

IFW NEWS



Interfaith Wolverhampton



Interfaith Visit to Coventry Cathedral, showing Jacob Epstein's sculpture of Saint Michael's Victory over the Devil

Interfaith Wolverhampton's vision

is to promote mutual respect and shared commitment to the common good by the City's diverse communities.

We aim to dispel hatred and misunderstanding through dialogue and friendship.

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In This Issue

Our longest serving monarch Queen Elizabeth II's 90th birthday was on 21st April, but it was during May and June that most of the celebrations took place with great pomp and pageantry up and down the country. The culmination of the celebrations was on 12th June when the Queen hosted a street party for some 10,000 people at the Patron's Lunch – a celebration of more than 600 organisations in the UK and around the Commonwealth. The élan of the event and the full-throated expression of gratitude by the nation to the monarch, for her dedication and unwavering devotion to her role, gave us many fond memories to cherish in the years to come.

The Queen's gentle approach to valuing faiths other than her own faith has significantly contributed to the current milieu of tolerance and appreciation of our multi-racial, multi-faith society. In this issue we are offering a multi-hued bouquet of tributes to the monarch from an interfaith perspective.

The seismic outcome of the referendum on UK's membership of EU has surprised large numbers of people. The campaign was conducted in a high-octane manner with considerable vitriol and unsubstantiated claims about our continued membership or the benefits of a divorce. Deep divisions in society reared their ugly head between young and old voters, between different parts of the country, together with widespread disenchantment with the establishment. This has led to considerable turmoil and uncertainty in the markets. The Prime Minister has announced his resignation, and the rising tide of hostility against immigrants might lead to erosion of community cohesion and stability. The work of organisations such as Interfaith Wolverhampton will become even more vital in order to bring communities together.

The refurbishment of the Darlington Street Methodist Church after the devastating fire in March 2014 was completed, and the Interfaith Wolverhampton Office is now on the ground floor, more accessible than before. The opening ceremony of the new premises was performed by the Mayor and mayoress of Wolverhampton on 11th June.

I hope you will like the variety of articles and accounts of interfaith events that we are offering in this issue. The theme of the next newsletter will be "Dying Well with Dignity". If you have something to share on this sensitive subject, please do let us know.



Sehdev Bismal MBE
Editor

The Religious Roots of the Queen's Role

The whole idea of monarchy is understood by some as having three rather different roots in early society, though these ideas could all point to the same person.

For some communities it was no doubt the strongest person in battle, or at least the most effective, who naturally became the ruler, and one of whose children was given the advantage in succeeding him to save having constant wars of

succession. For others it was someone recognised as being very wise, and to whom people were willing to go for fair judgement of their disputes, perhaps because they could "remember" the ancient ways of the people. Either of these could

have a religious element, perhaps God had given them their strength or their wisdom, and perhaps that strength and wisdom was understood as exercised on behalf of God.

Alongside those ideas which had a natural basis even if they could be interpreted in a religious way, there was a more specific understanding in some pre-Christian traditions, that of the priest-king (described in Frazer's *The Golden Bough*). Here the king – or queen – was the one who brought the good weather, fertility, and the seasons in due time, and had the power to control the vast forces of the natural and psychic worlds. This was done not only by wisdom but also by ecstatic self-abandonment allowing spiritual power to flow through him, something which might involve an annual acting out of the sacrifice of their own lives. This had a particular dramatic and religious power because when their powers were seen to fade they would indeed be expected to sacrifice themselves to make way for a successor, but also as an effective gift to ensure the future well-being of the people.

This idea of the king-priest is found in the Jewish scriptures too, the order of the priest-king appearing very early on with the mysterious character of Melchizedek, an order ascribed in Psalm 101 to the kings of Israel themselves, and then the king-sacrifice theme comes through in the story of the crucifixion of Jesus, when he is reported as hanging there dying under a sign declaring to all the world “The king of the Jews”. This sacred notion of kingship as priest and sacrifice continued in the Eastern Church without challenge. In the West the popes tried to bring kings under their religious authority and saw Western monarchs as performing a secular function with their blessing. Most kings retained some of the religious trappings of their roles though, even if they were now expected to receive them at the hands of the clergy. In Protestant times many countries rejected the authority of the Catholic Church and many religious ceremonies and trappings loved by the common people were swept away. In the tug of war over religion in England, though, the rituals important to kings and queens tended to survive, so our own

Coronation service is still full of reminders of the role of the king as priest and sacrifice.

