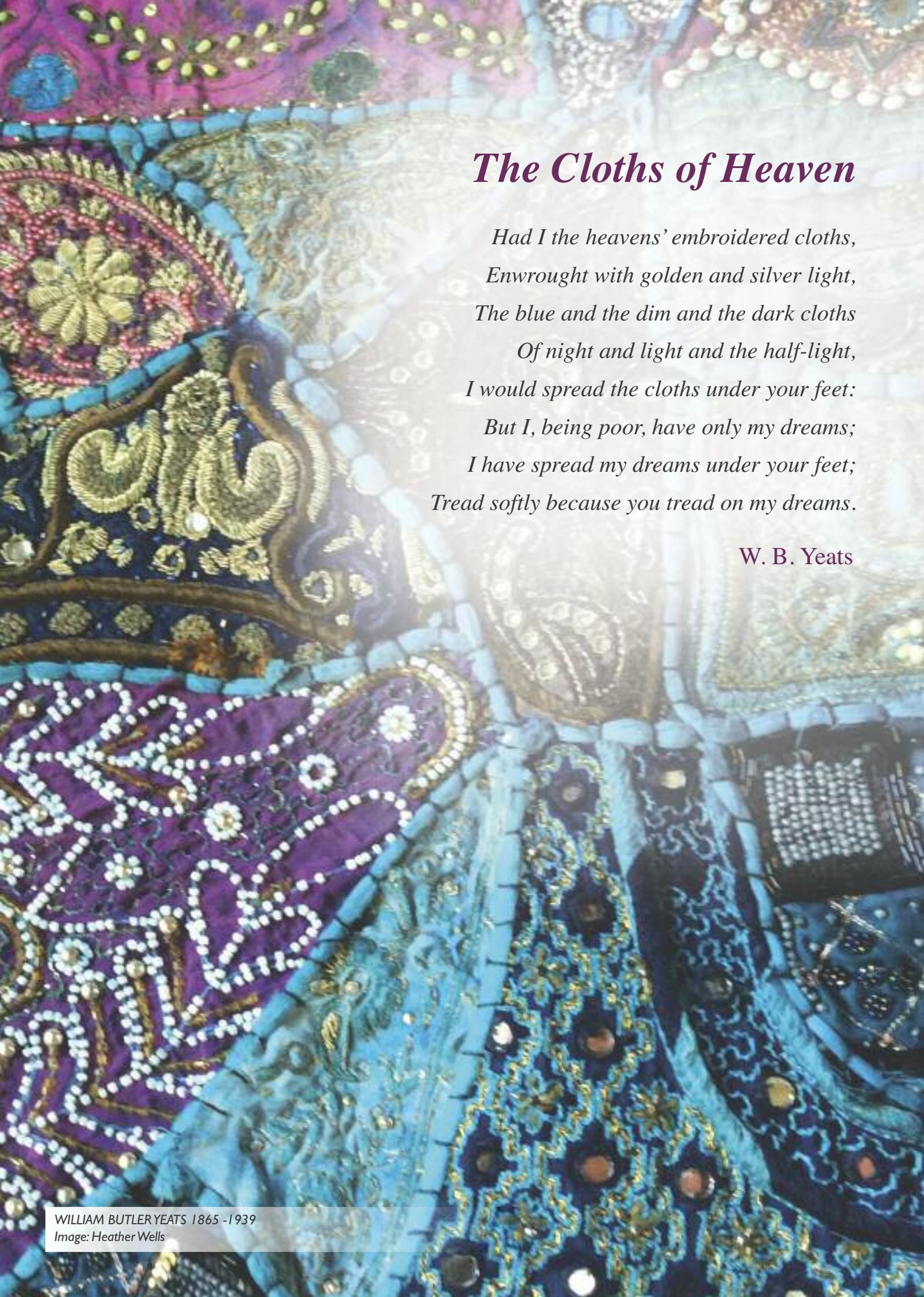
HIS HOLINESS THE 14TH DALAI LAMA

Laudato si
Ecological Theology

waging peace
Interfaith Encounter

principles, rights and values
Religious Charities

WINNER:
SHAP AWARD 2011



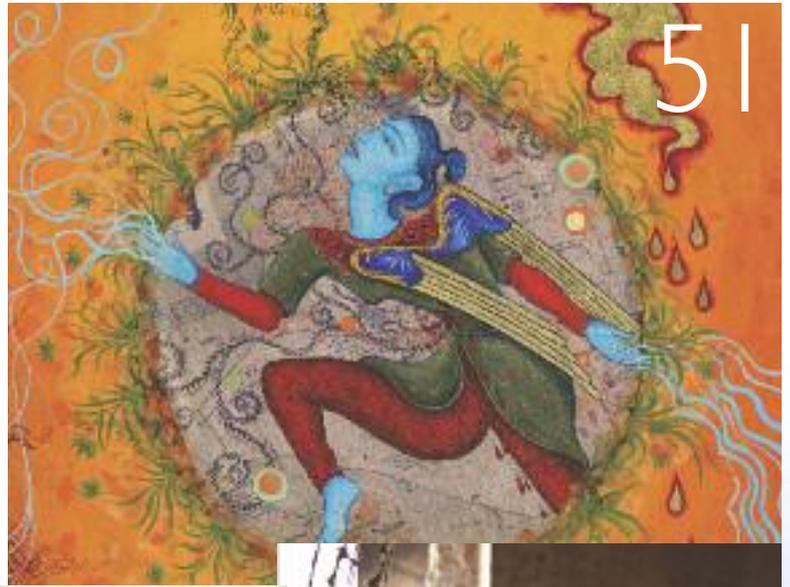
The Cloths of Heaven

*Had I the heavens' embroidered cloths,
Enwrought with golden and silver light,
The blue and the dim and the dark cloths
Of night and light and the half-light,
I would spread the cloths under your feet:
But I, being poor, have only my dreams;
I have spread my dreams under your feet;
Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.*

W. B. Yeats

contents

- 04 **EDITORIAL** - Heather Wells
- 05 **KEYNOTE**
Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh - *Shaking off the Silence*
- 07 **CAFOD REFLECTION**
Pope Francis' Encyclical
Laudato Si' An Invitation to Dialogue
- 09 **A JEWISH REFLECTION**
Pope Francis' Encyclical
Rabbi Jonathan Wittenberg - *'There is no Planet B'*
- 11 **RELIGIOUS CHARITIES**
- 11 **Khalsa Aid**
Simrat Kailey - *United in Humanity*
- 12 **Christian Aid**
Jack Arthey - *Visualising a Better World*
- 16 **Ahmadiyya Muslim Association**
Aamir Sikander - *Responding to cries for help*
- 17 **World Jewish Relief**
Richard Verber - *Strengthening the hand... rebuilding lives*
- 19 **MAKING CONNECTIONS**
Janice Ross - *Random Conversations*
- 20 **SACRED SPACE**
Roy Henderson - *Encountering the Holy*
- 21 **POEM**
Wendy White - *Love*
- 22 **FAITH COMMUNITY**
Lorna Douglas - *Love calls to Love*
- 25 **LANGUAGE OF ART**
Rachel Boak - *Sacred Stitches - Ecclesiastical Textiles*
- 29 **POEM**
Sheena Blackhall - *The Fortingall Yew*
- 30 **GARDEN OF REFLECTION**
Eimear O'Callaghan - *New Light Through Old Gates*
- 35 **SACRED MUSIC**
- 35 Berthold Auerbach - *Quote*



- 36 Revd. Dr Sam Wells - *Seeing Beyond the Everyday...*
- 39 Shiban Akbar OBE - *Responsive and Remote Divinity*
- 40 1914 Sikhs Campaign - *Food of the Soul*
- 42 **FOCUS**
Marcus Braybrooke - *A Daily Call to Peace*
- 46 **INTERFAITH ENCOUNTER**
Paul-Gordon Chandler - *Waging Peace*
- 49 **FAITH AND THE ARTIST**
Siona Benjamin - *Similarites of Repair*

editorial

In light of the tragic events in Paris on the night of Friday 13th November, I abandoned my prepared editorial - in which, following a visit to Beijing, I reflected on the legacy of the Single-Child Policy in China, and the massive gender imbalance created due to the cultural preference for boys - to give special focus to the thoughtful and compassionate ways in which our many contributors of all faiths and none, are working to combat the effects of such atrocities. We have been in publication since 2001 and every issue provides insights into imaginative and mindful endeavours to overcome barriers of difference. Efforts have gone beyond a desire for tolerance, and aimed for the higher goal of understanding and peaceful co-existence. In this issue alone contributors highlight work in areas where violence, oppression, discrimination, poverty, prejudice, homelessness and loneliness are everyday experiences. They can be seen to promote a deep healing in what some may feel is a dark and fractured world. Their efforts deny the notion that violence can only be met with violence; that the power of despotic, oppressive regimes, and the extreme ideology of fanatics, is an all-consuming force, instilling a paralysing fear that drains all sense of hope. Their work is full of light, creative imagination, diverse energy and the will with which to restore humanity. Where the terrorist seeks only to destroy, each contributor can be seen to build. Where the terrorist conveys a mind-set closed to the possibilities of unity, each contributor provides insight into how it may be achieved: whether it is through art, poetry, music, the sharing of uplifting religious insights, interfaith gatherings, environmental awareness or direct charitable action at grass roots level, each is a channel towards a more peaceful world. All our contributors convey the essence of hope that is essential for humankind to live in a free and just society that seeks to care for those in need. This sense of hope must be extended to the thousands of refugees escaping regimes that would destroy them. Investigators are saying that some of the terrorists who operated in Paris, have entered Europe from Syria via routes taken by refugees. Hence there is a fear that refugees with a real need for sanctuary will be turned away, or worse, face long-term imprisonment through no fault of their own. It is with this in mind that I quote a newspaper headline a few days after the terrorist attack in Paris: 'It is important that we do not close our hearts and start equating the issue of refugees with terrorism' President Barack Obama (The Guardian 17.11.2015) But I shall leave the final word with Louis Pasteur who lived in the 19th century but could well have written these words for today:

One does not ask of one who suffers: what is your country and what is your religion? One merely says: you suffer, that is enough for me.

Louis Pasteur 1822-1895

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

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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- Religion and Human Rights
- Religious Renunciation

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by Rebecca Irvine Bilkau
Photograph: Michael Bilkau

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

Cited:
Mandalas: Spiritual Circles for Harmony & Fulfilment
Laura J. Watts (2002) Pub. Hermes House,
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Shaking S. / off the Silence

Political leaders, institutions, NGOs and many other agencies are forging important infrastructures for the protection, welfare, education, and employment of girls and women. Laws are being set up to guarantee sex equality. Women writers, artists, poets, and film directors, are trying to raise social awareness. Yet, particularly throughout the East, we find gender injustice. For centuries, daughters, wives, and sisters have been secondary to sons, husbands, and brothers. Sons have been deemed essential for carrying on the family name, property, land, and religious functions. Contemporary economic and technological priorities have made the patriarchal compulsion for sons even stronger. The combination of ancient androcentric values and new globalization has only reinforced the devaluation of girls and further entrenched gender prejudices. Daily news items include horrific statistics on female feticides, sex trafficking, dowry deaths, honor killings, harassment of women on buses, in classrooms, laboratories, and other workplaces.

It is a paradox therefore that the female has always been vibrantly present on the Eastern religious landscape. Transcendent wisdom in Mahayana Buddhism is configured as the Great Mother, Prajnaparamita. In China, Kuan-yin seen with her magic pearl, magical peach, and vase full of magical liquid has been worshipped as the goddess of compassion and mercy. The Japanese flag symbolically displays Amaterasu, the Shinto sun goddess revered as the progenitor of the Emperors of Japan, who sent her grandson to rule the earth with the three imperial regalia, the mirror, the jewel, and the sword. The invincible Durga, female energy (shakti), seated on her lion is a popular Hindu goddess who destroyed the demons to maintain the balance and righteousness of the world. The feminine as a theological imaginary and spiritual paradigm permeates Sikh scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib. In each of these Eastern traditions, the female plays a vital role in the ontological, epistemological, moral, and soteriological dimensions. One would think these strong female archetypes would translate into the everyday social, political, and economic life of men and women in their respective cultures. After all isn't there a reciprocal relationship between our ideals and reality? It seems not: this rich resource that is so close to us as women

of faith, remains at a distance.

I believe that we have not absorbed what we see and read, hear and sing about her because we have not related with her from a 'feminist' perspective. Invariably religious traditions have been understood, interpreted, and practiced from a male subjectivity, which has resulted in male-dominated identity formations, social relations, and power structures. So entrenched is the 'masculinist' that the mainstream rejects a 'feminist' approach as a western gimmick, and in scholarly circles, it is reduced to a tangential lexicon. We have to ask ourselves: how do we retrieve her? How do we empower ourselves with her power?

In reality it basically entails understanding literary and visual texts in their expansive and inclusive imagery, and using that understanding in everyday practices to empower both men and women in their private and public lives.

In order to avail her vast potential I recommend the following:

1) We come together. We women – Hindu, Buddhist, Tao, Confucian, Shinto, Sikh, Muslim, Christian or Jewish — barely know one another. The "divide-and-rule" policies of the Masters with their categories of "monotheism" "polytheism" "atheism" or "monism" have kept us splintered far too long. How can we make use of the windows of opportunity when we do not even communicate with one another? We may be born into different religions or speak different languages, but we suffer from similar androcentric codes. Through exchange and engagement we shake off the silence we are taught to honour and become confident. We gain insight into our subjugation and oppression, as well as develop strategies together to overcome our victimization.

2) Let us read our own and one another's scriptures. Traditionally male priests, along with elite male scholars and exegetes, officiate as readers; they intermediate between the subjects and their text. Covertly or overtly women are barred from reading texts exalting her. It never ceases to amaze me that Devi-Bhagavat Purana, a ninth/tenth century Sanskrit text lavishly lauding the Goddess, stipulates in its final chapter that that very text not touch the ears or lips of women (along with the low caste)! Our access to the sacred texts is critical. At some level,

many of us have developed a fear of holy books, the quintessence of every religion. Reading for some is complex, comprising the visual, perceptual, syntactic, and semantic processes. Therefore reading “Scripture” — especially another’s — becomes a daunting affair. Often those within the tradition hold such reverence for their holy book that they get anxious about any intimacy with it. Some of us may unnecessarily fear that by reading another’s holy book we may lose faith in our own. Actually when we read scriptures from other religions, not only do we experience what is important to them, but we also end up getting a better sense of ourselves, of our neighbors, and of the globe we inhabit. In their own and different ways, the Vedas, the Hebrew Bible, the Tao Te Ching, the New Testament, the Dhammapada, the Holy Qur’an, the Shobogenzo, and the Guru Granth Sahib provide us with kaleidoscopic glimpses into the beyond, and simultaneously make us feel much more at home with one another. Women’s authenticity and subjectivity is in there — but remains concealed.

3) Therefore it is imperative we read and hear scriptures from our own personal perspective. Since each of us belongs to a tradition, our understanding is shaped by our personal proclivities, by the immediate families we grow up in, by the long and complex past of our society, by our political state, and by all that we have been hearing from our religious leaders and exegetes for generations. Our intellectual habits have been constructed by the muscular patriarchal tradition to which each of us belongs. The protagonist Sita in Deepa Mehta’s film *Fire* (1996) puts it perfectly, “Somebody just has to press my button, this button marked tradition, and I start responding like a trained monkey.” We read texts with meanings and expectations that go way back into our past. So each of us must self-examine our biases. We must ask ourselves: what are the norms we inherited from our families and society at large? When we get rid of our internalized assumptions and prejudices will the feminine principle we read, hear, see, and extol make her way into us.

4) We must focus on passages, images, symbols, and metaphors suffused with feminine significance. For instance the fundamental Sikh theological precept of the transcendent One is identified in both genders: “ape purakh ape hai nar —Itself male, itself is female” (GGS: 1020). And yet exegetes, scholars, and translators have reinforced only the male and ignored the female dimension. Likewise, images of conception, gestation, giving birth, and lactation are unambiguously and powerfully present throughout Sikh scripture, but again male commentators, not finding much significance in them, simply ignore them. We need to bring the feminine principle to the fore, and read the words intimately so we can begin to experience her qualities and actions in our own self.

5) Make sure however, that the ‘mother’ not be viewed as the only female symbol for the Divine. With the singular stress on the maternal paradigm, woman’s creative powers can be misconstrued as an automatic and mandatory process that turns women into

reproductive machines to beget sons. It is important that we do not equate the maternal potential with physical conception or limit the maternal to the domestic world. As the French philosopher Luce Irigaray says, it is not necessary that women give birth to children; they can give birth to many other things such as ‘love, desire, language, art, social things, political things, religious things.’ (Sexes and Genealogies, Columbia, 1993. p. 18). The ‘mother’ as a theological principle reveals the potential to create — physically, intellectually, emotionally, politically, and spiritually. She shatters the gender roles that assign production to men and reproduction to women; conferring a sense of reality on women’s creativity, it enables everybody to cultivate meaningful relationships with their past and future generations, and with their geological and cosmic community.

