

Is Interfaith Worship a desirable practice?

Introduction

In a beautiful poem, 'God Would Kneel Down', St. Francis of Assisi poetically tells us of his walk with God: God once 'asked me to join Him on a walk through this world'¹ and, along the way, God 'gazed into every heart on this earth'.²

With poignant reverence, St. Francis continues:

'And sometimes when we passed
a soul in worship
God too would kneel
down.

I have come to learn: God
adores His
creation.'³

In desiring to kneel down in worship with 'every heart on this earth',⁴ St. Francis reveals the very 'Humility of God'⁵ that is showing us all the way of humility towards worshiping with people of all faiths because God 'gave birth/to all/religions'.⁶ In this light, Interfaith Worship can be seen as a manifest reflection of God's own humility and adoration of His/Her creation in kneeling with all souls in worship.

¹ St. Francis of Assisi, *God would Kneel Down*, in *Love Poems from God*, Daniel Ladinsky, (New York: Penguin Group, 2002), 41.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ilia Delio, *The Humility of God: A Franciscan Perspective*, (Cincinnati: Franciscan Media, 2005).

⁶ St. Francis of Assisi, *Because He Gave Birth*, in *Love Poems from God*, Daniel Ladinsky, (New York: Penguin Group, 2002), 31.

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As the question specifically uses the word 'Interfaith', I will first reflect on the subtle spectrum of meaning of 'Interfaith' in terms of how this term might slightly differ from, yet encompass, nuances of similar phrases, such as, 'Inter Faith', 'Multifaith', 'Interreligious', 'Inter-spiritual' or even 'Inter-mystical'. I will consider an interfaith depth ecumenical⁷ theology and some counterarguments such as syncretism. I will then consider 'Interfaith Worship' and its desirability as a practice with experiential insight from my own experience of participating in, as well as leading Interfaith Worship Services as an ordained Interfaith Minister and the relationship between Interfaith dialogue and inspired social action for the ever-pressing need of 'building bridges' in dialogue for World Peace/Co-operation.

As the great Catholic Theologian, Thomas Aquinas puts it poetically:

'How can we live in harmony?

First we need to
know

we are all madly in love
with the same
God.⁸

The very question of whether or not we are all 'madly in love with the same God'⁹ is at the heart of my inquiry into Interfaith Worship as a desirable practice.¹⁰

The tender nub of this question of faith is perhaps the 'Elephant in the Room' in many Interfaith circles. It personally challenges me as an Interfaith Minister, who delights in voluntarily leading Interfaith Worship, into questioning and re-examining whether Interfaith Worship is indeed a desirable practice *for all*, or as some might legitimately argue, *at all*.

⁷ In this essay, I will use the broad dictionary definition of 'ecumenical' as meaning, 'universal', as inclusive of world faiths, not only within Christianity: www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/ecumenical.

⁸ St. Thomas Aquinas, *We are Fields Before Each Other*, in *Love Poems from God*, Daniel Ladinsky, (New York: Penguin Group, 2002), 129.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ See further, Alon Goshen-Gottstein, *Same God, Other God: Judaism, Hinduism, and the Problem of Idolatry*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 44 and its critical review by Michael Hilton in *Interreligious Insight: A journal of dialogue and engagement*. Vol. 17, No. 1. (June 2019), 84.

The Spectrum of 'Interfaith'

I see 'Interfaith' as a word which points to a spectrum of different ideas, nuances and even 'belief/faith' in itself, which warrants a little further exploration for increased clarity about the range of its meaning in relation to 'Interfaith Worship'.

As an Interfaith Minister, I sometimes encounter a natural perception of Interfaith as being about tolerance, respect, dialogue and understanding *between* the different faiths, in the sense of being *Inter-Faith*. The very linguistic usage of one word of 'Interfaith' carries subtly different nuances to the two word phrase 'Inter Faith', which, is the phrase used in the context of our annual National 'Inter Faith Week'¹¹ in November with 'The Inter Faith Network',¹² during which I have recently been privileged to take part as a speaker on Interfaith.