At her coronation the queen wore layers of clothing, and they included some usually associated with priests. These included a coat of gold called a *supertunica*, and a stole round the neck such as priests wear to this day in services. It is hard to know how seriously the queen takes this priestly role, she may have met too many clergy over the years to be impressed! And it should be remembered she has an important role in the priest-free Church of Scotland as well as her responsibilities here south of the border. As well as these signs of the priest-monarch, there were also indications in the coronation of the other religious role, that of the royal sacrifice. In the most private moment of the service the queen was anointed with oil. This is a traditional sign of a prayer for divine power and protection for kings, but before the service two oils were mixed together for this anointing. Why two? Perhaps one of them was a reminder of the Christian tradition of extreme unction, of anointing before death. Certainly after the anointing had taken place the queen was dressed in a white gown called the *columbium sidonis*, or the “shroud tunic,” a sign that she had given up her own life in becoming queen. Whatever her view of priesthood her incomparably long reign has demonstrated the centrality of this sacrificial view of monarchy, a Christian tradition, but one with roots in deepest human history and in many cultures.



Revd. John Barnett.

Queen Elizabeth – A Catholic Perspective



The Queen is the sovereign pontiff of the Church of England but she does not see religious belief as problematic. But it is her relations with the papacy that has done most to reconcile centuries of distrust and suspicion between Catholics and Anglicans and to promote understanding and tolerance.

At the beginning of Elizabeth's reign, Catholics were a beleaguered minority, defensive of their faith and suspicious of the beliefs of others, and in

turn they were regarded as a part of English society which had its allegiance elsewhere. As far as Catholics are concerned, the Queen herself has done much to facilitate a happier relationship between Rome and the Anglican Church which inevitably extends to other faiths. She has visited the Vatican five times – the first as a youthful Princes Elizabeth to meet Pope Pius XII. Her second visit was a private one, in May 1962, when she was received by Pope John XXIII. She went twice to the Vatican during the pontificate of Pope John Paul II (Karol Wojtyla, the Polish Pope), in 1980 and 2000. The reception she extended to him during his highly-acclaimed visit to the UK in 1982 deepened the relationship between the Crown and the Vatican substantially. The Pope met the Queen and visited Canterbury Cathedral, the first Pope ever to do so. Full diplomatic relations were restored between the UK and the Holy See after a break of 423 years. It is remarkable how much progress has been made during the reign of Elizabeth, after so many years of turbulent history of relations between the English monarchy and the Pope.

There was some opposition and apprehension before the arrival of Pope Benedict XVI (Joseph Ratzinger) on September 20th 2010. Many remembered, and still remember, the terrible atrocities of the Nazi regime. But the Queen and her husband were amazing and set the tone for the remainder of the Pope's stay in Scotland and England – one of courtesy to a Head of State, but also of reconciliation and a determination to move forwards, an attitude shared by Benedict. Prince Philip welcomed the Pontiff at Edinburgh Airport, along with the Archbishops of Edinburgh, St

Andrews and Westminster. He was then driven to Holyrood House to meet the Queen for the first time. Then the mood of the visit changed. Television viewers were treated to the sight of Elizabeth, Philip and Benedict chatting easily together, like a family with Philip supplying the humour. Instead of an experience to be endured, it became one to be enjoyed. The few people who were waiting in Scottish streets, on a dismal day, swelled magically to cheering crowds. And the same elation continued for the four days of the Papal visit. It would not have been the same if the Government officials had greeted the delegation from Rome at Heathrow!

The Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh met Pope Francis in 2014. During their private audience, Francis gave the royal couple a gift of a huge sphere topped by a cross for their great-grandson Prince George. "I'm sure he will appreciate it when he is older", the Queen said tactfully. Pope Francis has not yet visited the UK, but he is still flying to distant countries – so who knows? The public meeting of two such charismatic people would be quite something!

But it was not only the Popes whose relationship with the Queen brought Anglicans and Catholics together. Cardinal Hume was an outstandingly popular Archbishop of Westminster whose pronouncements strengthened the reputation and self-confidence of Catholics. The Queen, the Supreme Governor of the Church of England, referred to him as "my Cardinal". She went to Latin vespers at his cathedral and chose him to be one of the twenty-four members of the Order of Merit. Although he was in the last stages of terminal cancer, he made a great effort to go to Buckingham Palace to receive it. After his death in 1999, a statue of him in monastic habit was erected in his home town of Newcastle-on-Tyne. The queen unveiled the statue in her jubilee year in 2002.

The Queen inherited a very fraught situation in 1953. Much of her credit for the amelioration of Anglican relations with Rome must go to her.

Michael Heap.

The Queen's Reign: Working for the Common Good



In modern Britain, respect for other people's differences is the bedrock of social cohesion and community relations. Queen Elizabeth's coronation took place in very different social circumstances when there were very few visible signs of backgrounds and faiths other than Christianity. During her reign there has been a phenomenal change in the composition of population and the range of cultures and faiths in our towns and cities. Society has significantly changed beyond recognition in the recent past, and is now made up of substantial numbers of Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Jews, Sikhs, and people of other faiths or none.

This change has been positively reflected by the Queen in her visits to places of worship, her frequent emphasis on the vital need to be inclusive and her initiatives to show her public support for people of all faiths and none.