6) We must get rid of the persistent mind-body dualism. Feminist scholars have shown us the terrible consequences of this bipartite framework and its drastic corollaries on the devaluing of our bodies, of our life on earth, and of female gender and sexuality. Centuries-old taboos against the body in our patriarchal cultures have made us blind to see the spiritual female whose sexuality is healthy and wholesome. In the Guru Granth Sahib, she is the scriptural model who incarnates physical beauty and spiritual awakening and she can rapturously make love with the transcendent Reality. Her powerful imagery overturns fears of intimacy prevalent in our culture, and palpably endorses the “purity” of our body— nothing, nothing, is polluted about women’s bodies as we have been made to internalize over the centuries. She mirrors our potential; she inspires us to enter exciting new horizons with all of our human faculties.

7) Finally, I suggest we work hard to ensure that the vital female subjectivity in sacred texts and iconography is embodied in our religious performances. As our history has demonstrated, it will not be easy! Women are actively involved in devotional practices at home, yet they are rarely seen conducting public worship. Women may be in charge of cleaning sacred precincts and preparing meals, but they do not lead prayers or conduct rituals. Though we see the male leader in that position of power for a short time, we unconsciously take his power into the home and invest it into our fathers and husbands and brothers and sons. We cannot allow such one-sided projections.

And so we reach out for the feminine principle in our sacred texts and iconography — we face her directly, confidently, imbibing her capabilities in our body, mind, consciousness, spirit, and move on to take positions of authority and become shapers of our tradition. The Sikh place of worship is the Gurdwara, literally a door (dwara) to enlightenment (guru). So let us now shape a sacred space for her, for us, — for she is our mirror; she is our door.



Laudato Si'

An Invitation to Dialogue

Laudato Si', Pope Francis' new encyclical, is both a hymn of praise to God for the beauty and wonder of creation, and a challenge to the way we live. The encyclical letter is, unusually, addressed to every person on the planet, and invites us all into a dialogue about how best to care for our common home.

Pope Francis draws attention to the urgency of the ecological crisis facing us all. He explains that the Church is respectfully offering its own contribution both to the debate and to the call for action and change.

The encyclical first sets out the reality of the situation we face today – environmental degradation, deforestation and loss of biodiversity, loss of clean water supplies, and climate change. Citing the example of St Francis, who calls the earth his sister, the Pope writes,

'This sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her. We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will.'

But Francis does not see the ecological crisis as simply a crisis of the earth itself, for him it is not only a so-called 'green' issue. He links the ecological crisis with what he calls a social crisis. The cry of the earth and the cry of the poor are interwoven. All is interconnected. *'Everything is related, and we human beings are united as brothers and sisters on a wonderful pilgrimage, woven together by the love God has for each of his creatures and which also unites us in fond affection with brother sun, sister moon, brother river and mother earth.'*

He observes that there is, sadly, a global culture of indifference towards those who live in poverty, and a lack of interest in caring for the earth. But he believes that change is possible.

'Rapidification'

Pope Francis suggests that we are all in too much of a hurry, and that we are always looking for the next new thing, rather than considering the quality of life and the sustainability of our lifestyles. Instead of being focused in the moment and on the value of each aspect and element of God's creation, we are always rushing on, looking for what we don't have, seeking novelty and change for its own sake. We consume, waste and throw away on a huge scale, damaging both the environment and indeed ourselves.

'The continued acceleration of changes affecting humanity and the planet is coupled today with a more intensified pace of life and work which might be called "rapidification"... the goals of this rapid and constant change are not necessarily geared to the common good or to integral and sustainable human development.'

The second part of the encyclical explains how Catholic teaching understands the relationships between ourselves, our neighbours, God and the earth. Pope Francis admits that sometimes Christians have interpreted the Book of Genesis to mean that humanity has the right to 'dominion' over the earth and other creatures, understood as absolute power. And he says, *'Although it is true that we Christians have at times incorrectly interpreted the Scriptures, nowadays we must forcefully reject the notion that our being created in God's image and given dominion over the earth justifies absolute domination over other creatures.'*

He states that, rather than absolute power, we have in fact been given responsibility. We have a duty to care for and protect the earth and other creatures, who each have value in and of themselves. All creation sings a hymn of praise to the Creator God, each in its own way. We have no right to destroy and damage our common home, nor to disregard or treat our neighbour with indifference.

'The continued acceleration of changes affecting humanity and the planet is coupled today with a more intensified pace of life and work which might be called "rapidification"... the goals of this rapid and constant change are not necessarily geared to the common good or to integral and sustainable human development.'

'Disregard for the duty to cultivate and maintain a proper relationship with my neighbour, for whose care and custody I am responsible, ruins my relationship with my own self, with others, with God and with the earth. When all these relationships are neglected, when justice no longer dwells in the land, the Bible tells us that life itself is endangered.'

The Pope also analyses the human root causes of the ecological and social crisis. He addresses what he regards as the 'myths' underlying the issues we face. Firstly, the myth of constant and unlimited economic growth, which he says has seen us prioritise the creation of wealth over the quality of human life and over the protection of our common home. The myth of infinite or unlimited growth, he says, is built on a lie, *'It is based on the lie that there is an infinite supply of the earth's goods, and this leads to the planet being squeezed dry beyond every limit.'*

Secondly, the myth of limitless human power through technology. Pope Francis recognises the benefits of technology when it is used for the good of humanity, but warns against over-reliance on it, 'It has' he writes, 'become countercultural to choose a lifestyle whose goals are even partly independent of technology, of its costs and its power to globalize and make us all the same.'

Thirdly, the Pope reminds us of the immense inequalities between people, some of whom live in appalling poverty, whilst others enjoy a lifestyle of excessive consumption and waste. And he illustrates the link between our lifestyle choices and environmental damage. *'We should be particularly indignant at the enormous inequalities in our midst, whereby we continue to tolerate some considering themselves more worthy than others. We fail to see that some are mired in desperate and degrading poverty, with no way out, while others have not the faintest idea of what to do with their possessions, vainly showing off their supposed superiority and leaving behind them so much waste which, if it were the case everywhere, would destroy the planet.'*

Ways forward

Pope Francis is clear that the scale of the challenge requires a move away from short-term individualistic thinking towards a long-term communitarian approach. He criticises world leaders for their lack of leadership on the issue of climate change, reminding us all that the climate is a common good, and not just for now, but for generations to come. *'What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?'* he asks.

At CAFOD we have been excited by the questions and challenges posed by Pope Francis in this encyclical. As a humanitarian and development agency, we are very well aware of the impact of climate change on the poorest communities. When Pope Francis visited the Philippines after Typhoon Haiyan, early in 2015, he made reference to the human causes of climate change, *'It is man who has slapped nature in the face,'* he said.

But the encyclical is not just about the ecological crisis, it also poses deep questions about the nature of progress itself. Economic growth alone is not sufficient to tackle poverty and exclusion. And a focus on economic growth

and the maximisation of profit above all has led in many cases to the exploitation of both people and natural resources. How can we begin to build a world where both people and nature are respected, and where the scandal of poverty and inequality can be overcome? We need both to restore dignity to those who are living in poverty, and, at the same time, to protect our common home. We need new models of authentic development and integral ecology.

Ecological conversion

In order to meet the social and ecological challenges that we must face together, Pope Francis insists on the importance of dialogue, hence his addressing of the letter to people of every faith and of none. He calls on Christians to engage in this dialogue, and to undergo a profound conversion.

'It must be said that some committed and prayerful Christians, with the excuse of realism and pragmatism, tend to ridicule expressions of concern for the environment. Others are passive; they choose not to change their habits and thus become inconsistent. So what they all need is an "ecological conversion", whereby the effects of their encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in their relationship with the world around them. Living our vocation to be protectors of God's handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience.'

He reminds us that a life free from an obsession with material goods can be joyful and meaningful. He asks us to contemplate the wonder and beauty of the created world and to be completely present and attentive in the moment, rather than endlessly restless. We are in addition reminded of the importance of rest, and that 'less is more.'

Our love for God, for our neighbour and for the earth moves us to act, and the God of love accompanies us all on our journey. *'Let us sing as we go'* says Pope Francis. *'May our struggles and our concern for this planet never take away the joy of our hope.'*



'There is no Planet B'

Jonathan Wittenberg

Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si* marks a critical moment in the history of life itself. It is rare that anyone has the wisdom and courage to propose to such a massive audience, a comprehensive agenda for humanity, at once spiritual, moral, social, economic and environmental. It is done with love, knowledge and humility and whatever our faith or philosophy, we owe the Pope our gratitude. We also owe a duty to respond, because the letter calls for the participation of everyone, and no less is at stake than the survival of life on earth.

Pope Francis's understanding of the world is profoundly rooted in the Hebrew Bible: *'The earth is the Lord's'* and all life has intrinsic worth before God, a value irreducible solely to utilitarian quantification. The human task is not to exploit but 'to work and protect' the earth and all life on it.

In the remarkable rabbinic phrase, we are '*partners with God in creation*', the appeal to humanity to act faithfully and responsibly within that partnership is deeply familiar. It seems radical only because the illusion of independence from nature, and the delusion of unlimited economic growth at its expense, has caused us to forget.

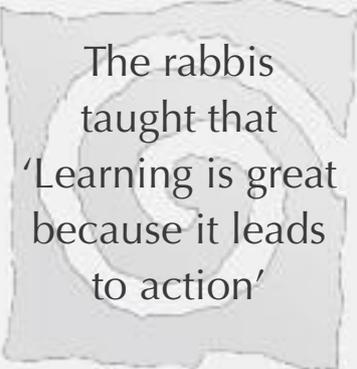
Equally Biblical, is the outspoken coupling of social with economic justice, the insistence that we must hear 'both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor'. In the sabbatical year when 'the earth rests unto the Lord' gates must be opened and barriers come down. Whatever grows must

be shared between poor and rich, citizen and refugee, domestic and wild animals. It is a model for how we might re-imagine a more just and integrated economy, not dominated by what Pope Francis describes as the consumerist, throw-away, self-seeking 'technocratic paradigm'.

The force and authority of the encyclical derives both from love and from knowledge. It is inspired by that deep love of nature as the expression of God's sacred oneness, known to mystics of all faiths. It is equally animated by an unremitting commitment to knowledge. Like for Maimonides in the twelfth century, science for Pope Francis is not regarded as a hostile discourse but rather as the essential partner of religion in seeking to comprehend and cherish God's world: to love God is to study God's works.

Laudato Si sets the results of such scrutiny before us with unsparing, comprehensive frankness, including the state of oceans, forests and farms; cities, buildings and transport; and above all the fate of the poor, the first to pay the price of our spiritual and moral disorientation.

The rabbis put into God's mouth the blunt demand: 'Do not destroy my world, because there is no one to repair it after you'. The same warning was brilliantly encapsulated on a placard at the recent Climate Action rally: 'There is no planet B'. What then are we leaving for those who come after us? This concern with what we pass on to our children has always been a central Jewish



The rabbis taught that
'Learning is great
because it leads
to action'

*It is a model for how we might re-imagine
a more just and integrated economy*

pre-occupation. The Pope's plea for '*intergenerational solidarity*' may be his most powerful, painful appeal.

The rabbis taught that 'Learning is great because it leads to action'. The encyclical indicates the necessary spheres of action: enforceable international agreements; governmental commitments to responsible, long-term policies; the full engagement of every sector of society, business, community and family. This call to personal and collective responsibility is familiar to Judaism, which understands God's first question to us all as 'Have you acted in good faith?'

In the last public lecture of his life, the moral philosopher Hans Jonas was asked to address the subject of racism. Instead, he spoke of the 'endangered global environment' and how it rendered racism 'anachronistic, irrelevant, almost farcical.' A new solidarity was needed: 'A common guilt binds us, a common interest unites us, a common fate awaits us, a common responsibility calls us'.

That call is compellingly expressed in *Laudato Si*. It is a summons to 'a conversation which includes everyone', and to actions in which we must all participate.

The encyclical concludes with a universal Prayer for the Earth:

*All-powerful God,
Pour out upon us the
power of your love,
that we may protect
life and beauty.*

I believe that alongside Christians those of all faiths will be glad to say

'Amen'

United in Humanity

Simrat Kailey

Khalsa Aid is an international aid agency founded in 1999. Based on the Sikh principles of "Recognize the Whole Human Race as One", it works across the globe providing emergency and long term relief to people affected by adversity.

We have worked in more than 21 countries helping people caught in disasters, both natural and manmade. Whether it is floods, earthquakes, civil war or refugee crises, we have always endeavoured to help people irrespective of their colour, race or religion. The majority of our funding comes from the global Sikh diaspora and it is a matter of pride that these funds are used to help people of all religions and faiths.

We have funded bakeries in Iraq, helped with debris clearance in Bosnia and run schools in India. Recently in Serbia, our team of Sikh volunteers celebrated Eid with the local population, raising morale and promoting cultural and religious harmony through positive practical hands on help.

Khalsa Aid helps run eight orphanages in Haiti, many of which are managed by Christian missionaries. We work together respecting each other's religions and beliefs, and have done so in perfect accord since the earthquake in 2010. This year we have been requested to take responsibility for another orphanage, taking the total number to nine.

In the Kurdish region of Iraq, we have helped the Yazidi communities and the Assyrians, often having to explain the difference between us and the ISIS, given our very similar turbans and beards! Khalsa Aid helped establish a bakery feeding 16000 refugees a day.

In the 2014 floods in the UK, we became the primary non-government agency helping in Thames Valley and Somerset. Few people in Somerset had come across the Sikh culture prior to the floods, and it is a testament to the inter-cultural acceptance in Britain that many of the residents now support and volunteer with Khalsa Aid. A few have even travelled to Bosnia and India with us, forming deep and enduring friendships.

In Greece, we are working with the Catholic Church of Rhodes to provide relief during the ongoing refugee crisis. We have worked with local grassroots organisations in Uganda and Kenya, establishing pumps and bore holes to provide clean water, also providing desks, uniforms etc, for schools. During the earthquake in Nepal, we ran free hot food kitchens (Langar) for over 6 weeks, serving more than 8000 people a day.

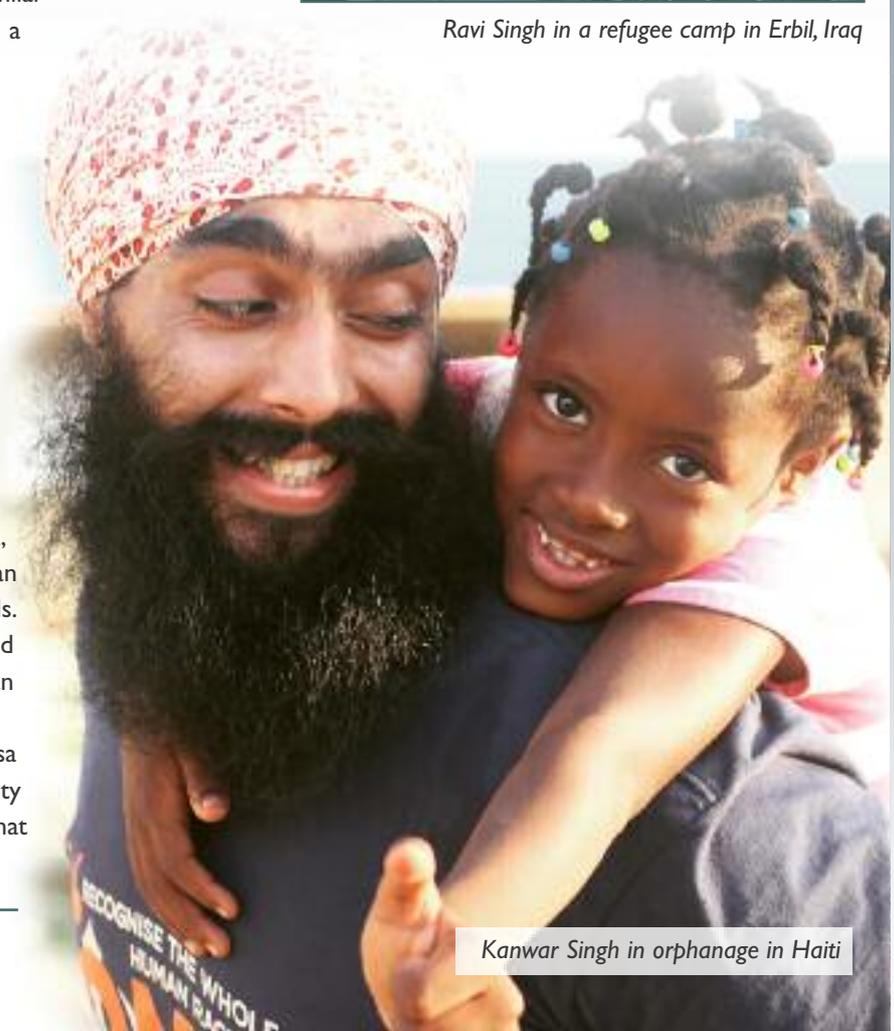
Every member, volunteer and supporter of Khalsa Aid works with the firm belief that across the diversity of race and religion and culture, it is our humanity that unites us all.