However, I see Interfaith as including a further depth perspective for some people, if not all, of a depth Unitive Spirituality of 'Oneness'¹³ at its heart which is more of an Inter-spirituality or even an inter-mysticism, which can, in turn, become a basis for faith in itself, as similarly reflected in the theology of Unity of Unitarian Universalists¹⁴ and the Unitarian and Free Christian Church,¹⁵ or indeed Sufism,¹⁶ Bauls and Bahá'í Faith¹⁷ which believes in the Unity of God, Religion and Humanity. This compliments similar beliefs of Swami Vivekananda (a disciple of the Indian Mystic Ramakrishna), who was well known for his work in establishing the idea of the Universality of all Religions as a Religion in itself.¹⁸ Swami Vivekananda writes:

'I shall go to the Mosque of the Muslim,
I shall enter the Christian's Church and kneel before the Crucifix,
I shall enter the Buddhist Temple and take Refuge in the Buddha,
I shall go into the forest and sit down in meditation with the Hindu...

In addition....

¹¹ See, www.interfaithweek.org.

¹² See, www.interfaith.org.uk.

¹³ See, www.interfaithfoundation.org.

¹⁴ See, www.uua.org.

¹⁵ See, unitarian.org.uk.

¹⁶ See, www.sufiorderuk.org.

¹⁷ See, www.bahai.org.

¹⁸ See, www.researchgate.net/.../286623696_Swami_Vivekananda_His_Universality_of_Religion.

I shall keep my heart open for all that may come in the future.

Is God's book finished?

Or, is Revelation still going on?'¹⁹

Whatever one's personal views are about the burgeoning spectrum of belief about what Interfaith means, represents and stands for, it is important, in my view, that it is gently, more consciously, acknowledged that such a spectrum does exist. We must recognise that there are differences in Interfaith views that range from (i) dialogue, respect, tolerance and understanding *between* faiths to (ii) inter-spiritual theologies of Unity/Oneness²⁰ and (iii) beliefs in the universality of all faiths as a potential 'new 'interfaith' religion'²¹ in itself,²² although Christopher Lewis says, 'there is no new religion called 'Interfaith', even if some people appreciate the insights (and worship) of many religions.'²³ Interfaith Worship can encompass all dimensions of Interfaith.

Interfaith Worship

It was happenstance that I recently stumbled across an old-fashioned booklet, almost three decades old, entitled, 'Interfaith Worship and Christian Truth'.²⁴ Its front cover cartoon illustration depicts a sketched Multi-faith building that looks like an ingenious combination of a quaint English Church-turned-Mosque/Synagogue/Temple, with a sign outside saying 'All Saviours?'. People of all faiths are entering the 'Parish-Church-like-graveyard' outside the Multi-faith building for Interfaith Worship. David Bookless discusses some contemporaneous Christian objections to Interfaith Worship, such as whether Interfaith Worship means worship of the same God or other Gods, or Idolatry, or whether it inevitably compromises the uniqueness of Jesus and opens people to 'demonic spiritual forces'.²⁵ A dark cloud is

¹⁹ See, shehjar.com/list/131/1573/1.html.

²⁰ See, www.interfaithfoundation.org.

²¹ See, "*MULTI-FAITH WORSHIP*": *Questions and Suggestions from the Inter-faith Consultative Group*. (London: Church House Publishing, 1992), 45.

²² See, The Church for the Fellowship of All Peoples and The Living Interfaith Church.

²³ Christopher Lewis, cited in Lewis, C. and Cohn-Sherbok, D. *Interfaith Worship and Prayer: We Must Pray Together*. (London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2019), 22.

²⁴ David Bookless, *Interfaith Worship and Christian Truth*, Grove Worship Series No. 117, (Cambridge: Grove Books Limited, 1991).

²⁵ David Bookless, *Interfaith Worship and Christian Truth*, Grove Worship Series No. 117, (Cambridge: Grove Books Limited, 1991), 3.

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sketched above, with a large bolt of lightning zigzagging its way ominously towards the Church steeple part of the Multi-faith building.

As an Interfaith Minister, this image struck me deeply, like a bolt of lightning into my own soul. It highlighted to me the need for increased humility regarding my personal enthusiasm for and love of Interfaith Worship, acknowledging and deeply respecting the very real concerns about Interfaith Worship that are shared by people of many faiths; as an 'idealized image of the meeting between religions'²⁶ or 'threatening to those who make a claim to exclusive or unique knowledge of the truth'.²⁷

I like to see my stumbling across this booklet as something of a Jungian psycho-spiritual 'synchronicity' of receiving so pertinent a message in my newly ordained phase of enthusiasm for Interfaith Worship! It caused me to reflect deeply on Interfaith Worship in terms of my own ever-deepening understandings in relation to worship with people of 'All Faiths and None', which is my personal aspiration, commitment and vow as an ordained Interfaith Minister.