The Queen, through her addresses, visits and events, has made explicit her commitment to pluralism, secularism and multiculturalism during her long reign, and created an environment that has given confidence to minority faith communities to contribute to the common good. This country appreciates diversity, and nowhere else in the world would you see equality of opportunity and diversity given such a high profile. Her inspiring work and ethos have shattered a large number of glass ceilings for members of minority backgrounds in public life.

Despite the Queen holding her position as the Supreme Governor of the Church of England, and as Head of the Commonwealth, she has been sensitive to the needs of people living in 53 countries that comprise the Commonwealth, and has always let their faith and cultural needs inform her thinking. Her dedication to interfaith relations won her the Stemberg Gold Medallion back in 2007. Her tenacious and inclusive support for all religions saw her meeting five Catholic

Despite the spasmodic eruption of disquiet about numbers of incoming different ethnicities and nationalities on these shores, Britain is widely recognised as a country with a long history of tolerance and understanding where most people are willing to get on with their neighbours. Its multicultural, multi-faith and multi-ethnic society is, from time to time, enriched by newcomers who choose to make it their home and prize its accommodating and often welcoming ethos.

Popes and a large number of other Muslim, Hindu, Jew and Sikh religious leaders.

The Queen has often made it explicit in her Christmas and Commonwealth broadcast speeches that she values all faiths. In 2004, she remarked in her Christmas message: "Everyone is our neighbour, no matter what race, creed or colour."

There have been several events when members of different denominations and faiths have been represented, for example, at weddings, funerals and thanksgiving services. The Queen organised a reception at Buckingham Palace for leaders of different religions in 2002, which I was privileged to attend. She has also visited in the UK and overseas, places of worship of different religions. In 2002, she visited Highgate Hill Hindu Temple in London, and also met worshippers at a mosque in Scunthorpe. The Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh attended a reception to mark the 350th anniversary of the Jewish community in Great Britain.

The Queen's recognition of other religions is also evident in other members of the Royal family. The Prince of Wales has, on many occasions, called for an acknowledgement of other religious traditions and reinforced the need for mutual respect and understanding. In November 2014, the Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall attended the 40th anniversary of Interfaith Wolverhampton, and emphasised the urgent need for respecting the integrity of all religions and for bringing them together in collaborative initiatives for the good of society.

The Queen said in an address to the Interfaith Service at Westminster Abbey to celebrate Commonwealth Day last month:

"Being inclusive and accepting diversity goes far deeper than accepting differences at face value. True celebration of the dignity of each person, and the value of their uniqueness and contribution, involves reaching out, recognising and embracing their individual identity."

Sehdev Bismal MBE

Religious Cohesion - Recognising Religious Diversity

Freedom of religion or belief is often crucial to peace in a multi-faith society such as the United Kingdom. In order to uphold the right of individuals to practise their own faith without fear or reprisal, we have anti-discrimination legislation and laws against religious hatred to ensure all religions are treated equally and with respect.

Queen Elizabeth II's title includes the words 'Defender of the Faith'. Modern Britain is a multi-cultural, multi-faith society, made up of Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Jews, Sikhs and people of other faiths. The Commonwealth is also made up of peoples with different religious beliefs. As Head of State and Head of the Commonwealth, the Queen has consistently taken tangible steps to respect and recognise these various faiths, and to promote tolerance and understanding.

Among the most significant changes to Britain during the Queen's long reign has been the growth of religious and cultural diversity. The Queen, as defender of the faith, has reflected this in many ways over the years, including visits to various places of worship, her Christmas messages and the annual Commonwealth Observance.

The Queen wished as part of her Jubilee programme to celebrate with British non-Christian communities. The four largest such groups are Muslim, Hindu, Sikh and Jewish. The Queen recognised each of Britain's many faiths during her jubilee tour of the country in 2002. Although she has visited Hindu temples abroad, the visit to the Highgate Hill Murugan Temple in Archway, North London was her first visit to one in Britain. Shoeless and garlanded, the Queen and Prince Philip paid their first visit to a Hindu temple in Britain. The Queen also visited other places of different faiths which included Manchester Jewish Museum, the Islamic Centre in Scunthorpe, and Guru Nanak Gurdwara in Leicester. Other members of the Royal family also visited a Jain Temple in Leicester, a Baha'i reception in Central London, a Zoroastrian Thanksgiving Service in North London and a Buddhist gathering.

The purpose of each of these visits by the Royal Family was to support inter-faith dialogue and to show that non-Christian as well as Christian communities are central to modern Britain.

The Prince of Wales and The Duchess of Cornwall also visited the newly built Swaminarayan Mandir Hindu Temple in Neasden, North London, to recognise the Hindu faith's contribution to modern Britain. They joined in the celebrations for Diwali, the Festival of Lights.