Jaswinder Singh - Khalsa Aid provided a water pump in a village in Malawi



Ravi Singh in a refugee camp in Erbil, Iraq



Kanwar Singh in orphanage in Haiti

Visualising a Better World

Jack Arthey



Kohsan district of Herat, western Afghanistan. Habibe Abdullah, 6 (centre). Her mother received goats from RAADA, which Habibe helps her to milk. Habibe says "I can't milk them yet but I hold their heads while she milks them and I enjoy playing hide and seek."

In May 1945 the leaders of all the main churches in Britain asked that on the Sunday after VE Day, worshippers should resist celebrating a great victory and instead donate what they could to help reconstruct Europe. More than £3 million in today's money was raised that weekend. It was used to provide bricks, food and medical supplies, to find teachers and equip schools to help life return to normal, and to buy bicycles and boats so that pastors could minister to their people. It was used to help allies and former enemies alike, irrespective of belief and ideology.

That was the beginning of Christian Aid. Its origins lay in the determination of British church leaders during World War 2 to build a different kind of world. Throughout the War, and especially after 1942 when the British Council of Churches was formed, they felt that the churches, acting together, must save succeeding generations from the scourge of war which had killed, maimed, destroyed, uprooted, bereaved and impoverished their own. And this

work would be best achieved, they believed, through the churches being united by their common calling to love their neighbour as themselves.

Christian Aid's founders had a vision of a world where each person was respected because they were a human being; of a world where women and men and large nations and small would have equal rights; and of a world where there would be better standards of living and opportunities for all with everyone's needs met. They had a vision where everyone would live in peace and harmony with others as good neighbours; and of a world without poverty. And they decided to create an agency to help build this vision. In the first instance it was called Christian Reconstruction in Europe. It then became Inter-Church Aid and Refugee Service and now it is known as Christian Aid.

What is Christian Aid's purpose? For

70 years the organisation has sought to expose the scandal of poverty so that no-one can plead ignorance of the poverty that afflicts more than a billion people in developing countries and the reasons for that. It has worked with partners in more than 80 countries to take practical action with local organisations to help people pull themselves out of poverty. And it has sought to challenge and change the systems and structures that make and keep people poor.

...a world where
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being...

What makes Christian Aid distinctive? A number of fundamental principles guide what it does. It responds to need, irrespective of nationality, gender, creed, caste, or class. It works with anyone and everyone who shares its vision of a world free from poverty and injustice and a commitment to work in a spirit of mutual respect, cooperation and partnership. It believes that all people are created equal in the image of God with inherent dignity and worth. It believes that no one faith has a monopoly of wisdom, insight and compassion. And it believes that poverty is not inevitable and that the

world can be changed for good.

Taking practical action has been a hallmark of Christian Aid throughout its history. The agency's archive tells an amazing story of what God has enabled to happen over 70 years. In the 1950s its Director helped to found Voluntary Service Overseas so that young people of all faiths could get involved in practical work in developing countries. In the 1960s Christian Aid got involved in World Refugee Year, raising funds to resettle refugees who had been in camps since the end of the Second World War, and took the lead in setting up the Disasters Emergency committee to ensure that different relief agencies cooperated rather than competed with each other during a humanitarian crisis. In the 1970s it worked with a Bengali coalition to enable 500,000 slum dwellers in Calcutta to have clean water, sanitation and primary education.

In the 1980s it raised £1.35 million to feed starving people in Ethiopia and campaigned to end apartheid in South Africa. In the 1990s it helped to establish the Fairtrade Foundation and successfully called for western governments to drop \$130bn of debt owed by poor countries. In the 2000s it reached more than half a million people in need after the Indian Ocean tsunami and so far this decade it has helped 953,500 Africans to adopt preventive health practices and get the medical treatment they need.

For 70 years Christian Aid has sought to read the signs of the times and add value to the initiatives of poor people and those who stand by them through strategic partnerships, (it has no development programmes of its own but works through local organisations on the ground.) It has become increasingly clear to the organisation that a characteristic of this millennium is the perception that religion can contribute to tensions and conflict at best and is a significant obstacle to justice and peace at worst. Responding to this when many of the powerful are fighting a war against terrorism, Christian Aid has actively sought partnerships and coalitions with people and agencies of other faiths. In some places it works directly with and funds other faith organisations to provide tangible services to the community, while in other situations it supports programmes that promote shared interests to resolve inter-communal problems.

In Afghanistan, for example, most of Christian Aid's partners (even those that are officially secular) are staffed by Muslims. The agency is not ashamed of its Christian origins and motivation but recognises that, in Afghanistan, agencies which are overtly Christian find it difficult to integrate with and reach into local communities. Experienced as an organisation that is fighting poverty on the basis of need alone, Christian Aid has built an effective working relationship with a potentially hostile regime. One of the fruits of this approach has been the ability to challenge the seclusion of women from public life and commerce which is mistakenly believed to be an 'Islamic practice' when, in fact it is the product of a traditional patriarchal society. As a consequence women in remote villages acquire the skills and technology to earn an income and live sustainably.

Meanwhile in the southern Philippines, religious conflict has plagued the island of Mindanao for more than four centuries. Muslim communities refused to submit to Christian colonisers which led to violence, exploitation and marginalisation. As a consequence Muslims were denied education, social services and healthcare and any attempt to integrate them led to increased social unrest and conflict. However, a peace agreement between the Philippine government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front in 2014 brought hope that religious harmony might be possible. Two of Christian Aid's partners, the Muslim organisation Ummah Fi Salam, and the Christian organisation, the Socio-Pastoral Institute chose to work together to try and make hope a reality. Their leaders were of one mind. One of them, Joey Clemente said: "The sad fact was that religion was used to divide rather than bring people together. We changed the conversation from 'what is the right religion?' to 'what can we do together to lessen human misery and to promote life?'" They organised interfaith meetings and, once relationships of mutual trust were established, began to work together to address issues that affected everyone such as preparing for natural disasters like Typhoon Haiyan. They believe

that people in Mindanao are tired of fighting and looking for alternatives for war. Their partnership is making people work hard to make peace succeed.

Driven by its values of love for all, the innate dignity of everyone, the right to justice, the sustainability of its work and doing everything in partnership for others, Christian Aid recognises that there is still much to be done. With the help of our supporters we believe it has the energy, experience and commitment to do it.

For more information about how Christian Aid is building peace across religious and ideological divisions, contact Jack Arthey at jarthey@christian-aid.org or go to www.christian-aid.org.



“The sad fact was that religion was used to divide rather than bring people together. We changed the conversation from ‘what is the right religion?’ to ‘what can we do together to lessen human misery and to promote life?’”



*Gul Shah, 70 years old, works a loom. She has received silkworms from RAADA. With the income from the silk she was able to buy her own thread to set up a business of making cloth to sell in the market. Herat, NE Afghanistan, July 2011.
Credit: Christian Aid / Sarah Malian*

Responding to cries for help

Aamir Sikander

The Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam was founded by Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad in 1889. Since its inception, the community has strived tirelessly to present Islam as a religion of peace; uniting communities with the motto of "Love for All Hatred for None". The community advocates peace, tolerance, love and understanding among followers of different faiths.

From its humble beginnings in Qadian, a remote village in India, the community today is actively serving in over 207 countries of the world. The UK chapter of the Ahmadiyya Movement was established in 1913 and is one of the oldest Muslim communities in the UK. In 1926 it built the first mosque in London.

His Holiness, Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad, is the fifth Khalifa (Caliph) of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community and under his leadership the Community has built a number of schools providing tuition and education to underprivileged students around the world, irrespective of their religious background, and hospitals that provide essential facilities in remote parts of the world.

We take a particular interest in alleviating the suffering of developing nations - by helping to improve their agricultural output, their facilities for accessing food, clean water and electricity. We also support the work of "Humanity First", an international non-profit disaster relief and development charity, and other such organisations.

The Youth (Khuddam-ul Ahmadiyya) and Elderly (Majlis Ansarullah) are especially active in working to raise funds for national charitable causes. We believe that: "A person can only be a true Muslim when he seeks to remove the pain of others and to alleviate their anxieties".

The Majlis Ansarullah has been at the forefront in organising charity walks here in the UK. During the past 27 years we have

raised over £1,000,000 which has been distributed to over 115 UK based charities, including Age UK; British Heart Foundation; Great Ormond Street Hospital; Action for Children; Save the Children; Cancer Research; The Royal London Society for Blind People; Samaritans; and Macmillan Cancer Support as well as many more local charities. Over 90 percent of donated funds are spent directly on aid projects.

The Ahmadiyya Muslim Youth Association (AMYA) have performed a variety of nationwide initiatives - including blood drives where more than 6000 pints of blood have been donated; over 100,000 trees planted; more than 30,000 food packs distributed to the homeless, visiting the sick and elderly, fund raising initiatives, such as a hike over the Bavarian

Alps, peace conferences and interfaith meetings. They have presented 45 cheques to UK based charities totaling £340,000 - raised through activities throughout last year. This figure brings the total funds raised by AMYA for UK charities to £1.5 million. The list of charities includes the Royal British Legion, Barnardo's, NSPCC, British Heart Foundation, Humanity First, The Silver Line, CLIC Sargent and MacMillan Cancer Support. The majority of the funds are raised through AMYA's annual flagship event called the 'Mercy For Mankind' Charity Challenge. 'Mercy For Mankind' refers to the title that was given to Muhammad (peace be upon him) in the Qur'an and serves as the inspiration for all charitable work carried out by the group.

Recent events have placed the spotlight on young Muslims and their role in British society. AMYA has shown that not only are young Muslims proud of their country, they go out of their way to make sure they do their bit to contribute. For more information about the humanitarian efforts of the Ahmadiyya Muslims Youth Association, visit www.muslimsforhumanity.org.uk.



Charity Walk for Peace started from our Baitul Futuh Mosque in Morden, London.



Strengthening the hand... rebuilding lives.

Richard Verber

In 1939 Dvora was just nineteen years old. She had already had a difficult childhood: born towards the end of the Ukrainian War of Independence, her family survived the civil war. Her parents became Soviet civil servants but Dvora, together with her five brothers and sisters would know extreme poverty. Not only that, Dvora would soon be faced with the prospect of man-made famine. In the space of just two years, millions of Ukrainians died of starvation in the “Holodomor”. Despite this, Dvora and her family lived on.

Terrifyingly, worse was yet to come. Dvora was living in Kherson, eastern Ukraine when the Nazis marched in. She enlisted in the Red Army to fight against fascism and became an intelligence officer under a Russian cover name. Her role was to work the radios to listen in on the Nazis’ plans. All was going well until her neighbours told the Germans what she was doing. In December 1942 she was sent to prison in Munich. For three years the Nazis tortured her. Dvora refused to confess so was sent to Auschwitz aged 24. She somehow survived for three years. She fought Typhus and endured abuse and hard labour. The Nazis subjected her to ‘medical’ experiments.

After she was liberated Dvora returned home to Kherson to try and establish whether her family were alive. They had all been murdered by the Nazis. As she told us when we spoke to her, there was nothing for her to do but try to get on with her things. She set about rebuilding her life and by 1947 was married and had children.

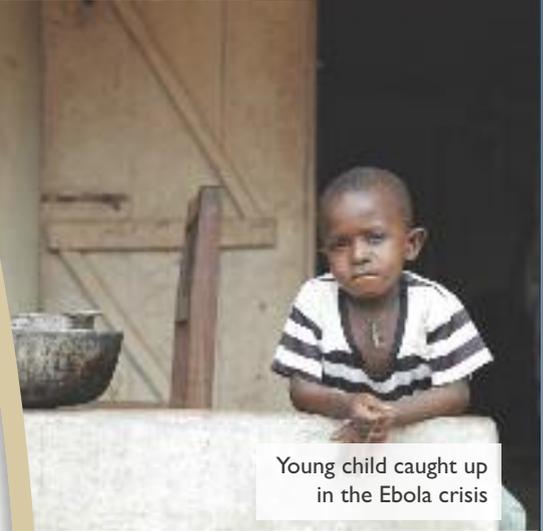
Today Dvora is 95. Her husband has died. Her beloved daughter Natalya and her grandchildren now live far away. They would love to visit her more but it’s too expensive. Dvora is alone once again. Sitting alone in her flat, her mind wanders back to the nightmares of the past. Dvora has fought so much but her biggest challenge today is battling loneliness. It blights her final years.

My organisation, World Jewish Relief has provided Dvora with a homecare worker, who, in Dvora’s words, has become a ‘lifeline’. She describes her as ‘the best kind of medicine’ and says that after their regular chats she feels better and is able to sleep well.

Lyudmila has taught Dvora how to use a computer so that she can speak with her daughter and grandchildren online: “The first time their faces appeared on the screen, I just couldn’t believe it! It’s been amazing hearing their voices and finding out how they are doing. I no longer feel so far away from them.”



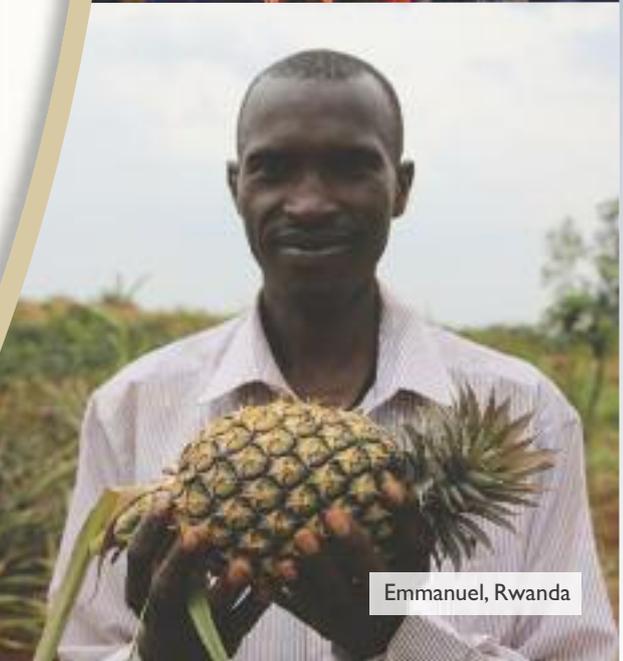
Combating loneliness, Ukraine



Young child caught up in the Ebola crisis



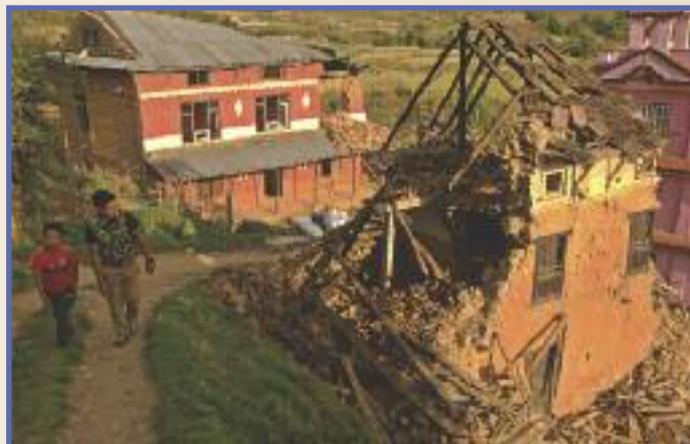
Galina. Sloviansk, Ukraine



Emmanuel, Rwanda



Shattered homes after earthquake, Nepal



Dvora's life is typical of the people World Jewish Relief support. World Jewish Relief is the UK Jewish community's leading international humanitarian agency. Our rich history stretches back more than 80 years. The Central British Fund for German Jewry, later known as World Jewish Relief, was established in 1933 when leading members of the UK Jewish community came together to express concern about what was happening in Germany.

Over the coming years, the charity helped tens of thousands of Jews to flee from the Nazis. We are well known for our role in organising the Kindertransport, which brought over 10,000 unaccompanied children from Nazi-occupied Europe. Most were Jewish; others were Christian. In the aftermath of the Holocaust, as the world began to understand the true horrors perpetrated by the Nazis and their collaborators, we brought hundreds of children from the death camps of Europe to safety in the UK.