Interfaith Theology/Philosophy of Deep Ecumenism

In an Interfaith classic, 'One River, Many Wells',²⁸ Matthew Fox quotes a beautiful Divine analogy by Meister Eckhart, one of the great Christian Mystics that, 'God is a great underground river that no one can dam up and no one can stop'²⁹ and Fox extends this idea in saying,

'There is one underground river - but there are many wells into that river: an African well, a Taoist well, a Buddhist well, a Jewish well, a Muslim well, a goddess well, a Christian well, and aboriginal wells. Many wells but One River. To go down a well is to practice a tradition, but we would make a grave

²⁶ Marianne Moyaert, *Ricoeur and the wager of interreligious ritual participation*, in *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology*, (2017), 78:3, 193.

²⁷ Marcus Braybrooke, *Praying Together: Possibilities & Difficulties of Interfaith Worship*, in *Dialogue & Alliance*, Vol. 3, No. 1, Spring 1989.

²⁸ Matthew Fox. *One River, Many Wells: Wisdom Springing From Global Faiths*. (New York: Tarcher/Penguin, 2000).

²⁹ Meister Eckhart, cited in Fox, M. *One River, Many Wells: Wisdom Springing From Global Faiths*. (New York: Tarcher/Penguin, 2000).

mistake (an idolatrous one) if we confused the well itself with the flowing waters of the underground river.¹³⁰

The One River is a metaphor for the confluence of waters that are ever-flowing into the Stream of Divine Wisdom from World Faiths. In the Christian tradition, Spirit has often been described as 'flowing water',³¹ as 'a spring inside you'³² and as a 'river of life'.³³ In Hebrew, the word for spirit is *ruach*, in Greek, the word is *pneuma* (and *Sophia* means Wisdom) and Indian Sanskrit has similar concepts of *prana* and *shakti*. Throughout the centuries, this proverbial 'River of Wisdom',³⁴ which carries with it the sublime Mysteries of its Divine Source, has been flowing through the world's towering pyramids along the Nile, through the great sages of the Orient, along the banks of the sacred River Ganges and the initiates of the Greek and Roman Mystery Schools through to our modern day and into the vast Ocean of Humanity. As the songwriter, Peter Yarrow says:

'There is only one river. There is only one sea.
And it flows through you, and it flows through me.
There is only one people. We are one and the same.
We are all one spirit. We are all one name.'³⁵

This depth theological understanding of Unity/Oneness has been called 'The Perennial Philosophy'³⁶ by Aldous Huxley, which points to the idea of a shared Universal Truth. The etymology of 'Philosophy' means 'Love of Wisdom' and, as Rabbi Rami Shapiro explains, 'Perennial Wisdom is not unique to any specific system of thought or belief, but rather a set of teachings common to all of them.'³⁷ Matthew Fox calls the perennial philosophy, 'Deep Ecumenism'³⁸ as a return to the

³⁰ Matthew Fox. *One River, Many Wells: Wisdom Springing From Global Faiths*. (New York: Tarcher/Penguin, 2000), 5.

³¹ John, 7: 38, NRSV.

³² John, 4: 10-14, NRSV.

³³ Ezekial, 47, NRSV and Revelation, 22: 1-2, NRSV.

³⁴ Fintry Trust, 'The Human Soul in the Myths of Plato', *The Shrine of Wisdom*, (1984, 2001).

³⁵ Peter Yarrow, lyrics from the song *River of Jordan*, www.fact.on.ca/quotes/jordan.htm.

³⁶ Aldous Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1945).

³⁷ Rami Shapiro, *Perennial Wisdom for the Spiritually Independent: Sacred Teachings -Annotated & Explained* (Nashville: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2013), xvi.