The Royal family as defender of the faith or faiths have praised and recognised time and again the huge contribution not only of Hindu community but other faiths also to British life. The Prince of Wales did mention in his thanks-giving speech at Swaminarayan Mandir that it is a remarkable and precious fact that Hinduism as a faith still touches upon every aspect of day-to-day lives: professions, culture and most crucially value systems.

The Queen's role in promoting and encouraging cohesion between faiths is very significant indeed.



Satya Pal Sharma.
Shri Krishan Mandir.

The Queen's own faith in a multi-faith society

“It is hard to find the noblest of men; he is not born everywhere nor in every clan. To whatever clan such a wise man is born, that clan prospers.”
(Lord Buddha, the Dhammapada Verse 193)

Her Majesty the Queen, Queen Elizabeth II, is a model for people of all faiths. She demonstrates her own Christian faith through her hard work, dedication to duty, her dignity, and her compassion and respect for all people. She is a Christian first and a monarch second and, as such, is ideally suited to her role as head of the Church of England. Like all good people of faith, she demonstrates the truth of her own faith through the way she lives her life whilst respecting the faiths of others.

On her 90th birthday, we wish her Majesty the Queen happiness, health and peace, with the blessings of the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha (the Triple-gems).



Ven. S. Tejwant.
Punjab Buddhist Society UK

Making a Difference

Her Majesty the Queen has turned 90 this year and the Nation has been celebrating the occasion with enormous excitement and pleasure. We send her our heartfelt congratulations and best wishes for good health and happiness; may she for many more years remain the Monarch of this great country of diversity, continuing to make a difference to the lives of all people in all walks of life. As the UK’s longest serving Monarch, in her own quiet and gentle way behind the scenes, not only has she made an enormous difference to the lives of people with a diversity of language, ethnicity, faith and culture in this country but also in the wider world as the Head of the Commonwealth. Above all she has made the Monarchy more popular than ever.

As is universally known, Mother Teresa was a woman of unique personality. Helping people who needed help was her work and no job was in her mind beneath her. She changed thousands of needy people’s lives but also through her work influenced the thoughts and attitudes to life of countless numbers of people in positions of power and influence. One incident of how she did it which I came across in a recent Rotary magazine is worth a mention: One day an elegantly-dressed gentleman in a pin-striped suit, hoping to see her, knocked on Mother Teresa’s door in Kolkata. The nuns who answered the door told him that she was cleaning the toilets at the back of the house and showed him the way. On seeing him while scrubbing the toilets, Mother Teresa greeted him. Assuming that he had come to volunteer, she

started explaining how to hold the brush correctly and not to waste water. She then handed the brush over to him and left him standing there in the lavatory alone. After finishing the job, the man came out and said: “I have finished; may I speak with you now?” “Yes, certainly”, she replied. “Mother Teresa, I am the Director of the airline and I have your air tickets here. I just wanted to bring them to you personally.” That airline Director, in narrating the story repeatedly for the rest of his life, said that cleaning the toilets for 20 minutes gave him the greatest joy of his life as he was able to become part of Mother Teresa’s work for humanity.

I should like to mention here another incident I read about quite recently. A writer, as was his

regular habit, used to go for a stroll on the beach just before the sun was about to set. One day, while walking as usual, he noticed at a distance a young man bending and standing making movements with his hand. Wondering what the young man was up to, the writer came up to him and asked: "What are you doing?" The young man replied: "I am trying to save these crabs before the sea water goes down too far." The writer said: "There are hundreds and hundreds of them on the long beach and you cannot possibly make any difference." The young man picked up another crab, threw it into the water just before the sea level went beyond his reach and said to the writer with great joy: "It made a difference to that one!"

Over 40 years ago, Interfaith was established to make a difference by building bridges and breaking barriers between diverse ethnicities, languages, faiths, customs and cultures in this City. Our aim has been to foster and develop relationships amongst all Wulfrunians irrespective of their faith or lack of it, or of their country of origin. We have attempted to fulfil our aim through a variety of activities, namely annual Prayers for Peace, organising Holocaust Memorial Day, cultural shows, conferences, annual visits to places of worship as well as pilgrimages to historical places of worship in other cities or

towns. Quite recently we have started a monthly 'Bring and Share' lunch followed by a talk on one's faith or life then questions and answers. This has been a very popular venture. However our work has not been limited to adults; we have been regularly organising visits to different places of worship by school children. We have also been by invitation going round to schools to give talks on different faiths. Thus, bit by bit, over many years, we have been trying to make a difference in this great City.

We all are given an opportunity to make a difference in the lives of other people. All we need to do is to seize that opportunity.



Dr. Harun Rashid.

Stations of the Cross



Members of Interfaith Wolverhampton were invited to attend a service entitled "Stations of the Cross" at St. Thomas's Catholic Church in Tettenhall at 5.00 pm on Sunday 13th March. This was "Passion Sunday", the day that marks the start of the last two weeks of the penitential season of Lent when attention is given especially to the "Passion" or suffering of Christ at the time of his death. About 20 members of Interfaith were able to join the congregation of St Thomas's on this occasion.