In the 1960s we helped to evacuate and support Jewish refugees from Hungary, Algeria and Czechoslovakia, and in the 1970s we provided support to Jews evacuating Syria, as well as vulnerable communities living in Iran and India. After the Iron Curtain fell in 1989, we shifted our focus towards helping those most in need in eastern Europe, particularly the two million Jews still living there.

Older people in Eastern Europe often face ill health, loneliness, discrimination, disability and crippling poverty. Many, like Dvora, have faced persecution, under both Nazi and Soviet regimes. We meet people's basic needs, including food and housing. We reduce loneliness, bringing older people together and forging a sense of community.

If someone's house isn't insulated against the freezing winter temperatures of Eastern Europe, we fix their home. If someone doesn't have a pension that will pay for their food, we enable them to eat. If an elderly person simply hasn't had any company for weeks, they can join our programmes bringing people together.

The fighting in eastern Ukraine has put a further strain on the country. More than two million people have fled their homes

because of the conflict. Well over a million are seeking refuge elsewhere in Ukraine. They also need jobs. Again, World Jewish Relief is on hand to help with shelter, food and medicines. We have also provided legal and psychological support.

In Moldova and Ukraine our training programmes help people get back into work and break the cycle of poverty forever. We have adapted the programmes to help people fleeing the conflict in Ukraine find work in their new host town.

Away from the Soviet Union, every year, emergencies, like floods, famines, earthquakes and wars, put millions of lives in danger. We act on behalf of Britain's Jewish community when these disasters occur. From the Philippines to Nepal, we respond to the immediate and longer term recovery needs of those affected by catastrophic disasters worldwide. We often reach areas where other aid agencies are not active, helping people in the crucial first weeks following the disaster. We keep people alive – food, medicine, water and shelter.

As time goes on, we have been helping these communities to get back on their feet, to rebuild their lives and livelihoods.

Our Jewish values inspire us to help both Jewish and non-Jewish communities in need. As the twelfth century philosopher Moses Maimonides said, we "anticipate charity by preventing poverty". Indeed, the highest form of charity, Maimonides says, is by supporting someone – perhaps via a loan, or by finding them employment – so that their "hand is strengthened until they need no longer be dependent upon others". This, ultimately, is the goal of all livelihood programmes: to enable disadvantaged individuals to gain sustainable employment and build lives of self-reliance for themselves and their families.

Hundreds of thousands of people have received our support, but there is so much more to do. Over the next five years, we aim to take another 100,000 people out of poverty by helping them to help themselves as well as supporting 50,000 older people to live dignified lives.

Dvora has fought so much but her biggest challenge today is battling loneliness.

RANDOM CONVERSATIONS

Since 2009, after I had answered a call in the local newspaper to volunteer for the community radio station on the island of Barra, I have been collecting life-stories. Although it was never really my intention to carry out interviews, I found myself setting up a radio programme based on talking to the people of the local community about what life was like living on the most south westerly island of archipelago of the Hebrides. The programme naturally developed into an interview format, and feedback showed that it had an appreciative audience – not only of those people indigenous to the island but the wider diaspora scattered around the globe. Some people thought the programme would run out of steam, that no one would be interested in listening to ordinary people tell their life-stories, but by the time I aired for the last time in March 2014, I had interviewed 12.5% of the island population, written weekly synopsis of each show for the local paper and photographed nearly all my guests. This has resulted in a documentary snapshot of life on a Hebridean island at the beginning of the 21st century.

What inspired me to collate these life-stories is to demonstrate my belief in the healing power of communication. It is only by talking to others, and listening to their stories can we better understand the world in which we live: the points at which our lives intersect enable us to make better sense of our own world. This brings into focus that what actually unites us all is our common humanity, and it is this that transcends each of us from the world of politics and economics, two areas that thrive on difference and breed alienation. Too often, rather than reaching out to others to share the highs and lows of our lives, we find ways of creating enmity and division.

How many of us actually engage in what some might consider as mindless blethering to each other for no other purpose than just to reach out and share a brief moment of our lives. By this I mean when was the last time you spoke to someone sitting across from you on a bus, train or in a doctor's surgery or in a supermarket queue – engaging in random conversation with someone you have never met before, just passing the time of day. Perhaps it is an age thing as most of the young people I know sit

staring blankly at phone screens as though their life depended on them, but I think this is because 'we' have failed to show how enriching everyday conversation can be.

Recently, on my way to university via the train from Queen Street, Glasgow I met a retired trumpet player who had just finished playing for a charity concert in the Royal Concert Hall, the first time he had ever played there and the first time he had played for ages. He was so enthused and so happy to share this story with me that in the brief time it takes for the train to sprint to my station, he had shared such human happiness with me that we both felt the celebration of what it is to live, to achieve, to give and to share. Or, the grandmother, rushing to pick up her grandson at his new school: a bit flustered, she was as delighted to unburden her story as much as her shopping bags. The rhythm

of her narrative was as hypnotic as the train. She wouldn't normally be late for picking him up but she had been to her brother's funeral that morning at 10am on the other side of Glasgow. She had decided after the tea to do a wee bit of shopping to cheer herself up. He had died of cancer within a year of diagnosis – he was 79. It was all really sad, she felt guilty because she hadn't spoken to him for a few months because her daughter had given birth to twins and she

was needed to help out with her own crowd and well "these things happen" she said. I could feel a huge sadness from her because she hadn't got to say goodbye to him. "Feels like just yesterday" she said, that her and her brother were at school laughing and joking, him winning a certificate and medal for running, how he was so fast no one could catch him. She remembered the time when their auntie came home from Australia to visit – her father's elder sister had emigrated on the £10 passage scheme - and they had been told there would be presents, and how he had run so fast out the school gate so he could be first home to get first pick – a big brown boomerang that seemed so exotic. "Funny the details you remember" she said. "Life, it flashes by 'hen'". In the 25 minutes it had taken to arrive at her station we had shared a rollercoaster of emotions - the highs and the lows of life and each of us in our own way felt happier for the connection that saw us not as strangers but as two human beings reaching and sharing the story of life.

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Encountering the Holy

Some of us will have had the experience of attending let's say a funeral, or an ecumenical service of worship, and being aware that some people were unable to enter the sacred space where the event was held. Outside there will be a respectful row of people, who for their own reasons cannot join others within. Perhaps they have a different religious commitment, one that precludes their presence in the building. Perhaps the building is in some way out of bounds for them. Maybe they do not feel safe entering.

So, what does the term sacred space mean to you? A place of worship? A roadside shrine to a traffic victim, a war memorial, or a place resonant with personal or family associations? For some, churches, temples, mosques, synagogues and the like are sacred in themselves. For others they are 'holy by association with deity' but not holy in themselves. They may be considered precious for historic, cultural or personal reasons rather than religious ones.

And what, I wonder, is meant by a safe sacred space. Even a casual knowledge of the scriptures and the stories of the great religious figures may well demonstrate to us that any human encounter with 'the Other', is not 'safe'? Rudolf Otto famously wrote of the 'Idea of the Holy' as 'mysterium tremendum' (an overwhelming and fearful mystery). Prophets and sages and simple believers alike testify to this. Encountering the deity invites personal and social transformation. It changes you. 'Moses, take off your shoes, this is holy ground...And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.' (Exodus 3.5) and Jacob is changed by his mysterious encounter at the Jabbok (Genesis 32. 22ff).

Speaking as a Christian (Church of Scotland) involved in ecumenical and interfaith work, I find that some of us have a strong sense that a place, a space, a religious building is sacred almost in itself, and is in some sense iconic. On the other hand, others have a more functional view where churches and the like are meeting places: it is the encounter within, rather than the space or the place itself that is holy or sacred. This can of course be overstated, the division drawn too starkly. My own Reformed Church tradition leans towards the functional view: churches are meeting places, gathering spaces. Though in practice, I expect that we have members and adherents who would beg to differ. It is worth asking oneself:

Do I locate sacredness more or less with particular places and spaces, and why?

Do I locate sacredness more or less with deity, and why?

How does my answer impact on my way of life?

Let us return to the question of what is deemed to be a safe sacred space. Historical factors, denominational or inter-religious conflict can render one person's safe place, into another's no-go area. One person's icon is another's idea of idolatry. How are we to negotiate such differences safely, respectfully, without resorting to violence - verbal or otherwise?

Recently, organisations such as the Conforti Institute, Faith in Community Scotland, Place for Hope and The Centre For Good Relations, have been involved in initiatives to tackle sectarianism in Scotland. Cross-community conversations have brought people together to look at their own, and one another's, often troubled histories. Such conversations are frequently viewed as 'difficult', and to be sure the experience is daunting, hardly 'safe' in any escapist sense. Yet people will testify to powerful experiences of encounter, of mutual and personal learning, of coming to appreciate 'where someone else is coming from'.

I am told by practitioners that some facilitators and consultants prefer not to "use the word 'safe' in relation to a space conducive to enabling in-depth dialogue between people". Others argue that it is "what people 'feel' that enables more open dialogue, whether this is feeling at ease, safe, comfortable, unthreatened, encouraged to participate..." Therefore, relationships, time, space all well-managed, and facilitated with respect, make us feel safe.

A cross community dialogue tackling sectarianism in a Scottish context, might begin meeting in a neutral place with food and conversation. With time and a growing level of trust, meetings are moved to other community facilities, church halls and lodges. The testimony of those taking part is that, 'a welcoming and non-threatening space is important in the early stages, but as relationships develop I think this becomes less important.'

As one participant and facilitator says:

"I would certainly say that my experience with Listening Circles of all sizes has been that we can create a sacred space which is often a scary place to begin with, but can become a safe place ... an amazing place to be."

A local ecumenical or inter-faith group, might arrange a walk or pilgrimage around places of worship. Gifts may be exchanged at these places. Hosts could introduce their visitors to what goes on in their meeting space. And of course, as people walk together, there are conversations on the way.

Speaking personally as a practitioner and as a follower of the Christian way, in today's multi-faith Scotland I seek fellow travellers who will work with me to acknowledge and understand what is sacred to one another, and work to hold open safe meeting spaces where much-needed, challenging and enriching, encounters may occur. These will come in formal and informal guise.

In my view - it is the encounter that is holy, the relationship that is sacred. When we meet in growing trust, moving from the polite to the more edgy topics, and where the relationships grow, that is true 'safe' space. Whatever we call it, it certainly moves us beyond our comfort zone.

Hopefully, the hesitant line of well-wishers who began this article, will, in time cross the threshold ...

Love

*Love looks down at hate
He sees the war torn countryside
And weeps to see the fractured lives
Of innocents who leave their ruined homes
Their lives at risk, to find security.
In their eyes deep sadness and real fear
Of what may lie ahead in lands unknown.
They shuffle numbly on their way
Emaciated faces etched with loss.
In loves heart burns empathy,
He's suffered too, known hate and cruelty.
He cannot stand aloof and watch this scene
So swiftly comes to help their direst need.
He moves amongst the throng and can be seen
In man's willingness to help his fellow man.
Tired children carried on the backs
Of strangers, reaching out to help the weak.
A blanket offered up to ease the cold of someone old.
Food shared, though very little to be found.
Supporting arms of comfort over rock strewn ground.
Love dwells gently in the hearts of men
And even in their direst stress,
Will offer hope where there is hopelessness.*

Love CALLS TO Love



Reception of the 'habit'.



Sr.Celine (middle) day she entered Carmelite order.



Fully veiled Carmelite nun awaits new arrivals.

I am waiting in a small reception room at the Carmelite Nunnery in Dumbarton. Tea and cake have been kindly offered which I accept as I am in need of recharging after a days teaching. I look out through the bay window across the gardens to a statue of the Virgin Mary, it is a serene scene. All is peaceful and I wonder to myself could I live my life in this way? Could I have chosen this path as a teenager? At this moment I am unable to imagine why anyone would wish to retreat from the world at an age when most young people are going out into the world; maybe if one was of a reclusive nature or fearful of what the world had to offer. I truly do not know!

I am here to interview four Nuns who entered the Carmelite Order in their late teens and early twenties. Sr.Teresa, the Prioress, and Sr. Magdalen I had met briefly before on a visit to the Nunnery with my cousin to celebrate Sr. Magdalen's (her aunt) 87th birthday. Sr. Magdalen had entered the enclosed Order of the Carmelite Nuns in 1947 at the age of nineteen, fifty-eight years ago. Sr. Teresa was training to be a teacher when she entered at the age of twenty-one in 1962. She entered, on the same day,

with Sr. Celine, who was only seventeen and had been planning to go to University to study music. Sr. Mary also entered the Order at seventeen, at first she had thought of being a nun within a missionary order but was guided, in prayer, to the Carmelite Order. What brought all these women into a religious life was a strong sense of Calling from an early age.

Sr. Celine said that it was a calling to “God’s Way” and this call was first experienced at about the age of eight years old. Sr. Teresa considered that sometimes a call can seem dormant, waiting for a time to resurface again, until finally it can no longer be ignored. It’s like “finding yourself and what God wants of you”. Sr. Magdalen said of her call that she quite simply “fell in love with God incarnate”.

Although their calls were personal to each of them, their sense of vocation was similar and found shape in the mystical teachings and spiritual guidance of a woman 500 years before their time, Saint Teresa of Avila (1515 - 1582). All four of them became familiar with St Teresa’s writings and identified something of themselves in her. Sr. Celine explained: “I wanted to love the way that she loved”, and this meant entering into an enclosed order. It was heart breaking leaving behind family to begin a new life in the Carmelite Order as young women, yet, the attraction to this way of life was so strong, so right. Sr. Mary said: “I can still remember the tears in my father’s eyes and my younger brother asking when I would be home again”. Entering the Order as a young adolescent of seventeen had its challenges as Sr. Celine and Sr. Mary discovered for themselves. Sr. Celine said “we were no different to a seventeen year old today: it’s a difficult age, with deepening spiritual and emotional turmoil”. Yet here these four women sit today, decades later, resilient, reflective, contented and still committed to God’s way.

The Carmelite Order they entered, at different places and times, has radically changed over the years and Sr. Teresa reflects: “things I thought normal and took for granted, such as electricity, were feared by the older nuns”. But with new technology came new ideas and these slowly started to filter through to change things within the Order”. Sr. Celine passes me a photograph of herself with Sr. Teresa on the day they arrived to join the Carmelite Order. A few thoughts ran through my mind, how young and pretty they look and how fashionably they are dressed, and then I notice a figure completely veiled in black at the back of the photo, and the thought strikes me that this garment looks like a burka worn by some Muslim women, seemingly out of context within a Christian setting. Sr. Teresa told me that over hundreds of years the Carmelite Order had never adapted or modernised, it was as though it was stuck in the 16th century Moorish Spain where it was founded. Only in the last fifty years has the Order started to evolve and become more in line with modern life. It has also become less regimented. The emphasis is no longer on the notion that the more perfect you are as a human being, the more spiritual you are, and Sr. Mary added that when she joined there were strict rules “silence was hammered into me as if it was the end in itself, but now there is an understanding that it is best to serve God

from your inner resources not rules”. The Sisters are pro- reform, like St. Teresa herself who almost 500 years ago reformed the Carmelite Order of old to embrace her own changing times. This became known as the Discalced Carmelite Order which St. Teresa founded in August 1562. At this time the Carmelite nuns of sixteenth century Spain had servants, and religious life was very relaxed. St. Teresa of Avila, as she is known, considered that the Order needed to be more disciplined and more active in living a life dedicated to God. She believed that this would emanate through prayer, silence and a removal from worldly distractions. She was progressive in her thinking, able to read and understand the world of her time, and the spiritual needs that were arising within her community and society. In my short time in the company of the Nuns I was aware that the progressive thinking of St.

Teresa was well and truly alive in the daily lives and thinking of these Sisters. In many ways they have become reformers of their time, as she was of hers.

Although traditionally an enclosed Order for hundreds of years, this is now changing. Sr. Teresa said, “although we have changed, public perception of what we are has not moved on at the same pace”. She tells of a time when she had taken another Sister to a hospital in Glasgow for tests, and when they came out they went to the Art Galleries next to the hospital for a tea. “As we sat there I could see some women looking across at us disapprovingly for being ‘out’ as if it was shameful. I later found out that these women reported us to the Cardinal for being ‘outside’”. Similar stories are told by the other Sisters. But perhaps perceptions are evolving on the outside, with the young and those who are progressive in thought, for while walking down town the other week, passed the local secondary school at lunch time a young girl asked Sr. Teresa “are you a real nun?” Sr. Teresa said “yes” and the girl replied “that’s great” and gave her a high five!