³⁸ Matthew Fox. *One River, Many Wells: Wisdom Springing From Global Faiths*. (New York: Tarcher/Penguin, 2000), 4.

depths of the Ecumenical/Universal Truths in the Heart of all Wisdom traditions and World Faiths. Bede Griffiths taught that each of the different traditions were like one finger of a hand: if we look at the finger tips, each looks like a distinct entity, separate from the rest, but if we follow each finger down to their origin, they all merge in the tender centre spot of the palm of our hand, as a metaphor for religions emerging from the same source of Being/Mystery.³⁹ As Bede Griffiths says:

'What is required is a meeting of the different religious traditions at the deepest level of their experience of God. Hinduism is based on a deep, mystical experience, and everywhere seeks not simply to know "about" God but to "know God," that is, to experience the reality of God in the depths of the soul.'⁴⁰

Different Religions speak of Divine Unity with different language and in different ways and, as Hebron Ndlovu says, 'the pluralist paradigm of interfaith relations...posits the view that 'no one [religious] tradition can comprehend the fullness of ultimate truth'.⁴¹ My yoga training taught me that 'yoga' means 'to yoke' or 'unite' in the One True Being or Source of Life (*Ekam Sat*⁴²) which in Advaita-Vedantin Indian/Sanskrit language is called *Brahman*, the One Transcendent Being who is, at the same time, the Indweller of all beings, called the *Brahman-Atman*, as 'God in the Soul'.⁴³ Similarly, in Buddhism, Absolute Reality of Life is non-theistically called *Sunyata*, a Pali word, meaning Emptiness and Fullness at once,⁴⁴ teaching that Form/Matter and Formlessness/Spirit are ultimately, one connected 'Whole'. Similarly, the *Yin-Yang* symbol of Taoism depicts the interconnected flow of the dualisms of Life within One Circle of Wholeness. The Sikh Symbol of *Ek Ong Kar*

³⁹ Matthew Fox. *One River, Many Wells: Wisdom Springing From Global Faiths*. (New York: Tarcher/Penguin, 2000), 5.

⁴⁰ Bede Griffiths, *Christ in India: Essays towards a Hindu-Christian Dialogue* (1965). See, *Bede Griffiths: Essential Writings*, ed. Thomas Matus, (London: Orbis Books, 2004), 65.

⁴¹ Hebron Ndlovu, in Lewis, C. and Cohn-Sherbok, D. *Interfaith Worship and Prayer: We Must Pray Together*. (London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2019), 58, citing Race, Kenny and Roo in *Interreligious Insight paradigm: An invitation.* in *Interreligious Insight*, 3,1, 8-19.

⁴² See, Rig Veda text, I.164.45-46, as cited by Anantanand Rambachan in Lewis, C. and Cohn-Sherbok, D. *Interfaith Worship and Prayer: We Must Pray Together*. (London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2019), 34-36.

⁴³ See, www.britannica.com/topic/brahman-Hindu-concept.

⁴⁴ Thich Nhat Hahn, *The Heart Sutra, The Fullness of Emptiness*, in *Lion's Roar*, 6 August 2012. See, www.lionsroar.com/the-fullness-of-emptiness.

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represents the Sikh Unity of God meaning 'God is One'⁴⁵ and Sufi Muslims similarly pray the Islamic *Shahada*: '*La ilaha illallah*', meaning, '*There is no God but God*'.⁴⁶

As Anantanand Rambachan says, 'A different name for God does not mean that God is different'.⁴⁷ However, we 'fail to recognize the One in other theological and linguistic dresses'.⁴⁸

Objections to Interfaith Ecumenism

It is not surprising that some people raise an objection to Interfaith ecumenism and worship that it perhaps denies the diversity of life and the many differences that do exist between religions. Some people rightly ask whether Interfaith Ministers are trying to fuse all faiths together in worship, as articulated by Chris Lawson who argues that 'much damage has been done in the name of unity where the eternal destiny of precious souls is at stake'.⁴⁹ Some argue that 'there is no real unity'⁵⁰ with such differing concepts of Divinity.

Conversely, the Theravadan Buddhist teacher, Thich Nhat Hanh, tells of attending an Interfaith conference for theologians and professors of religion in which a speaker said, 'We are going to hear about the beauties of several traditions, but that does not mean that we are going to make a fruit salad'⁵¹ to which Thich Nhat Hanh replied, 'Fruit salad can be delicious!'⁵² I know that I certainly desire my fruit salad, with plenty of tropical fruits such as papaya, lychee and dragon fruit or, even more desirable when fruits are blended into a healthy fruit smoothie!

⁴⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/IK_Onkar.

⁴⁶ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shahada>.

⁴⁷ Anantanand Rambochan, in Lewis, C. and Cohn-Sherbok, D. *Interfaith Worship and Prayer: We Must Pray Together*. (London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2019), 34.