The first thing we noticed on

entering the church was that all the crosses and statues of Christ and the saints were covered with purple cloths. This is called "Passiontide veiling" and is an expression of the mourning of the Church for the suffering of Christ. The veils are removed at Easter to celebrate his resurrection. In

St. Thomas's the "Stations" themselves take the form of a series of etched glass panels arranged along the left-hand wall of the church. The panels are back-lit so that the engraving is clearly visible, and each panel depicts an episode in the story leading from Jesus's condemnation to his crucifixion and burial. Most of the episodes are

taken directly from the gospel accounts in the Bible, but a few draw on wider Christian tradition.

The form that the service takes is a series of readings followed by a time of silence, a prayer and singing a verse of a hymn before each of the "Stations". In some larger churches this would involve a procession, but at St. Thomas's the congregation remained in their seats while a group of young people took turns to hold a veiled cross as it was carried from one "Station" to the next. At the beginning of the service, Erik Pearse welcomed the visitors to the church and explained what would be happening. The prayers were spoken by members of St. Thomas's congregation and the readings done by a variety of people

including representatives from other faith communities.

The service lasted for just over 45 minutes and most people found it a moving, if slightly unfamiliar, experience. After the service we were invited for light refreshments in the adjacent church hall where there was an opportunity for visitors from Interfaith to meet members of the congregation. We are most grateful to St. Thomas's for inviting us to share in this act of devotion.

David Belcher.

Prayer in Islam and Christianity

Four of us (Harun Rashid, Prem Lal, David Belcher and Erik Pearse) drove to the Centre for Interfaith Dialogue in Washwood Heath, Birmingham, on Monday April 25th, to attend a Conference on the 'Importance of Prayer in Islam & Christianity'. The Centre is part of the impressive Muslim-run and financed Institute for Leadership and Community Development.

We were warmly greeted by Dr Iqtidar Cheema, the Director of the Institute. Along with some 50 others, mainly Birmingham-based Muslims and Christians, we heard contributions from two Muslims and two Christians – two young very articulate ladies, Shaykha Safia Shahid and Nikki Tapper, and two older gentlemen, Shaykh Mhammad Yaseen and Rev. Larry Wright, with opportunities half-way through and at the end for discussion in small, mixed Muslim-Christian groups. What was particularly striking was how our experiences of prayer, both institutionally and as individuals, tended to converge, both of our faiths combining rich traditions in relating to God/Allah.

The Conference was ably and enthusiastically chaired by Canon Andrew Smith, the Director of Interfaith Relations for the Bishop Of Birmingham. The evening concluded with a delicious meal and a keen desire by all of us to maintain and develop links between IFW and the Institute.



Erik Pearse

Pilgrimage to Coventry and Leamington

On Saturday 11th June we went on a pilgrimage arranged by Interfaith Wolverhampton. The day started with a short visit into the Sri Krishan Temple on the Penn Road, where we were greeted with a warm welcome. Here we were able to experience prayers and blessings. Then our coach journey commenced. We continued to experience our Hindu friends' wonderful hospitality as we were fed sumptuous samosas and delicious Indian sweets on our way to Coventry Cathedral.

As we approached the Cathedral, it was obvious that it was a very contemporary building as the original was destroyed in the 2nd World War. Once inside, we were met by our guide who explained how it was designed and built. He went on to illustrate some of the many main features including the cathedral's font, which is a three-ton boulder from a hillside near Bethlehem, and a huge tapestry which has 900 colours within it and is guaranteed for 500 years. Every hour they stop for prayers which we were fortunate enough to participate in. We were able to have a short walk around the Cathedral, where we saw the Lady Chapel and got a closer look at the huge tapestry. There was so much to see, but this will call for a further visit.

We then continued on our journey to Leamington, where we were to visit the grand Gurdwara Sahib Sikh Temple. On arrival, we were welcomed by a member of the temple. Once inside we removed our shoes and covered our heads out of respect to the Guru Granth Sahib Ji. Then a tour of the temple commenced. Firstly we were taken to a large prayer hall (of which there are 3) where the main points of the Sikh religion were explained to us. We were then escorted to another huge prayer

hall where a High Priest was reciting prayers which would continue for 48 hours as Priests would take it in turns. There was a small bedroom off the main hall where Guru Granth Sahib could rest. Their hospitality was amazing as we were then taken to the large dining hall and fed a wonderful array of curry, rice, yoghurt and chapattis. The visit finished with a short tour of the outside of the temple where future plans were explained.

In all we had a wonderful day, and would like to give a special thanks to many but especially to Erik and Satya for making the day so memorable.



Lisa and Doreen.