I asked the Sisters if they had any regrets about the life they had chosen all these years ago - none of them did. In hindsight I don’t really think it was a choice, but more of an acceptance of their call. There were times when they had wondered “what if I had gone to

“I wanted
to love the
way that
she loved”



Sr. Teresa, Sr. Celine, Sr. Magdalen, Sr. Mary

University to study music or become a teacher?" "God does not disappoint" said Sr. Teresa, and the lives they accepted have been fruitful - full of love, friendship, community and prayer. Like any small group or community living together, life can be demanding and testing at times, but perhaps it is this testing that binds love, friendship and community. Sr. Celine said that living in community "is like a self giving", and Sr. Teresa adds "there is nothing to escape from here but yourself". Their years of praying together for the

world, and all creation, has shaped them as a family and connected them daily to the outside world. Sr. Celine said "We pray to Our Father for all children of God, baptised and non-baptised, for to us humanity is all one in Christ". St. Teresa wrote of prayer that it is a *'falling into the hands of the living God'*. After decades of collective prayer their spirituality and compassion is palpable, a life of prayer, not out of duty or by rule, but out of love divine.



Sr. Teresa



Sr. Celine



Sr. Mary



Sr. Magdalen

*"Christ has no body on earth but ours,
no hands but ours, no feet but ours.
Ours are the eyes through which the
compassion of Christ
looks out upon the world,
ours are the feet with which he goes
about doing good,
ours are the hands with which he
blesses his people."*

ST. TERESA OF AVILA

OF

SACRED STITCHES:

Ecclesiastical

Textiles

IN THE ROTHSCHILD COLLECTION
AT WADDESDON MANOR

Waddesdon Manor in Buckinghamshire was built by Baron Ferdinand de Rothschild (1839-1898), a member of the famous Jewish banking dynasty. Now owned by the National Trust and managed by The Rothschild Foundation, Waddesdon is open to the public and has an exciting annual programme of exhibitions on different aspects of the collection and Rothschild patronage.

One recent exhibition, *Sacred Stitches*, highlighted a small, but exceptional group of European ecclesiastical textiles dating from the mid-15th to the 18th century, examining their original uses and symbolism and exploring how they were adapted as furnishings by the Rothschild family in the late 19th century.

Origins and early production

From its earliest beginnings the Christian Church has been an important artistic patron. Sumptuous textiles have always been an aspect of this creativity.

In medieval and early Renaissance Europe, embroidered vestments and furnishings for the Church were usually made by professional workshops, often funded by royal or ducal courts. The workshops were run by men, but employed male and female embroiderers. Other trades provided the rich materials needed, from importers of fabrics, to craftspeople producing threads. Designs were supplied by artists whose work was probably also used for illuminated manuscripts and stained glass.



Detail of seat mounted with a panel from a dalmatic; Spanish (frame English or French); 1575-1600 (embroidery), c 1890 (frame); Waddesdon, The Rothschild Collection (The National Trust); Bequest of Dorothy de Rothschild, 1988. Photography: Mike Fear © The National Trust, Waddesdon Manor, acc. no. 576.2

LANGUAGE

Life beyond the Church

Revisions of church practice and periods of great political change led to the rejection of ceremony in favour of less flamboyant worship. Alongside other ecclesiastical art forms, textiles were destroyed because of their religious significance, confiscated or sold. Although vestments continued to be made in countries where Roman Catholicism was still practised, they were not produced on the same scale or with such rich materials.

Former ecclesiastical objects appeared on the art market because of their quality, beauty and adaptability for secular use or decoration. Firms in London and Paris imported old fabrics and collectors in Britain and America eagerly acquired antique textiles. With their family and business connections, and new houses to furnish, the Rothschilds purchased as widely and extravagantly as possible.

Although their original contexts have been lost and their functions changed, the ecclesiastical textiles at Waddesdon would have been parts of larger decorative schemes in churches or cathedrals, meant to be understood as a whole and set apart as holy. While the richest examples tend to be in museum collections, some historic textiles and vestments, or modern versions, are still in use in churches around the world and continue to reflect the belief that art and craftsmanship can be used to the glory of God.

The Rothschilds as collectors of ecclesiastical textiles

Why would a Jewish family collect and display textiles with overtly Christian iconography and themes? Human figures are not

depicted in Jewish religious decorative arts, perhaps increasing the appeal of Christian textiles as art objects, in addition to their technical and artistic brilliance.

Since the Rothschild family acquired paintings by the most distinguished artists, and furniture and porcelain from famous craftsmen and manufacturers, it is not surprising that they should

also have desired the very best textiles and that some have ecclesiastical origins. Religious objects, or works with religious subjects, including books, enamels, manuscripts, metalwork, paintings, sculpture and works on paper were also acquired by the Rothschild family.

The Jewish principle of *hiddur mitzvah* encourages beautification of religious objects using the best materials available. This includes re-using items, such as older dress silks, often for Torah mantles and binders. There is no suggestion that ecclesiastical vestments were cut up on

the instructions of Rothschild collectors and it is likely that fragments had been in circulation for years before being adapted as furnishings. The re-use of fabrics is evident in all the Rothschild collections represented at Waddesdon, particularly those of Baron Ferdinand, his sister, Alice (1847-1922), and their niece, Baroness Edmond de Rothschild (1853-1935), whose son James bequeathed Waddesdon to the National Trust in 1957.

Furniture covered with recycled vestments was acquired by Baron Ferdinand for Renaissance-style interiors at Waddesdon. The seats and backs of four armchairs are made from apparels (decorative panels) from 16th-century Spanish dalmatics.

Designs were supplied by artists whose work was probably also used for illuminated manuscripts and stained glass.



Armchair mounted with panels from a dalmatic; Spanish (frame English or French); 1575-1600 (embroidery), c 1890 (frame); Waddesdon, The Rothschild Collection (The National Trust); Bequest of Dorothy de Rothschild, 1988. Photography: Mike Fear © The National Trust, Waddesdon Manor, acc. no. 576.2



Two-leaf screen mounted with embroidered collars worn with dalmatics; Italian or Spanish (frame probably English); 1675-1700 (embroidery), c 1890 (frame); Waddesdon, The Rothschild Collection (Rothschild Family Trust). Photography: Mike Fear © The National Trust, Waddesdon Manor, acc. no. 1229.1995

They originally featured skulls and crossed bones, indicating that they were probably from vestments worn for funerals or Masses for the Dead. These motifs were later removed and replaced with leaves and bows, but their outlines are still visible.

Two Italian or Spanish embroidered collars from 1675-1700 are mounted on a folding screen. The collars were worn with dalmatics and the central embroidered roundels show the Lamb of God from the Book of Revelation and a crowned eagle, possibly representing the Gospel-writer John, or symbolising Christ's ascension.

Ferdinand's sister Alice acquired five French panels from 1400-1450 depicting saints embroidered in silk and metal thread. Probably once segments of an altar frontal which was later cut up, the panels may have faced towards a central scene showing the Annunciation or Crucifixion.

Of the five saints, only two are recognisable. With her loose hair, the one identifiable female saint is probably Mary Magdalene, the first to see the risen Christ on Easter day. The only male saint is John the Evangelist, Jesus' disciple and Gospel writer. He holds a chalice containing serpents in reference to a legend where John's faith was tested by drinking from a poisoned chalice. From medieval times the chalice symbolised the Christian faith, while the serpents represented Satan.

Alice mounted the saints as decorative banners, but their appearance in *Sacred Stitches*, with other examples from the Rothschild Collection, highlighted their original, symbolic function, restoring their status as ecclesiastical textiles.

New acquisition by The Rothschild Foundation

In 2013 a set of seven embroidered hangings was 'export stopped' by the Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art and Objects of Cultural Interest (RCEWA), administered by Arts Council England.

No similar works have yet been identified anywhere in the world. The hangings are thought to have been made in a professional workshop in northern Italy between 1700 and 1770



Embroidered panel depicting Saint John the Evangelist; French; 1400-1450; Waddesdon, The Rothschild Collection (The National Trust).
Photography: Mike Fear © The National Trust, Waddesdon Manor, acc. no. 3032.3



Large horizontal panel showing the sacrificial altar; Italian or Dutch; 1700-1770; silk, metal, linen and cotton; 580 x 933mm; Waddesdon, The Rothschild Collection (Rothschild Family Trusts).
Photography: Mike Fear © The National Trust, Waddesdon Manor; acc. no. 22.2013.2

and depict interiors from the First and Second Temples in Jerusalem. It is not clear what purpose they served, but the rich materials and sacred subject matter suggest that they were used in a religious setting and were holy objects in their own right.

The Temple of Solomon is described in the Old Testament First Book of Kings (Chapters 5- 7). The two smallest panels show the freestanding columns *Yakhin* ('may he establish') and *Bo'az* ('in strength') that flanked the entrance to the First Temple, destroyed in 586 BC. Four hangings depict the Second Temple (built to replace the First Temple and destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD).

The largest panel shows the sanctuary with the seven-branched *Menorah*, the Ark of the Covenant, and the Table of the Shewbread. The Hebrew inscription at the top of the panel, *Likhvod Beit Eloqeinu* ('to the honour of the House of our Lord'), is a particularly pious way of saying or writing the name of God.

Despite their mysterious origin, the embroidered hangings are symbolic of the interest the Rothschild family continues to show in its Jewish roots and are highly suitable additions to the collection of textiles at Waddesdon.



One of a pair of small panels showing the columns *Yakhin* and *Bo'az*; Italian or Dutch; 1700-1770; silk, metal, linen and cotton; 565 x 328mm; Waddesdon, The Rothschild Collection (Rothschild Family Trusts).
Photography: Mike Fear © The National Trust, Waddesdon Manor; acc. no. 22.2013.6

Largest panel showing the sanctuary of the Temple and view towards the 'Holy of Holies' beyond the curtain; Italian or Dutch; 1700-1770; silk, metal, linen and cotton; 1823 x 1090mm; Waddesdon, The Rothschild Collection (Rothschild Family Trusts).
Photography: Mike Fear © The National Trust, Waddesdon Manor; acc. no. 22.2013.1

Rachel Boak was Senior Curator (Exhibitions Programme) at Waddesdon Manor and cared for the collection of costume and textiles from 2004 until 2015. She is now based in Scotland.

Sacred Stitches: Ecclesiastical Textiles in the Rothschild Collection at Waddesdon Manor ran from 27th March to 27th October 2013. A fully-illustrated catalogue of the exhibition is available from www.waddesdon.org.uk and from Paul Holberton Publishing www.paul-holberton.net

A special display *Saved for the Nation: Acquisition of Jewish Embroidered Hangings by The Rothschild Foundation* is at Waddesdon until 25th October 2015. Find more information at www.waddesdon.org.uk/collection/exhibitions/displays-and-installations

The Fortingall Yew

*When Neolithic man with fur & stone
Roamed Scotland, one small seed begat a tree
At Fortingall, with wolf and wildness sown
It grew in stature, a yew stout and free*

*It shaded wild cat, beaver, Bronze Age man
And later, Roman legions from the sea
Here Pontius Pilate played within its ken
The boy who killed a breeze and bred a gale*

*This yew's seen Kingdoms rise & Kingdoms fail
Eternal in its ancient, siccar soil
Enduring Beltane fire, flood and hail
It watched men hunt and forage, till and toil*

*This tree of Knowledge, sacred churchyard queen
Grown from the heart of Scotland, stinch and royal
The mythic and the modern lie between
Its boughs like fleeting pictures in a dream*

New Light Through Old Gates



“It’s a place to feel safe and respected,” he explains. “A place of acceptance for whatever unspeakable thing you might have done but weren’t ready to share. A place for developing whatever you choose, as long as it’s not used against others.”

Two American tourists making their way from the seventeenth century St Columb’s Cathedral, inside Derry’s historic city walls, pause momentarily to admire the ornate ironwork on an arched doorway halfway along a Georgian and Victorian terrace.

Intrigued by the birds, leaves, butterflies and red-painted blossoms adorning it, they peer through the glass, wonder aloud what’s inside, and move on.

If they had crossed the threshold, they would have been bathed in soft light reflected off blue aluminium panels, the colour of a summer sky and covered in swirls of poetry.

Following a meandering, blue-paved path, past sun-dappled walls, they would have reached a small amphitheatre, a crystal wall, a water feature, and artwork by schoolchildren from across Derry’s religious divide.

As sunshine glinted off seven vivid, stained glass sculptures inscribed with a suite of haiku, they could have contemplated the various stages of reflection: awareness, hope, compassion, wisdom, understanding, acceptance and reconciliation.

This oasis of calm, tucked away among Derry’s busiest streets, was a derelict courtyard until the Holywell Diverse City partnership transformed it into Derry-Londonderry’s new Garden of Reflection. Holywell’s genial, grey-haired chairman, Eamonn Deane, would have welcomed the two visitors.



“A place of acceptance for whatever unspeakable thing you might have done but weren't ready to share.”

The softly-spoken, self-effacing former teacher probably would not have revealed that the Garden marks the realisation of a dream he cherished for nearly three decades.

In rented premises in the heart of the Walled City - literally a stone's throw from its most notorious interfaces - he and other community organisers conceived the idea of creating a 'safe place', and shining "new light through old gates". He scoffs at the description of himself as a visionary.

"Back in the Dark Ages, when Europe was in darkness and all hope gone, Colmcille came here - to this hill-top island covered in oaks - and formed a monastic settlement, Doire Comcille. He lit a candle that would bring change and a message of hope across Europe.

We, in the same place, are relighting the candle and reflecting on ways of influencing others and bringing hope to a world of darkness and despair."

Derry has suffered more than its fair share of darkness. At the end of the sixties, the first televised clashes between police and civil rights marchers occurred not far from what is now the Garden of Reflection, heralding thirty years of conflict. British soldiers shot thirteen innocent civilians dead on Bloody Sunday. Derry still has the highest unemployment level in Northern Ireland.

At the height of the Troubles in 1988, Eamonn and like-minded others formed the Holywell Trust to promote community development and peace-building. Building positive relationships and partnerships underpin all of its work.

"That western, American construct of 'the rugged individual' doesn't work. It's not good for the soul or a people.

Far too often, too many people have put their arms around their exercise books, stopping others seeing the answers. We've realised the nonsense of that."

For years, the Trust and its partnerships have hosted many 'difficult conversations': between people who had literally been at war with one another; between loyal order marchers and their opponents; between young men 'ordered out' of Derry and those who threatened them, and between the perpetrators of crimes and their victims.

There is no room for despair in Eamonn's thinking. He quotes

from "the greatest anti-despair poem ever", Carrion Comfort, by the English Jesuit, Gerard Manley Hopkins:... I can; Can something, hope, wish day come, not choose not to be...

"The osmosis, the weight of all those difficult conversations," he says, "has created an atmosphere where almost anything is possible."

The resilience and perseverance that characterise the DiverseCity Partnership paid off. Led by Derry's Inner City Trust, and with the City Council, it secured £2.3 million under the EU Peace III 'Creating Shared Spaces' programme.

The Garden of Reflection project is of its time and place. A unique agreement, brokered between nationalist residents and Protestant loyal orders commemorating the Siege of Derry, means that the rioting once associated with parades is now a thing of the past. Appropriately, Derry's most contested space - its ancient walls - have been illuminated in the project's first phase, literally shining "new light through old gates".

More important, though, than any physical transformation, are the changes made in people's lives.

"Being in a 'safe place' is key to the success of our Garden events," says Susan Glass, who coordinated a programme of talks and exhibitions, and a major peace conference, in the project's second phase.

Dozens of people attended a weekly series of lunchtime events to hear from men and women affected by Northern Ireland's conflict, and from members of civic and cultural society. Visiting speakers described dealing with the effects of genocide in Rwanda, racism faced by Australian Aboriginal people, and violence in the Middle East and Africa.

People bereaved or affected by republican, loyalist and state killings spoke at a series of powerful 'testimony' events, where audiences were urged "to listen with ears of the heart." Significantly, speakers allowed themselves to be filmed so their stories could be made public.

"These weren't dialogues," Susan explains. "People from all sides told their individual stories, without judging or being judged. They shared them in an open, honest way that was cathartic for them.

"They weren't expecting sympathy. It was simply, 'Hear me. This is what I have to say.'"



audiences
were urged
"to listen
with ears of
the heart."

April's Hope Beyond Hurt conference brought five 'Chairs of Learning' from England, the United States and Palestine to share their experiences of international conflict resolution.

"In Northern Ireland, we're good at looking inwards," says Susan, "but we need to hear people at the sharp end of conflict elsewhere and learn how they deal with victims and survivors."

A constant theme ran through the two-day event: maintaining hope is the only way a society can move forward, regardless of what crises and horrors it has endured. Those behind the Garden of Reflection project are set firmly on that path.

The Inner City Trust Chief Executive, Helen Quigley, hopes the Garden will transform the lives of people using it, just as the five artists involved transformed a derelict space.