⁴⁸ Anantanand Rambochan, in Lewis, C. and Cohn-Sherbok, D. *Interfaith Worship and Prayer: We Must Pray Together*. (London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2019), 36.

⁴⁹ Chris Lawson, *TAIZÉ, A Community and Worship: Ecumenical Reconciliation or an Interfaith Delusion?* (Montana: Lighthouse Trails Publishing, Inc.: 2017), 75.

⁵⁰ Marcus Braybrooke, *Praying Together: Possibilities & Difficulties of Interfaith Worship*, in *Dialogue & Alliance*, Vol. 3, No. 1, Spring 1989, 90.

⁵¹ Thich Naht Hanh, *Living Buddha, Living Christ*, (London: Rider, 1995), 1.

⁵² *Ibid*.

The main objection to Interfaith worship is that any 'blending' of Religions homogenizes Faith and this homogenization of Faith is called 'Syncretism'. However, perhaps Bede Griffiths articulates it best:

'We have, of course, to guard against syncretism of any kind, but this only means that we have to learn to discriminate within each tradition between that which belongs to the universal religious tradition of mankind and that which belongs to its own limited and particular point of view.'⁵³

In other words, Interfaith Worship is like lowering a bucket down diverse Wells of Faith. Each well is different but the life-giving water that is brought out of the depth experience of each well in each bucket, is pure water because it comes from the Divine Source of the well-spring of Divine-Being. In order to experience the well-spring of Being, we can plumb the depths of our own wells of faith and this involves going beyond our intellectual conceptualisations of God by experiencing Divine Source directly for ourselves so that we have an experiential 'knowing' in our own hearts of that which is beyond words: whether through Buddhist *Metta Bhavana* or mindfulness meditation, Christian contemplation/prayer, Sufi dancing or *dhikr/zikr*, Hindu devotional *kirtan* or *puja* or experiencing a Oneness with Nature. Interfaith worship values and includes all faith practices⁵⁴ yet, in the wise words of Anantand Rambochan, praying together 'does not imply the claim that all religions are the same or share the same soteriological goal'.⁵⁵ Therefore, as Christopher Lewis and Dan Cohn-Sherbok say, 'We must pray together',⁵⁶ yet I might add, sing, dance and meditate together.

Another analogy that I like is that of Deep Sea Diving. Reading books on Interfaith Worship is like learning the theory of scuba diving - knowing the amount of oxygen required in a tank for diving to certain depths and how to avoid the dangers of

⁵³ Matthew Fox. *One River, Many Wells: Wisdom Springing From Global Faiths*. (New York: Tarcher/Penguin, 2000), 9.

⁵⁴ See, Reverend Stephanie Rutt, *The Interfaith Worship Manual, The Resource for Creating Interfaith Worship Services*, (Amherst, New Hampshire: Tree of Life Publishing, 2012) and Matt Sanders, *Interfaith Ministry Handbook, Prayers, Readings & Other resources for Pastoral Settings*, (Berkeley, CA: Apocryphile Press, 2015).

⁵⁵ Anantanand Rambochan, in Lewis, C. and Cohn-Sherbok, D. *Interfaith Worship and Prayer: We Must Pray Together*. (London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2019), 36.

⁵⁶ See. Lewis, C. and Cohn-Sherbok, D., *Interfaith Worship and Prayer: We Must Pray Together*. (London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2019).

nitrogen narcosis! Spiritual practices such as meditation, prayer and contemplation are like metaphorically, putting on your wetsuit, oxygen tank and mask and jumping overboard into the Ocean of Consciousness and experiencing for oneself the True Beauty and Peace of the 'Pearl of Great Price'⁵⁷ which is only found in the Heart of the coral reef of the Ocean of Life.⁵⁸ Meditation and prayer of all faiths enable us to plumb the depths of our own souls, One with God, allowing us to deepen into ourselves, moving from our intellectual conceptualisations *about* God and into a heartfelt experience and inner knowing of our Oneness with All that *is*.