"Educating Heart and Mind"



In this film Sir Ken discusses the importance of an education that educates not just the mind, but also the heart. It was a point well received by the multi-faith audience on the night, all of whom whole heartedly agreed with his point of view. Discussion that followed highlighted the need for radical change especially if action was to come sooner rather than later. There was certainly a feeling that the pace of change in our education system has often been slow. In addition, change has often been initiated simply because of a different political point of

On the 27th February, 15 members of Interfaith Wolverhampton took part in an evening which focused on the education system in the UK. The main event for the evening was a viewing of Sir Ken Robinson's 'Educating the Heart and Mind'. This film was made as part of the Dalai Lama Centre's educating the heart series.

view rather than change that was necessary to benefit the pupils themselves. If only Sir Ken Robinson could become Education Secretary himself!

After the viewing and discussion were completed, the evening concluded with a wonderful shared meal provided by Kamaljit Kaur and her family. The evening was a great success, and everyone looked forward to similar events in the future.

Steve Walters.
Headteacher.
St. Peter's Collegiate School.

"The 100-foot Journey"



The 100-foot Journey, our fund-raising film at the Lighthouse on April 18th, was much enjoyed by all those who attended. This amusing cross-cultural story of an Indian family setting up an Indian restaurant just opposite a snooty French Michelin-rated one in the

South of France had all the ingredients of a good family film – good actors, romance, wit, culture

A Film Review by Erik Pearse.

clashes and a happy ending – which appealed to the multicultural and multi-generational audience.

The event raised around £600 for IFW. We wish to thank all who contributed to the organisation of the event, and particularly to the Sathya Sai Service Organisation for providing much of the food, and to Mike and Sue Shelley Smith for their raffle, and to the Lighthouse staff for their cooperation. Let us have your ideas for next year's film!

Healthwatch

We at Healthwatch Wolverhampton are out and about Wolverhampton. Capturing the opinions and views of the residents regarding the Health and Social Care services they access.

The areas of interest people have highlighted include the following:

- o Adult Social Care
- o Children Social Care
- o Hospital
- o GP/Primary Care
- o Maternity Services
- o Mental Health
- o Public Health
- o Urgent Care
- o Care homes
- o Dentists

What do you think of these services or other services you have used in Wolverhampton? Have you had good experiences, bad experiences. Have you got concerns, should they be working in different ways? Go on our website leave comments, or contact us on 0800 470 1944.

Work with us to improve services for yourself, family and friends.

Would you like to be involved with work of Healthwatch Wolverhampton? You can become a volunteer, member, supporter or champion.

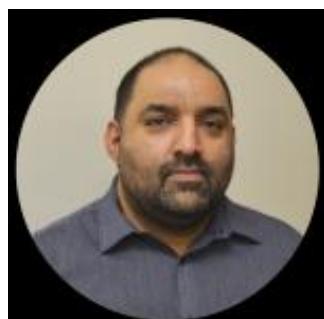
If you have any groups or events you would like us to talk to, please contact us on the number below.

You can contact us in the following ways:

Healthwatch Wolverhampton,
Regent House,
First Floor,
Bath Avenue,
WV1 4EG.

www.healthwatchwolverhampton.co.uk

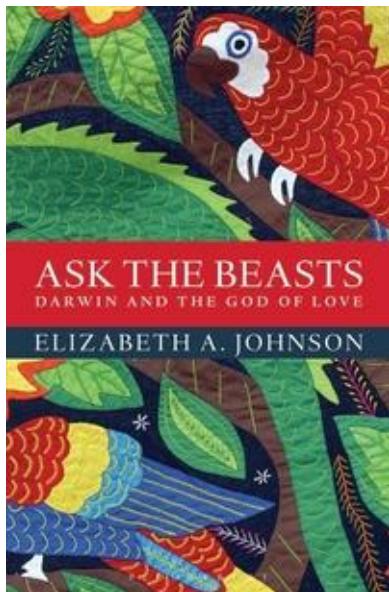
Freephone 0800 470 1944



Rasham Gill

“Ask the Beasts – Darwin and the God of Love” by Elizabeth A. Johnson.

A Book Review by David Belcher.



This book, in the words of the author, is an attempt to conduct “a dialogue between Charles Darwin’s account of the origin of species and the Christian story of the ineffable God of mercy and love recounted in the Nicene creed”. At one level it can be seen as an attempt to bridge the gap between ‘evolutionists’ and ‘creationists’ in the debate concerning the place of natural science in the world of faith and religion. At another, and perhaps more significant level, it is a heart-felt plea to all of us to take seriously the threat to life in all its forms that is currently posed by the hubristic behaviour of the human animal.