At the official opening of the project's final phase, she quoted an extract from Seamus Heaney's *The Cure at Troy*, incorporated into the illuminated artwork at the entrance, "...Believe that a further shore is reachable from here..."

"That shore for Derry must be a place where new tolerance replaces old hatred; where the beauty of inclusion replaces the ugliness of division and bigotry; where the warmth of generosity and prosperity replaces the coldness of violence."

Like Derry itself, the Garden of Reflection, is simultaneously a place of little and great significance. What began as a monastic settlement, played a significant role in both World Wars. During the Cold War, the Washington to Moscow hotline ran through Derry. It once boasted the world's biggest shirt industry, employing 27,000 people. Nobel Laureate, Seamus Heaney, was educated there; it's where Derryman John Hume developed his Nobel Prize-winning peace campaign.

If the two Americans who passed by the Garden return next year, they will undoubtedly find that the climbers on the new wooden trellises have crept up towards the sunlight, the ground-cover plants have blanketed the bare soil and the greenery along the walls has flourished. But Eamonn insists the work is only starting.

"If you provide space that can be used creatively, people will use it. We can't predetermine the outcome but I've confidence in the people of Derry and beyond - of all colours, religions and backgrounds - using it to find partnership for building a new society.

The ground has been cleared and seeds have been planted. Literally and metaphorically, the garden will keep growing."

*maintaining hope is the only way
a society can move forward, regardless of
what crises and horrors it has endured.*



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*Music washes away
from the soul the
dust of everyday life.*

Berthold Auerbach

Jewish Poet and Author
(1812 - 1882)

Karpuz Kaldiran Waterfall, Antalya, Turkey
Photograph by David Pollock

Seeing Beyond the Everyday into the Eternal

Music makes community: it's about soul, and desire, and the heart of all things...



I lived for seven years in North Carolina, a part of the US comparatively well-served for public broadcasting. North Carolina has a classical station, not so different from the UK's Classic FM, and on a Sunday, this being the American South, a good deal of airtime reflected the listeners' devotional, largely Christian, interests. As I would step out of the shower on a Sunday morning I would hear a trailer for the 8-10am programme. It would begin, ingenuously, 'Did you know that a great deal of the classical music that we enjoy has religious origins...?' – as if the broadcaster had happened upon a remarkable and profound truth. I never took the trailer seriously. But I never forgot it.

I became vicar of St Martin-in-the-Fields in 2012. Besides engaging with homelessness and destitution, what St Martin's is most famous for is classical music. St Martin's, besides being the busiest choral and orchestral concert venue in the

country, is the only major classical music home that makes a commercial profit, rather than relying on grant support. It successfully offers popular revenue-generating concerts alongside more specialist aspirational events. When I joined St Martin's, two things about this drew my attention. One was that all the best-attended concerts were franchised to external promoters: this meant the principal creative live interface between the public and St Martin's was one in which St Martin's congregation, clergy and staff were communicating little, or nothing, about their own convictions and vision of the world. The concert programme was seen largely, though not wholly, as a form of income-generation; no time was being spent nurturing and highlighting our own professional performers – leaving aside the Academy of St Martin-in-the-Fields, an entirely separate but cordially-related organisation. The other concern was that there was no cross-fertilisation between the public-facing concert programme and the congregation-facing liturgical programme; they were run by different people and happened at different times.

Thus in 2013 we combined the concert and liturgical music departments, and sought to strengthen both the liturgical and the performance programmes by integrating them. What St Martin's was trying to do was to identify its classical music more closely with its core identity as an agent of renewal in church, world and kingdom. Given it was famous for classical music, it wanted to offer clearer messages through that fame that spoke of the mission of the whole organisation.

What we have noticed is that many concert-goers see classical music as a significant aspect of their spiritual quest, and/or eagerly wish to discover more about the origin of much classical music in its theological themes and commitments. Thus we have begun



to explore ways in which clergy and musicians can present events that provide both musical delight and enriching commentary on the intent and texture of anthems and hymns. These ‘crossover’ events, that are both concerts and worship services, and at the same time neither of the above, are developing a large and enthusiastic following. One visitor, on departing from our Great Sacred Music event, and seeing two or three hundred people gathered, said, referring to the internationally-known and hugely-influential introduction to the Christian faith run by the charismatic West London Anglican church, Holy Trinity Brompton, “This is your Alpha course.”

Since 2013 Great Sacred Music has taken place at St Martin-in-the-Fields every Thursday between 1-1.35pm, usually led by me and performed by the St Martin’s Voices conducted by Andrew Earis. It follows a regular pattern: it begins and ends with an anthem, followed by a hymn, 3-4 anthems, and another hymn. In between I offer theological, historical and anecdotal commentary on the music, its origins, references, and significance. We work hard to ensure that it’s not an act of worship in any conventional sense: there are no prayers, the hymns are sung with people seated, God is spoken about but not spoken to, there are no vestments or processions, there is no especial air of reverence. But it still feels different to a concert – not just because there are four or five interruptions to the music each with 3-4 minutes of spoken words, but because those words are designed to highlight the dimensions of the notes and lyrics that have existential significance; some people report having an experience of worship, others sense they are involved in an educational programme, others again regard it as a more engaging form of concert. What is happening is that churchgoers, who want to discover the real significance of the music they know, are mingling with music-lovers, who are intrigued by the theological approach that takes their diverse standpoints of faith, other faith or no faith, seriously.

The tendency in the classical music world is either to scorn

Classic FM as ‘Radio 3 lite’ or slyly to admire it for making classical music mainstream and profitable. Our approach is not only to see the commercial potential of Classic FM and what it represents, but to see it as indicating a deeper search for meaning, understanding, and depth, which St Martin’s is well-placed to feed and reward. The secret is not to look for a particular outcome, but to ensure every gathering is stylish, professional, light-hearted, playful, probing, surprising, informative, and fun. There are usually salacious details about the composers’ real lives, a provocative observation about why a hymn, though popular, is problematic, and a pause to dwell on a sublime turn of word or tune and what makes it so special.

Why are people, who in many cases know very little about composition or theology, nonetheless so often moved by classical music that, in the words of that Carolinian trailer, ‘has religious origins’? The answer, we have come to believe, is that they are deeply searching for meaning and truth, and, through disillusionment or habit, have in many cases lost the will or desire to seek a fulfilment of that quest in institutionally-shaped conventional religion – yet may be drawn to such depths by music that opens doors, asks questions, and addresses longings. All Great Sacred Music does is to take that quest seriously, and point out the ways that composers, of words and tunes, were asking

...music
that opens
doors, asks
questions,
and addresses
longings.

similar questions and addressing comparable yearnings.

One favourite hymn at Great Sacred Music is ‘How shall I sing that majesty’ by the seventeenth-century writer John Mason. Mason recalled St Augustine’s peerless words, ‘God is an infinite circle whose centre is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere.’ That led him to write this spectacular description of God: ‘Thou art a sea without a shore, a sun without a sphere.’ That combination of wonder and beauty is what music draws us to. When I became vicar of St Martin-in-the-Fields everyone said, ‘I had no idea you knew so much about music.’ Actually I don’t – St Martin’s is famous worldwide for classical music so I ride on its reputation. But at St Martin’s it’s never just music – it’s always about beauty, truth and goodness – some desire through music to forge

friendships between powerful and powerless: together to make something everyone can be proud of, that combines the joy of volunteers with the experience of professionals in a gathering where everyone's contribution is vital, and we all need each other to be greater than the sum of our respective parts. Music makes community: it's about soul, and desire, and the heart of all things, and seeing beyond the everyday into the eternal.

Some while ago at a memorial service for an admirable man, a friend of his turned up with 850 copies of Parry's 'I was glad,' written for the coronation of Edward VII in 1902. He said,

"I thought we'd just get everyone to sing it. No rehearsal. The choir can help with the difficult bits." It was a crazy idea. But a beautiful one. Standing amid 800 people spontaneously shaping their four-part song, I realised we were living what the memorial was proclaiming: a much-loved man taking his place in the heavenly choir, adding his unique tenor to that of the angels, receiving the shower of God's glory in the music of praise, entering the infinite circle whose centre is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere. I was glad.

*"I thought we'd just get everyone to sing it. No rehearsal.
The choir can help with the difficult bits."*



Responsive and Remote Divinity

The Devotional Songs of Nazrul



I grew up listening to the songs of Kazi Nazrul Islam, they are timeless treats appealing to the secular and the religious minded. As a music composer and a versatile literary talent, Nazrul wrote nearly 4000 songs about love, Islam, devotion, folk, freedom and revolution. He was the proponent of 'Ghazal' to Bengali - poetic form of music dealing mainly with devotional love which originated in Arabic, Persian and Urdu.

Written in his vernacular Bengali and interlaced with Arabic, Hindi, Persian and Urdu expressions, Nazrul's songs are vibrant poetry, and his inspirational and didactic Islamic themed songs range from the panegyric (a eulogy, in praise of Almighty Allah and the Noble Prophet) to prayerful songs and laments.

He was born in India in 1899 and was awarded the 'Padma Bhushan' the 3rd highest civilian award in the country. He also became the national poet of Bangladesh where he lived from 1972 until his death in 1976. Nazrul was a poet, lyricist, music composer, playwright, essayist, novelist, short-story writer. Sadly his literary and professional careers came to an abrupt end when in his early 40s (towards late 1941) he began suffering from a neurodegenerative condition that led to loss of memory and language. He is commemorated on postage stamps of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

I have translated two of Nazrul's sacred lyrics reflecting different moods - these have slight adaptations mainly in line arrangement.

O Lord, Listen to my Prayer

*O Lord, listen to the prayer of this lowly man!
Give me fresh water to cool my thirst,
A fistful of rice with a pinch of salt,
A field of golden harvest,
Forever friends to warm the hearth,
And tranquillity in my heart.
These are my life elixir, Sweet Lord.*

*Listen O Lord, listen!
That I harm not a single soul,
That I fear none,
That I am feared by none.*

*O Lord, listen to this lowly man!
That I drift not to the lures of the world,
That when my path leads to the Mosque,
It is only for my longing for you, Sweet Lord.*

*Listen O Lord, listen!
That my darkest night,
Shines bright¹ as the festive moon!²*

O Lord, Alone in your Aloneness

*O Lord, deep in solitude
You create and destroy for sheer sport.
Like a determined toddler,
You revel in your own universe,
Oblivious of the game trails!*

*O Lord, deep in solitude
You tear down and you build up in a flash.
From space to the vast cosmos
You stay immersed,
In your boundless play.*

*O Lord, apart and aloof
You trifle with sun and moon.
Stars sprawl at your resplendent feet,
In countless clusters.*

*O Lord, alone in your aloneness!
You amuse yourself with rousing pursuits.
While impervious to joy and sorrow,
You are magnanimous, time after time.*

¹ Acceptance of fate is based on the Islamic principles of 'sabr' or uncomplaining patience and 'shukr' or gratitude for the great and small mercies.

² Refers to the Muslim festival of Eid, heralded by a crescent at the beginning of a new lunar calendar month

Food of the Soul



Musicians - Gursevak Jatha



Singers - Acapella Jatha

Strolling through Trafalgar Square in Central London in the summer of 1915 you might have noticed a memorial service taking place in St Martin-in-the-Fields to honour those of who had fought and died in the ill-fated Gallipoli Campaign of the same year. Inspired by the words of Austen Chamberlain MP who had relayed to Parliament an account of their heroism, the service was dedicated to the 14th Sikhs - a regiment recruited in India to fight in a war that had no direct relevance to their own lives, nor to their country, except that it, by default, was now inextricably part of the British Empire.

The strains of music that filtered through to Trafalgar Square from St Martin's on that day were unmistakably Christian, but the reality of 'Onward Christian Soldiers' had already long gone. In the 19th century, troops of different origins and faiths had begun to join forces in an unprecedented scale under the umbrella of the British Indian Army. Cultural diversity was to be found on the parade ground, in the trenches and the battlefields long before it became an everyday reality in modern society. Many of these soldiers forged life-long relationships founded on mutual respect and comradeship which were to last long after their own lives, into future generations of family and friendship.

Fast forward now to June 2015, precisely 100 years on, and a 'Solemn Commemoration of the Contribution of the Sikh Regiment at the Battle of Gallipoli, and throughout the Great War', was held at St Martin-in-the-Fields. The service brought together the actual descendants of those who had fought together, and hundreds of others who came to commemorate and share the memories of their ancestry.

The challenge for the organisers of this multi-faith service was to focus on its content and ensure that it had, as far as possible, a universal, or at the very least a dual-faith resonance. This sense of harmony was achieved through the sacred music of both traditions, demonstrating that music is a universal language with which human beings can communicate. It can uplift the mind into a higher spiritual plane where the mind and the body become as one in peace and harmony. In Sikhism, as in Christianity, music and worship coalesce to occupy a central place in our religious traditions.

In the Sikh Faith, music is intrinsically sacred because it is inextricably linked to the Holy Sikh scriptures: the Guru Granth Sahib which is in itself divine. The founder of the Sikh faith, Guru Nanak Dev Ji, travelled with a Muslim musician and together they started the tradition of reciting and singing devotional hymns in praise of the Almighty. Each of the 5894 hymns that comprise the Sikh scriptures is set to music. This is perhaps nowhere more vividly illustrated than in the Golden Temple at Amritsar, which like other Sikh places of worship throughout the world resonates to the sound of live devotional music throughout the day.

Music plays an important and central part in everyday life for the Sikhs. Shabads (Hymns) from the Guru Granth Sahib, the Holy Sikh Scriptures, are sung in the Gurudwara daily. Music is the language of the Divine which can be easily comprehended. The Sikh Gurus set the revealed Word to different musical measures (Ragas) thereby making it unique. A raag in Indian classical music means a pattern of melodic notes. This form provides the divine experience through the medium of music and the sounds of God's creation.

The Guru Granth Sahib verses are often sung in a process known as Kirtan. In this process true meaning is revealed directly to the Surat - the consciousness and awareness – through cosmic vibrations. These keep the mind focused on the Word. They heal the physical body and cleanse inner thoughts. The Shabads when sung in Ragas create a vibration in the body and gradually start uplifting the mind spiritually into a blissful state of contemplation. The Shabads are sung in the Gurdwara, in the morning and evening, accompanied by two musical instruments: the harmonium and able. The harmonium is a small, portable, bellow-blown reed organ; one hand fingering a keyboard the other pumping the bellows; and the able, a pair of drums played with the palm of the hands and fingers. The singing of Sikh hymns –Kirtan- has been likened to “a priceless gem” and is also seen described as “the food of the soul”. An expression of the interfaith credentials of the Sikh scriptures, is that many of the hymns contained within them are the compositions of Hindu and Muslim saints.

The various Shabads performed at the service all reflected the theme of the Warrior Saint tradition that underpins the legendary reputation of the Sikh soldier. Amongst the iconic images of the Sikh regiment in WWI are some taken on the Western Front and Mesopotamia. They show Sikh troops, with instruments, singing hymns from their scriptures. If it were needed, this is indeed testimony to the primacy of faith to the Sikh warrior.

In the words of Dr Gurnam Singh: ‘The inter-faith dimension of the service resulted in a wonderful syncretised experience where the poetry of Wilfred Owen was dancing with the varas of Guru Gobind Singh; where the haunting echoes of the magnificent sounds of St. Martin’s Voices were complimented by the soothing renditions of gurbani by the Acapella Jatha, all against a dazzling bouquet of stringed and percussion instruments, both Punjabi and Western.

However, perhaps the most moving moment of the whole service was when Harbans Singh Thandi, the 95 year old son of Udai Singh of 14th KGO Sikhs who had saved the life of Lieutenant Savory at the battle of Krithia during the Gallipoli campaign, came forward to face the congregation. In the Church was a descendant of Lieutenant Savory; together they stood as living testimony to the bonds of shared history and true comradeship that transcends our own mortality.’

Dr Gurnam Singh recounted: ‘The ceremony ended with a rendition of the *Last Post*, which, however many times I have heard it, always brings a tear to my eyes and a lump in my throat. If there ever was a piece of music written only for one instrument, the bugle, then it is the *Last Post*.

Just when I thought the sad and serene notes were providing a fitting end to the proceedings, as we exited the Church in a procession we were greeted by a guard of honour of the 1914 Sikhs, who were splendidly dressed in their WWI khakis.

This is a group of young, UK born, Sikhs who, after spending some 16 months in training with the British Army, made history last year by becoming the first Sikhs in 200 years to march at the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst, in honour of their fallen forefathers.

“ Cultural diversity was to be found on the parade ground, in the trenches and the battlefields long before it became an everyday reality in modern society. ”

As we moved through the guard of honour with their raised Lee-Enfield rifles - the British Army's standard rifle from its official adoption in 1895 - for a moment, by allowing my imagination to flow, I felt a real sense of the presence of my brave ancestors. I was not the only one; many of the war veterans at the ceremony were saluting them, with tears rolling down their cheeks.