In the beautiful Sufi words of Pir Inayat Khan:

I looked for thee on the earth.
I searched for thee in the heavens, my Beloved.
And at last, I have found thee,
hidden as a pearl in the shell of my Heart.⁵⁹

Interfaith Worship, Dialogue and Social Action

My inspiration for Interfaith Worship came from early experiences of Sufi Universal Services of Worship with scripture readings from World Faiths, which came as a vision to the Sufi mystic, Hazrat Inayat Khan, in accordance with the Sufi ideals of Religious Unity.⁶⁰ However, this may be considered sacrilegious or contrary to some faiths⁶¹ or even 'compromise'⁶² one's beliefs or integrity or 'imply disloyalty'.⁶³

As an Interfaith Minister, I have recently participated as a speaker in our local 'Inter Faith Week' Service as well as leading/creating Interfaith themed services on diverse subjects of Hindu Mystics, Maha Shivaratri, Sikhism, Rosh Hashanah, Navratri,

⁵⁷ Matthew, 13:45-46, NRSV.

⁵⁸ For a beautiful chapter on 'Pearls from the Ocean Unseen', by Sufi Mystic Hazrat Inayat Khan, see, *Spiritual Liberty: The Sufi Message*, Pir-o-Murshid Hazrat Inayat Khan (Delhi: Shri Jainendra Press, 1995), 189 - 223).

⁵⁹ www.soufi-inayat-khan.org/mus_mess/gayan/gb_gy_ra.htm.

⁶⁰ Hazrat Inayat Khan, *Ideals of Religious Unity*, (Katwijk Zee, Netherlands: Servire B.V., 1979).

⁶¹ See, "*MULTI-FAITH WORSHIP: Questions and Suggestions from the Inter-faith Consultative Group*. (London: Church House Publishing, 1992), 45.

⁶² See, Lewis, C. and Cohn-Sherbok, D., *Interfaith Worship and Prayer: We Must Pray Together*. (London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2019), 248.

⁶³ Marcus Braybrooke, *Praying Together: Possibilities & Difficulties of Interfaith Worship*, in *Dialogue & Alliance*, Vol. 3, No. 1, Spring 1989, 89.

Beltaine and Interfaith Ecumenism/Unity [Appendix A]. Interfaith worship services have been well received by worshipping communities in my experience and clearly demonstrate Interfaith Worship as a desirable practice for broad-minded congregations who love Wisdom, wherever Wisdom comes from. Many such congregations are actively engaged in 'walking their talk' with social action events for various charities. At a Refugee Conference, faith groups were co-operating in efforts for housing refugee families of other faiths. By attending Interfaith Services of Worship, our minds are broadened and our hearts are opened more fully, more deeply, in extending the hand of friendship across faith divisions in many ways of inspired social action. As Bogoda Seelawimala observes of Interfaith Worship: 'Although we are a big crowd, with many different robes or different colours of skin, we can see the oneness of humanity...There are many different instruments which make up an orchestra. However, when they play together in harmony, the results give pleasure to an audience comprising people from many different backgrounds.'⁶⁴ Indeed, the Dalai Lama believes that, 'Interfaith activities are imperative in a globalised world where religious cultures interact with ever-greater intensity.'⁶⁵

Poignantly, the Inter Faith Week Service was held for the first time inside a beautiful Christian Church, because the 'Community Room' was being refurbished. In my experience, this significantly elevated the felt-reverence of the Interfaith Service and lifted the spirits of all souls present to the worship of the 'God of our Understanding'.⁶⁶ However, some might argue that 'a church is not and cannot be 'neutral ground''.⁶⁷ Conversely, Aaron Rosen speaks of Jewish worship in a Unitarian Universalist building, observing: 'a space need not be exclusively Jewish to be genuinely Jewish'⁶⁸ and that 'no space, after all, is ever neutral'.⁶⁹ [Appendix B].

⁶⁴ Bogoda Seelawimala, in Lewis, C. and Cohn-Sherbok, D. *Interfaith Worship and Prayer: We Must Pray Together*. (London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2019), 113.

⁶⁵ The Dalai Lama, cited by Vishvapani Blomfield, in Lewis, C. and Cohn-Sherbok, D., *Interfaith Worship and Prayer: We Must Pray Together*. (London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2019), 115.

⁶⁶ An Interfaith phrase from the OneSpirit Foundation: See, www.interfaithfoundation.org.

⁶⁷ See, "*MULTI-FAITH WORSHIP*": *Questions and Suggestions from the Inter-faith Consultative Group*. (London: Church House Publishing, 1992), 47.

⁶⁸ Aaron Rosen, in Lewis, C. and Cohn-Sherbok, D. *Interfaith Worship and Prayer: We Must Pray Together*. (London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2019), 69.