Johnson, who is Distinguished Professor of Theology at Fordham University in New York, makes no bones about the fact that she is operating from the point of view of the Roman Catholic community within the Christian Church. Similar discussion can take place from the perspective of other faith traditions, but she does not attempt to cover such areas in this book. The title ‘Ask the Beasts’ is a reference to some lines from the Book of Job in the Hebrew scriptures common to the Jewish and Christian religions:

*“But ask the beasts and they will teach you;
ask the birds of the air to inform you,
or tell the creatures that crawl to teach you,
and the fish of the sea to instruct you.
Who does not come to know from all these
that the hand of the Lord has done this?”*

(Job 12: 7-9)

The implied rebuke to human arrogance is that we cannot make sense of the world or of the person of God behind it unless we take seriously the value of life in all its forms and see ourselves as part of the creative or evolutionary process rather than as somehow standing outside it.

Throughout the book the author skilfully weaves together three principal themes: the theory of evolution through natural selection as proposed by Darwin in his ‘Origin of Species’; the concept of an on-going divine presence in the universe through a process of ‘continuing creation’; and a sense of wonder at the beauty and complexity of life coupled with trepidation concerning its fragility in the face of current human behaviour.

In the chapters devoted to the origin of species the author gives an eminently accessible account of the

evolutionary process, including the necessity for a steady rate of species extinction. Death – of species as well as individuals – is an essential part of the whole life process. When moving on to the realm of faith and the role of a loving God as the source and sustaining power of life, she reinterprets the creation myths of Judaeo-Christian tradition as a vision of continuous creation in which God is an underlying presence throughout the evolutionary process as a whole. She is less convincing when trying to reconcile the evolutionary model with the Christian doctrine of resurrection and in her desire to confer immortality on even the humblest of creatures risks exceeding the bounds of credibility.

The third strand, that of wonder, is probably the one that gives the whole book its dominant colour, and makes more poignant the final chapter in which she focuses on the threat posed to the survival of life on our planet by the actions of the human species today. This threat can only be avoided if as humans we co-operate with the divine love in embracing an ecological vocation to foster the well-being of life in all its varied forms.

The book makes a thoroughly enjoyable read.

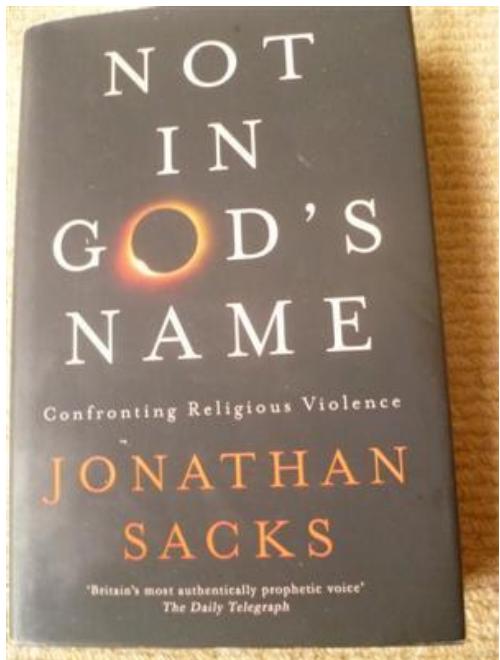
[One of the treasures of the Ivy Gutridge Collection, located in the Faith Section in the Central Library]

David Belcher

"Not in God's Name" by Jonathan Sacks.

A Book Review by Erik Pearse.

In this powerful and timely book, Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, a former Chief Rabbi, explores the roots of violence and its relationship to religion, focusing on the historic tensions between the three Abrahamic faiths: Judaism, Christianity and Islam.



Insofar as the three faiths have been at loggerheads in different times of history, Sacks contends that this has been the result of each faith community appropriating God for their own faith. He points out that, in the Book of Genesis, God actually makes two separate and distinct Covenants, the first with Noah, the second with Abraham. The one with Noah following the Flood is universal: '*Never again will I curse the soil because of man, for the inclination of man's heart is evil from his youth. I will never again strike down all life as I have done*' (Genesis 8:21-22). The Covenant with Abraham, on the other hand, is particular or tribal - it relates to him and his descendants. But Sacks points out that neither tribalism nor universalism are adequate to the human situation. "Tribalism envisages a world permanently at war (my God is stronger than yours)", whereas "universalism risks a dualistic world divided between the saved and the damned (I have the truth – you have only error), and hence to holy wars, crusades, jihads." To avoid violence, both types of covenant are necessary. Tribalism affirms identity, essential to our individuality; universalism affirms the

unity of God and the shared dignity and responsibility of every individual. Sacks makes it clear that 'God is larger than any nation, language , culture and creed. He lives within our group, but he also lives beyond.'

Sacks further argues that, although God leads the Jewish people to Israel, they do not have ownership of the land, which, as is stated in the Book of Leviticus, belongs to God. '*You are strangers and temporary residents with me*'. Real ownership is God's only. None of us can, in God's eyes, claim full ownership of where we live; all of us are strangers and, if only we will acknowledge this, we will learn to feel empathy, which transforms the stranger from being 'one of them' to being 'one of us' for every stranger we meet – there will no longer be 'them and us' – we are all 'us', united as brothers and sisters in God. Sacks recounts the awesome case of the SS Officer working in a concentration camp in World War 2 who suddenly discovers that he is himself a Jew – one of 'them' whom he has been persecuting – his life and his perspective are totally changed - the anti-semitic himself becomes

a Jew. He becomes one with the one he has been persecuting – the stranger is no longer the enemy.