War is not a pleasant thing and should be avoided at all costs. However, if there is anything good that can come out of war, it is the realisation that, as the Sikhs have so famously demonstrated in their short but illustrious history, it is under such conditions that the true qualities of the saint-soldier emerge.

As General Sir Ian Hamilton, the Commander in Chief of the Expedition at Gallipoli, in a tribute to the Sikh soldiers noted: ‘Their devotion to duty and their splendid loyalty to their orders and to their leaders make a record their nation should look back upon with pride for many generations.’

The spoken service at St Martin’s was not only a fitting tribute to the spirit of heroism and comradeship that the Sikhs, and other troops displayed during the somber days of WWI. The complimentary and uplifting performance of Sikh and Christian music conveyed perfectly the values of co-existence, understanding and tolerance to which both traditions aspire.



Image depicting a wounded British Officer being carried from the battlefield by a Sikh soldier. Reproduced by the kind permission of the Avtar S Bahra Collection.

A Daily Call To Peace

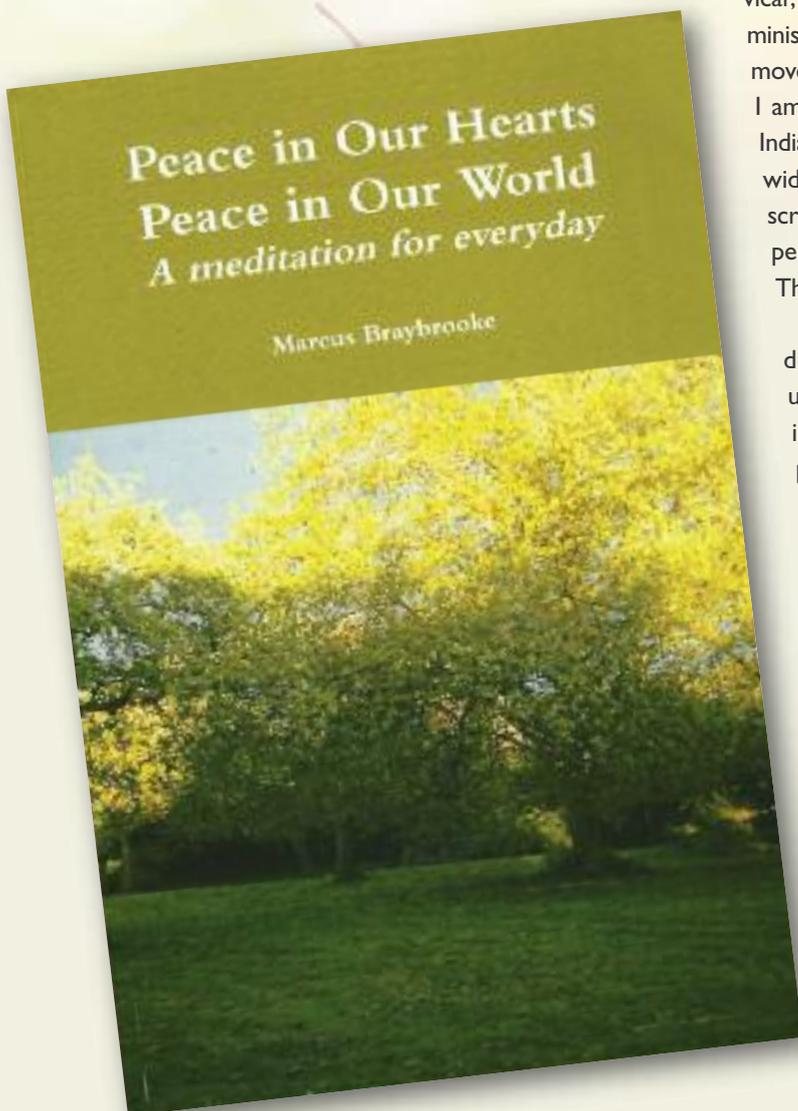
The search for peace in society and in the world cannot be separated from the quest for inner peace in the heart. If you wish for a more peaceful world, the first step is to resolve to become a more peaceful person yourself. This commitment is a lifetime task. In the beginning, you have to learn how to quieten the body and still the mind. This is not just outer silence, which is difficult in a noisy world, but inner silence, which is even more difficult with a hectic schedule and many pressing concerns to think about. Yet without inner silence, you will not come to know yourself nor discover your deep rootedness in the Soul of All Being, to whom people have given many names.

As you get to know yourself better, you may not like what you find. You may have a low opinion of yourself or a lack of self-worth. You may be plagued by feelings of guilt from childhood memories. You may feel bitter about an unresolved argument or you may still be hurt by a broken relationship. You may be struggling with pain or sadness. But as you look deeper you will find forgiveness for yourself and all around you. Like cleaning a tarnished vessel of silver, you will gradually discover the original brightness of a pure heart. A peaceful heart is one without regret about the past or fear for the future. You are free to live wholly in the present - at peace with yourself and at one with life.

My own perspective is that of a Christian. As a Church of England vicar, I have learned much from my parishioners. Throughout my ministry I have also, on a voluntary basis, been active in the interfaith movement, as a member of the World Congress of Faiths, of which I am now President. I spent a year before ordination studying Indian religions at Madras University. Subsequently, I have travelled widely and learned about world religions both from their sacred scriptures and from practitioners, many of whom have become personal friends. Fifteen years ago, I helped to co-found The Three Faiths Forum of Jews, Christians and Muslims.

The relationship of religions to each other has been much discussed by scholars. In my view, each religion is 'unique and universal.' Each religion has a distinct identity and is to be valued in its particularity, but each religion also has a message for all people. This means we can learn from the wisdom of great spiritual teaches, even if we do not belong to the same religion. Many of the meditations are based on the insights of a particular religious tradition. Similar themes, however, can be found in several religions - such as peace itself. It can be illuminating to juxtapose quotations from different traditions, as I have tried to do in some of the meditations.

When you meditate, you may experience timeless moments of total stillness and peace. But most of your days are spent interacting with other people or with the natural world. You can radiate peace to all whom you contact, but you will also pick up vibrations from others whom you meet. It was not until I developed a form of angina that I realized how the body, especially the heart, reacts to anger, jealousy, and resentment of others, even if it is not focused on you. You are interrelated with life at every level of your being. Just as smoke makes it hard to breathe, another person's depression may dull your spirit.



To be a peaceful person means learning to respond peacefully to the ever-changing demands of life - at work, in the home, and in the community. Do not be discouraged if you are not transformed overnight. The lost keys, the delay on the way to work, your teenage daughter's loud music, your own mistakes, will still be annoying. But gradually you will learn to react more creatively while maintaining an inner tranquillity.

The search for a peaceful heart is not, however, a selfish pursuit. It does not require you to live cocooned from the pain and conflict of the world. In fact, as your inner peace develops, you will feel more acutely the anguish of those who suffer. You will become increasingly aware of the changes necessary to create a more harmonious community. There are many ways in which you can help: by your attitude, by what you say to friends, by donations to charity, by campaigning for a cause, by overcoming prejudice, or by challenging injustice. You cannot do everything. But everyone can do something. Your most important contribution is not what you do but who you are - a person with a peaceful heart. You will become aware that you are part of a great network of people, who, in a wonderful variety of ways, care for the sick, feed the poor, bring reconciliation to areas of conflict, and share in the healing of the world. You can

find renewal for your search for peace in the example of people from many countries and faiths who have dedicated their lives to the service of others and the search for peace.

The ever-changing beauty of the natural world is another source of renewal. Many people feel they are most at peace when they are quiet in the hills or valleys or beside still water or churning waves. Many come in touch with the sustaining Source of Life through Nature. Awareness of the preciousness of all life imposes a responsibility on each person to protect it for future generations.

The search for peace in the heart and in the world is a daily calling and this book provides a quotation, a thought for meditation and reflection and a practical suggestion for each day of the year. Many religious people, although not most Buddhists, speak of 'God' so the word appears in many of the meditations, but if you find the word a hindrance, you may prefer to use a term such as 'The Real,' 'The Inner Light,' 'The Light Force,' 'the Soul of All being,' or your own choice of words. It may be that all words are inadequate. There is an old saying - 'Pray as you can, not as you can't'

The book is arranged under themes suggested in a prayer by George Appleton, who was committed to the search for understanding and friendship between people of all religions and who longed for a more peaceful world.

*O God of many names,
Lover of all people,
Give peace in our hearts,
In our lives,
In our homes,
In our community,
Between our religions,
In the world
In the universe,
The peace of our need,
The peace of your will.*

Grief can be the garden of compassion.

34 Don't Hurry

*There is a time for everything
And a season for every activity under heaven
Bible: Ecclesiastes 3,1*

Are you always in a hurry? I have a friend who ends every letter 'I must dash now.' Sometimes I puzzle why she's always in a hurry and hope I don't give the same impression to other people. You are more likely to offend other people and to make mistakes, if you are always in a hurry. There's a saying that 'God gives you time for what you need to do.' It is surprising how often, if you are really pressed, someone rings up to cancel an appointment. The Bible also says there is a time to rest and a time to enjoy life.

Instead of hurrying and worrying about what you should do next, give your best energy to your present activity. If you have a lot of things to do, imagine telling them to 'stand in line.' Then as they quietly queue up, you concentrate on each task, one at a time. If you do several things at once, you're likely to bury the vital letter in the wrong file and waste time looking for it. If you concentrate, it can be surprising how quickly some things are dealt with and how calm you feel.

102 Grieving

*Grief can be the garden of compassion.
Jalal al-Din Rumi (1207-73), Sufi poet and mystic.*

There is no short cut for grieving. Traditional societies know that it takes time to recover an inner tranquility, especially if the death was sudden. Jewish custom is for the mourner to observe seven days of intense mourning - shiv'ah. Mourning continues for a year, with children saying a special prayer or Kaddish for a parent for eleven months. Modern society has few accepted rituals and expects the bereaved to be 'back to normal' after a few months. Judy Tatelbaum, in her book *Courage to Grieve*, says that grieving requires you honestly to face your feelings and accept them for however long it takes to heal. 'Grief experienced does dissolve. Grief unexpressed lasts indefinitely.'

This Tibetan meditation is designed for people in deep anguish and grief.

'Imagine in the sky an enlightened being radiating compassion - for example, the Buddha or the Virgin Mary or Rama. Open your heart to them and pour out your grief. Don't hold back your tears. Imagine the Compassionate One responds with his or her love, with rays of light streaming to you, transforming your suffering into bliss.'

158 I am the Refugee and the Pirate

*I am the twelve-year-old girl, refugee on a small boat,
Who throws herself into the ocean after being
raped by a sea pirate, And I am the pirate,
my heart not yet capable of seeing and loving.
From a poem in 'Being Peace' by Thich Nhat Han.
Vietnamese Zen master, poet and founder of Plum Village*

When pictures of Vietnamese boat people were in the news, the Asian theologian Choan-Seng Song, in his book *The Compassionate God*, said God's face could be seen in the suffering of the Indochinese people. 'In the disfigured bodies of the children fallen victim to hunger and bullets, someone must have seen God disfigured with horror.' Through their pain God pleaded with the conscience of humanity. The Buddhist monk, Thich Nhat Hanh, in the poem above identified himself with a young refugee and with the pirate who raped her. If we have self-knowledge we recognise that we share in oppressive structures that cause much suffering. If we have a heart full of compassion, we identify with the victims. In seeking to help, we are channels of God's mercy.

In your meditation, ponder the poem of Thich Nhat Hahn quoted above or look carefully at a picture of young migrant trying to cross the Mediterranean or of a refugee child in Africa. Imagine the child as your child - a gift from God. Feel for the distant child, feel for her parents, feel their pain. Only as you sense at an emotional level your oneness with all who suffer, will you be moved to act and to help. Then if you commit yourself to loving concern for others, your heart will be at peace because it will be at one with the heart of God.

213 Hold Hands

Do not be satisfied until each one with whom you are concerned is to you like a member of your family. Regard each one either as a father, a brother, or as a sister, or as a mother, or as a child. 'Abdu'l-Baha (1844-1921), a Baha'i Leader.

On September 11, 2001, a young Muslim from Pakistan was evacuated from the World Trade Centre where he worked. He saw a dark cloud coming toward him. Trying to escape, he fell. A Hasidic Jew held out his hand, saying, 'Brother, there's a cloud of glass coming at us, grab my hand, let's get the heck out of here.' People of all faiths have condemned that act of terrorism. They have held hands to support and comfort each other and have joined together in prayer. As the young Muslim said afterwards:

'We need to continue to hold hands as we shape a more just and peaceful society.'

Consider how you use your hands. Do you use them to push people away or to welcome them? People use their hands in greeting: to shake hands, to hug and to embrace. In India it is customary to join hands and raise them level to the face, greeting people with the word 'Namaste', which may be translated as 'I greet the divine in you.' The media often gives to others enemy images, the person of peace sees in all people a reflection of God. John Wesley (1703-1791), founder of Methodism, said that like God's love, human love should 'embrace neighbours and strangers, friends and enemies... of every nation.'

280 Poverty is ...

*If a rich person sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him,
How can he claim that he loves God? Bible: 1 John 3, 17.*

When I first went to India forty years ago, I was shocked to see children picking through heaps of rubbish in the hope of finding a few grains of rice to eat. If you picture individuals who are starving or consider statistics, it is equally disturbing. President Clinton summarised the situation starkly: 'A billion people go to bed hungry every night - and a billion and a half people - one quarter of the people on earth never get a clean glass of water. One woman dies every minute in childbirth.' 'Development of itself may not bring peace, but there can be no lasting peace without it.'

If you are committed to seeking a more peaceful world, you cannot ignore the problems of world hunger. You need to inform yourself of the basic facts, but also try to enter imaginatively into the experience of those who are poor. Imagine not only the pain and weakness of starvation, but the weariness, humiliation and loss of human dignity. Ponder this Litany from the streets of Calcutta:

*Poverty is a knee level view from your bit of pavement;
Coughing from your steel-banded lungs,
Alone with your face to the wall;
Shrunk breasts and a three year old who cannot stand...
The prayer withheld The heart withheld
The hand withheld; yours and mine.*

337 Morning

*I slept and dreamt that life was joy I woke and
saw that life was service I acted and behold!
Service was joy Rabindranath Tagore*

Dawn and dusk are special moments when it is easy to sense a presence in Nature. In almost every religion, they have been set aside as times for prayer. Dawn holds the promise of a new day, with its hopes and worries. Nature is still, everything is fresh. The body should be refreshed and the mind quiet after a night's

sleep. To begin the day quietly helps you to live the whole day in tune with the rhythm of Nature. If you start in a rush you may never have a chance to regain your equilibrium.

Could you get up one morning really early, so that you could watch the Dawn? Find a quiet place and be aware of the stillness and sense of all life being renewed. You may like to read slowly this prayer by Masao Takenaka from Japan:

Eternal God,

Early in the morning, before we begin our work,

We praise your glory.

Renew our bodies as fresh as morning flowers.

*Open our inner eyes, as the sun casts new light
upon the darkness Which prevailed over the night.*

Deliver us from captivity.

Give us wings of freedom like birds in the sky,

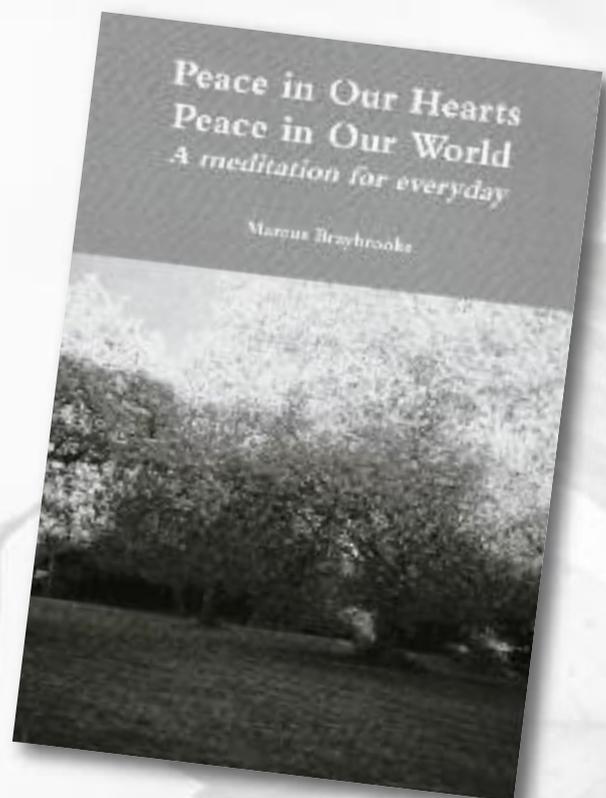
To begin a new journey.

Restore justice and freedom, as a mighty stream

Running continuously as day follows day.

We thank you for the gift of this morning,

And a new day to work with you.



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WAGING peace

THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF ART

“The point is, art never stopped a war... That was never its function. Art cannot change events. But it can change people. It can affect people so that they are changed - they then act in a way that may affect the course of events... by the way they behave, the way they think.”

Leonard Bernstein, the renowned late 20th century composer and conductor.

The current conflict in the Middle East highlights that much work lies ahead toward finding ways that the cultures and faiths of the Middle East and West can live peacefully together. Given the increasing chasm of discord and misunderstanding that exists between the two, a new kind of movement is needed: one that builds on what we hold in common, and that wages peace on the “other”.

In a world of stereotypes and assumptions, it is essential to redress the balance, listening to each other, and gaining true insights into each other. Hence it is more critical than ever that “creative demonstrations of dialogue” be developed.

I grew up as an American from a Christian background in Senegal, West Africa, a Muslim country. And as a young person I observed the tension that all too often exists between different faiths and I remember thinking early on that there must be another way. Senegal is also known for its artistic richness, and I grew up around the visual arts and music, including musicians that became world-class performers, such as Youssou N'Dour, who lived in the next neighbourhood over. So I have been passionate about both interreligious relations and the arts from

early on. However it was while living in Egypt that both of these passions came together as we began to experience the transformative power of art, echoing the words of the late Nobel Prize Egyptian novelist Naguib Mahfouz, “Art is language of the entire human personality”.

“Art is
language of
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human
personality.”

The vision for CARAVAN originated over seven years ago in Cairo where I lived for ten years serving as the Rector of the historic St. John’s Episcopal Church; focused on the international diplomatic, business, academic and NGO communities. With the goal of building bridges with our Muslim brothers and sisters, we started a citywide interfaith arts initiative called CARAVAN that quickly grew into a movement

that led to it becoming an international interreligious peacebuilding arts non-profit organisation (NGO). Our focus was on encouraging people to “journey together through the arts,” thus the “caravan” theme. Through these initiatives in Egypt, we discovered how the arts can be one of the most effective mediums to build bridges between the creeds and cultures of the Middle East and the West, and to enhance understanding, bring about respect, enable sharing, and deepen friendship between them.



Viewing The Bridge in London



Siona Benjamin's work in Metz Cathedral, France

Through the CARAVAN exhibitions and festivals we learned how the arts can serve as an indirect catalyst for diverse peoples to come together that would normally never come together, thereby becoming a means to encourage new friendships to be made across religions and cultures. The early 20th century Lebanese artist and writer, Kahlil Gibran, who profoundly bridged the Middle East and West, beautifully said, "Your neighbour is your other self dwelling behind a wall. In understanding, all walls shall fall down." In this sense CARAVAN is not so much about interfaith dialogue, but about something much deeper; interfaith friendships. CARAVAN's exhibitions become "encounter points," enabling new friendships across faiths and cultures and changing erroneous stereotypes that previously existed. And there are numerous inspiring stories of strategic interfaith initiatives and programs that have come out of these art initiatives.

One of the flagship initiatives of CARAVAN is the globally recognized interfaith CARAVAN Exhibition of Art, that brings together many of the Middle East's premier and emerging artists with Western artists for peacebuilding, seeking to use the arts as a bridge for intercultural and interreligious interchange and dialogue between their cultures and creeds. Each year this unique exhibition has garnered attention from the international press, media and art world, attracting thousands of visitors.

One of the distinctive elements of CARAVAN is that we do all possible to hold our interfaith exhibitions in sacred spaces, instead of in traditional art venues, such as galleries or museums, in order to reach a broader demographic than just the "art world." Also, in sacred spaces there is a contemplative atmosphere that enhances the message of the art. Within the CARAVAN arts initiatives there is also a charitable component that seeks to bring hope to individuals that are in need (economically, socially and physically) within the Middle East through the support of charities assisting the poor regardless of creed.

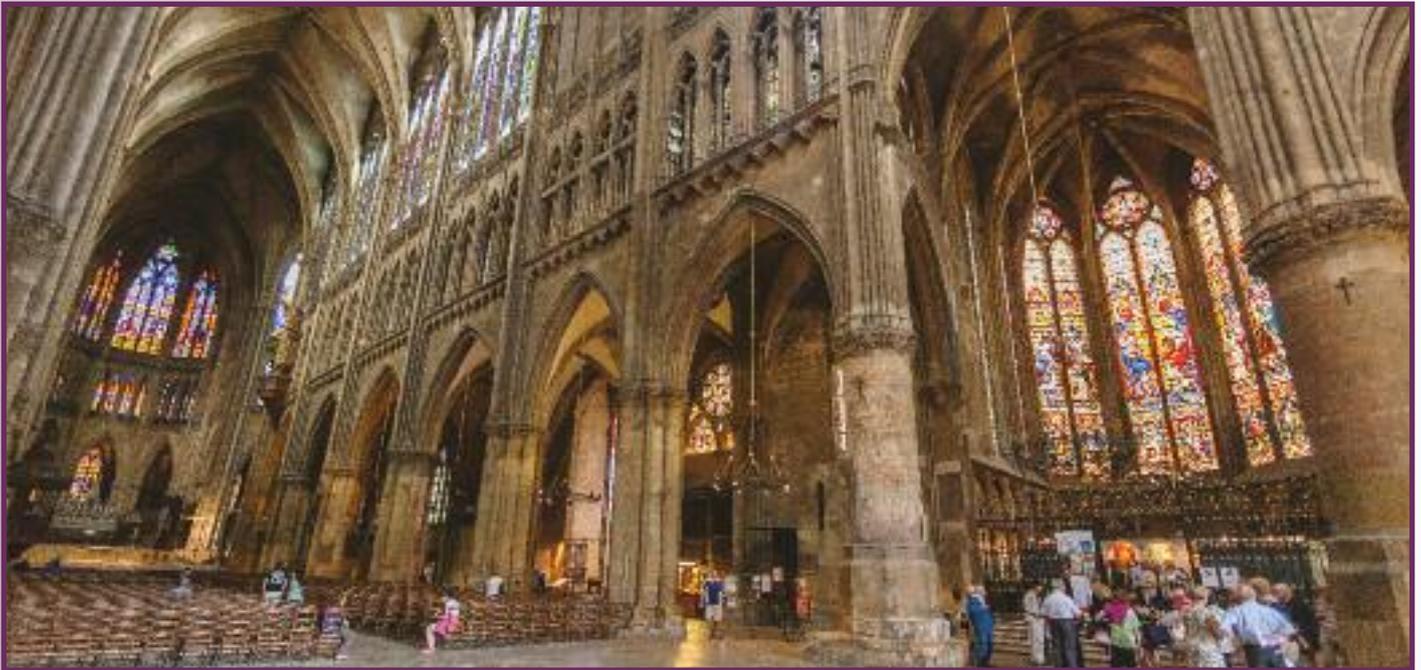
The 2015 CARAVAN Exhibition of Art, titled "THE BRIDGE," is a ground-breaking travelling interfaith art exhibition featuring 47 premier Arab, Persian and Jewish contemporary artists of



Muslim Imam and Christian Coptic priest at London opening of The Bridge



Imam from Al Azhar with Anglican Archbishop of Middle East at Cairo's The Bridge



The Bridge at Metz Cathedral, France Photograph: Olivier-Henri Dancy



Paul-Gordon Chandler with Grand Rabbi Bruno Fiszon at opening in Metz, France



Viewing The Bridge in London

Christian, Muslim and Jewish faith backgrounds focusing on the theme of what “bridges” us to each other. The exhibition, which is sponsored by SODIC in Egypt and United Religions Initiative (URI), and will tour for 18 months, opened in Paris, France in February during the United Nations World Interfaith Harmony Week just after the Charlie Hebdo tragedy, at the historic Church of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, in the Latin Quarter, the oldest church in Paris. It has since been exhibited in Cairo, Egypt, on London’s Trafalgar Square (St.Martin-in-the-Fields) and in Metz, France’s majestic cathedral. Following the tour in Europe, it will head to the USA in early 2016 to open at Ground Zero’s St. Paul’s Chapel, following by in cities throughout the USA.

In this time of turbulence around the world, as THE BRIDGE exhibition travels, it takes with it a fundamental message of intercultural and interreligious harmony, seeking to serve as a common starting point on which to build, toward seeing the development of a society that inherently respects and honours cultural and religious diversity, living and working together to jointly enhance their communities.

The words of Kahlil Gibran are most apropos to CARAVAN’s artistic mission, and our current THE BRIDGE exhibition: “I love you when you bow in your mosque, kneel in your temple, pray in your church. For you and I are [children] of one religion, and it is the Spirit.”

For more information on CARAVAN and its interfaith art initiatives, please see: www.oncarvan.org
Visit us on Facebook: CARAVAN Arts Twitter: @oncarvanarts Email: oncarvan@gmail.com

Author: REV. PAUL-GORDON CHANDLER is the Founder and President of CARAVAN. An author, interfaith advocate, art curator and patron, social entrepreneur and a U.S Episcopal priest, who grew up in Muslim West Africa, he has lived and worked extensively throughout the Islamic world in leadership roles within faith-based publishing, relief and development agencies and churches. Most recently, he served as the rector of the Episcopal Church of St John the Baptist-Maadi in Cairo (2003-2013). He has curated exhibitions at such sites St. Paul’s Cathedral-London, Egypt’s Museum of Modern Art, Washington D.C.’s National Cathedral, the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City and St. Martin in the Fields in London.

With and the artist

Similarities of Repair

I am inspired by traditional styles of painting, such as Indian/Persian miniatures, Byzantine icons and Jewish and Christian illuminated manuscripts, but I blend these ancient forms with pop cultural elements from our times to create a new vocabulary of my own. Using the rich colours of gouache I apply layers, literally with the paint, as well as metaphorically with the content. My painting is my ritual, my celebration, my essence. My research and ideas flow simultaneously together and make up the fabric of my work. I use gouache paints and 22K gold leaf to form layers of jewel-like colour. My background in painting, enamelling on metal and theatre set design all influence my work. My characters are real as they act out contemporary situations and dilemmas, while also celebrating my womanhood, my abilities, my strengths and my ambitions. The ornateness of the culture from which I came once seemed difficult, and unnecessary, to apply in my work. Now I have found a way to use it, to be able to weave current issues and parts of my life in its intricacies, thus making this ornateness strong and meaningful. In this way, I attempt to create a dialogue between the ancient and the modern, forcing a confrontation of unresolved issues. I am an artist originally from Bombay, India, of Bene Israel Jewish descent.



Finding Home # 89 (Fereshteh) "Vashti"
7" x 10", Gouache and gold leaf on wood panel, 2006

*Vashti was cast out (Book of Esther 1-19 Hebrew Bible)
Now she looks in....*



Finding Home # 93 (Fereshteh) “Mahalat”
 22” x 22”, Gouache, gold leaf and digital
 image on paper 2006

*Does forgiveness come easily to Mahalat?
 Daughter of Ishmael
 Granddaughter of Hagar
 A bridge in the midrash
 Wife of Easu
 In the ying yang of her destiny
 The circle must complete
 What we have left undone.*

My work reflects my background and the transition between my old and new worlds. Having grown up in a predominantly Hindu and Muslim society, having been educated in Catholic and Zoroastrian schools, having been raised Jewish and now living in America, I have always had to reflect upon the cultural boundary zones in which I have lived. In this transcultural America I feel a

strong need to make art that will speak to my audience of our similarities, not our differences as I feel I can contribute to a much-needed “repair” (Tikkun) through my art. I would like my audience to re-evaluate their notions and concepts about identity and race, thus understanding that such misconceptions could lead to racism, hatred and war.

Bridging Pardes

World spins them all
 About round to tall
 Trails to be made
 By all so young and small

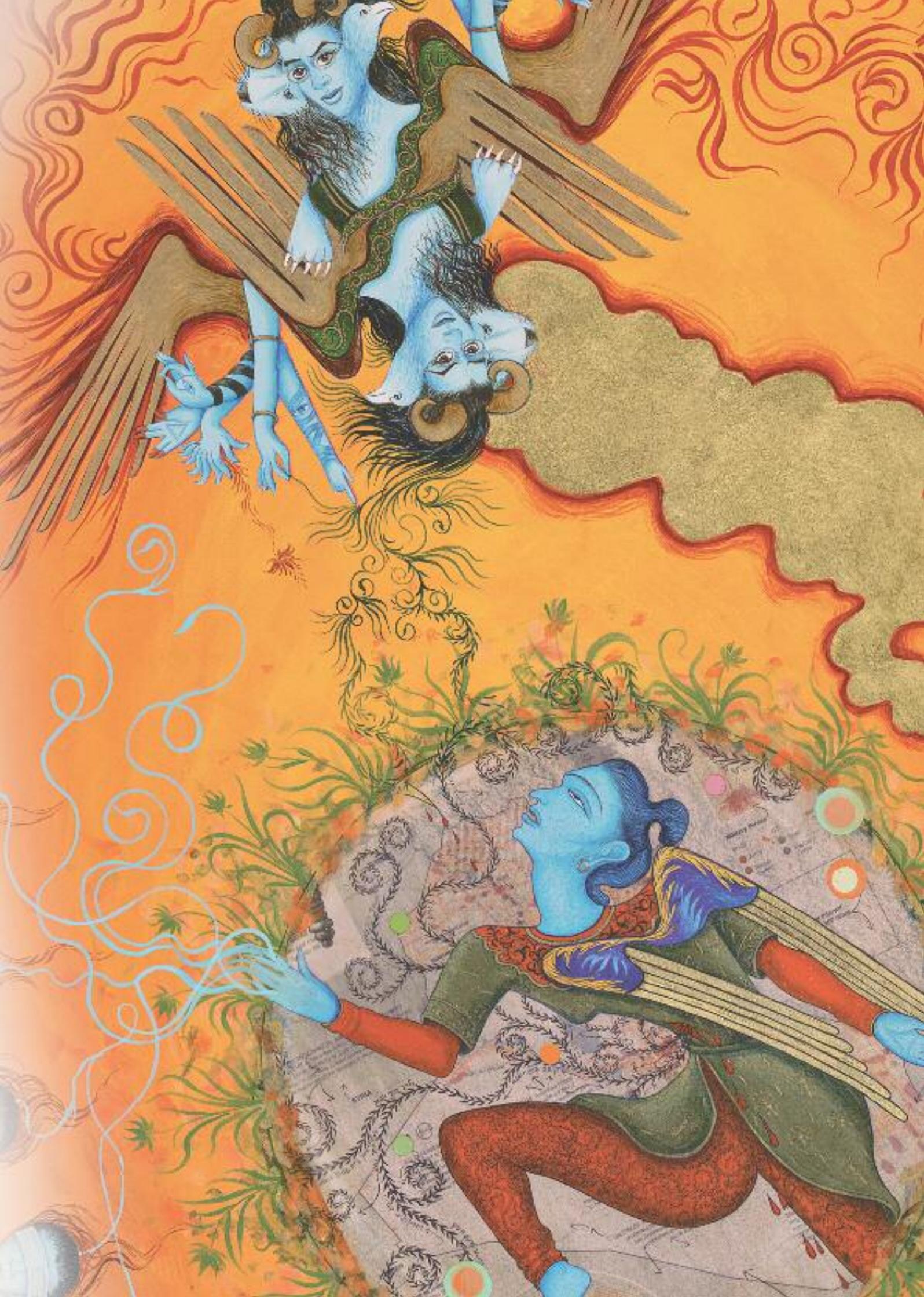
Blindfolded by my own
 Watching, learning, forlorn
 Bridges to be hung
 By me and you alone

Zeus of my dreams
 Come unfold your wings
 Nectar of your being
 Inside my heart it stings

30” x 24”, Gouache, mixed media and 22 K gold leaf on wood panel 2014

Siona Benjamin

Please see www.artsiona.com for greater insight into Siona’s work



Symphony of Night

High mist. In the garden, dew stills the leaves' chatter; a hedgehog unrolls, silent on the damp gravel; next door's son gulps back a whoop to the goal in his cans;

across, the old girl silhouetted in her window makes the storm in her chest subside, waves her inhaler, pulls the blinds; and the young ones, over, know to keep

the intimate moans down in the week; and from the street, the blur of traffic, and pop of rap from the odd trapped car are the muted symphony of night; we play

together, us townsfolk, almost tender in the orange dark. And when someone's lights linger too long on, we wonder, awake too, why. Say nowt, wish well.

Altogether now.

Ssssh.

Rebecca Irvine Bilkau