[One of the treasures of the Ivy Gutridge Collection, located in the Faith Section in the Central Library]



Erik Pearse

Diary of Events

July

- 6th (Wednesday) **Opening of the Weekly Drop-In Centre** at the Church in Broad Street, from 12:30 to 2:30 p.m. each Wednesday, funded by a grant obtained by Interfaith Wolverhampton. Among other things, we aim to provide a safe, welcoming place where asylum seekers and refugees can relax by socialising, playing games and informally mixing with people from their own and other cultures.
- 11th (Monday) **Remembering Srebrenica** 10:30 a.m. A short ceremony of remembrance led by Interfaith Wolverhampton in St. Peter's Square, by the flag pole on the Piazza in front of the Civic Centre. Followed by Tea and Coffee in the Mayor's Parlour.
- 19th (Tuesday) **Bring and Share Lunch** 12.45 - 2.00, "Darlington Street Methodist Centre", 24 School Street, WV1 4LF. Speaker: Revd. John Barnett, InterFaith Officer for the Church of England for this area.

August

- 3rd (Wednesday) Last day on display of the 'Birmingham Qur'an', as part of the "Faith in Birmingham" exhibition at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery. Open daily 10.00am - 5.00pm, except Fridays 10.30am - 5.00pm. The animal skin, or parchment, on which the text is written, has been dated through radiocarbon to the period between AD 568 and 645 with 95.4% accuracy. This result places the manuscript pages close to the time of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be Upon Him), who is generally thought to have lived between AD 570 and 632.
- 16th (Tuesday) **Bring and Share Lunch** 12.45 - 2.00, "Darlington Street Methodist Centre", 24 School Street, WV1 4LF.

September

- 20th (Tuesday) **Bring and Share Lunch** 12.45 - 2.00, "Darlington Street Methodist Centre", 24 School Street, WV1 4LF.
- 21st (Wednesday) **Interfaith Wolverhampton AGM**, at the Ravidassi Temple and Centre, Dudley Road, WV2 3DR. Speaker: Rt. Rev. Clive Gregory.

October

- 16th (Sunday) **Prayers for Peace** 3 p.m. in St.Peter's Church, W'ton town centre.
- 18th (Tuesday) **Bring and Share Lunch** 12.45 - 2.00, "Darlington Street Methodist Centre", 24 School Street, WV1 4LF.

November

- 2nd (Wednesday) **"The Joy of Creation"** Following the success of the 2015 Interfaith talks, a further series of five Evening Meals with invited speakers, on each Wednesday evening in November, beginning with David McLoughlin of Newman University.

Diary of Events (continued)

November (cont.)

15th (Tuesday) **Bring and Share Lunch** 12.45 - 2.00, "Darlington Street Methodist Centre", 24 School Street, WV1 4LF.

19th (Saturday) "**Dying Well**" Interfaith Wolverhampton Conference, with Keynote Speaker Baroness Ilora Finlay (see right). 10 am to 1:30 pm, followed by lunch. Registration from 9:30 am. (times subject to confirmation).



December

20th (Tuesday) **Christmas Bring and Share Lunch** 12.45 - 2.00, "Darlington Street Methodist Centre", 24 School Street, WV1 4LF.

January 2017

27th (Friday) **Holocaust Memorial Day** 11 a.m. A service led by Interfaith Wolverhampton at the Cenotaph, St. Peter's Square, Wolverhampton City Centre. Followed by a reception and signing of the Statement of Commitment in the Mayoral Suite.

For up-to-date details, see the Interfaith Wolverhampton website: <http://ifwton.org.uk/diary.html>

Free computer virus check!

Interfaith Wolverhampton members are being offered a free computer check by our friend Arshi, an expert with computers, who has done wonders for our office computer system for the past 2 years. Even if you have installed an antivirus in your computer, it doesn't eliminate the risk of online threats. Arshi is prepared to come to your home to give your system a thorough check-out and advise you on how to improve the security level of your computer and how to protect your system and your information against online attacks. All he will ask of you is to contribute £5 towards his travel costs. You can contact him by E-Mail at arshang77@yahoo.co.uk

Membership Subscriptions for 2016-7

For those of you who have not yet paid their subscription for this year, a membership form is enclosed/attached. Please return the form with your payment as soon as possible.

Contact Details

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Registered Charity no. 1114265
Company Registered no. 3218967

The office is most likely to be staffed between 10 a.m. and 1 p.m. - Best to phone before you visit.

Patrons: The Mayor of Wolverhampton. Dr. K. Bradshaw, DL. Dr. S. Sharma, MBE, DL.