⁶⁹ Aaron Rosen, in Lewis, C. and Cohn-Sherbok, D. *Interfaith Worship and Prayer: We Must Pray Together*. (London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2019), 70.

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The House of One⁷⁰ in Berlin is designed to include a synagogue, mosque and a church. Further, a multifaith worship space for the 2012 Olympics was 'designed to function as a mosque on Fridays, a synagogue on Saturdays and a church on Sundays'.⁷¹ Therefore, perhaps the decades-old vision of the cartoon-sketched 'Multi-faith Building' on Bookless' booklet⁷² is becoming a manifest architectural reality.

Recognising music as an International language, I shared a beautiful heart-opening Persian/Bahá'í sung-prayer and concluded that if all our hearts open and bridge in loving understanding with all other open hearts, then the loving connections that our hearts make can dissolve the conceptual barriers of difference created by our minds because our hearts *know* the essential connectedness of our humanity.

Conclusion

In some profound words of White Eagle, from a Native American Indian tradition:

'In different Religions you get a different presentation of truth [because] Truth is like a jewel with many facets. There are many paths to God and someday when people of various faiths arrive at their goal, they will be amazed to find all their friends there also.'⁷³

Whilst Interfaith Worship may remain undesirable to those who legitimately prefer one traditional well of faith, Interfaith Worship certainly proves a desirable practice for those who wish to connect in a spirit of peace and respect *between* faiths as well as for those spiritual seekers who, having explored different religious routes and spiritual paths, discover by plumbing very different wells of faith, 'the flowing waters of the Underground River'⁷⁴ that flow through the many intersecting traditions as our

⁷⁰ <https://house-of-one.org/en>.

⁷¹ See, Lewis, C. and Cohn-Sherbok, D. *Interfaith Worship and Prayer: We Must Pray Together*. (London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2019), 87.

⁷² David Bookless, *Interfaith Worship and Christian Truth*, Grove Worship Series No. 117, (Cambridge: Grove Books Limited, 1991).

⁷³ See, www.whiteagle.org.

⁷⁴ Matthew Fox. *One River, Many Wells: Wisdom Springing From Global Faiths*. (New York: Tarcher/Penguin, 2000), 5.

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'shared spiritual essence',⁷⁵ without eroding the distinct wells of faith. Therefore, Fox's metaphor 'One River, Many Wells',⁷⁶ is a useful model to balance universalism and particularism, allowing kindred spirits to worship together in the flow and mystery of the River of Life.

In poetic conclusion, Interfaith Worship as a desirable practice is beautifully expressed in the poem, 'In my Soul',⁷⁷ by Rabia, a female Sufi-Muslim Saint/Mystic:

'In my soul
there is a temple, a shrine, a mosque, a church
where I kneel.

Prayer should bring us to an altar where no walls or names exist.

Is there not a region of love where the sovereignty is
illumined nothing,

where ecstasy gets poured into itself
and becomes lost,

where the wing is fully alive
but has no mind or
body?

In
my soul
there is a temple, a shrine, a mosque,
a church

that dissolve, that
dissolve in
God.'

⁷⁵ Monawar Hussain, in Lewis, C. and Cohn-Sherbok, D. *Interfaith Worship and Prayer: We Must Pray Together*. (London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2019), 189.

⁷⁶ Matthew Fox. *One River, Many Wells: Wisdom Springing From Global Faiths*. (New York: Tarcher/Penguin, 2000).

⁷⁷ Rabia of Basra, *In my Soul*, in *Love Poems from God*, Daniel Ladinsky, (New York: Penguin Group, 2002), 11.

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Appendix A

Photographs from various Interfaith Worship Services

Photograph of a creative altar-table for an Interfaith Service during Inter Faith Week, on Interfaith Ecumenism, visually depicting Matthew Fox's Interfaith model of 'One River, Many Wells'.



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Photographs from two other Interfaith Worship Services



First Published in *Interreligious Insight*, The World Congress of Faiths' International Interfaith Journal: Jenny Miller, "Is Interfaith Worship a desirable Practice?" *Interreligious Insight*, Vol. 18, No.1, (June 2020), 48-60.

Interfaith Services inspired by Hinduism's Maha Shivaratri & Mystics



First Published in *Interreligious Insight*, The World Congress of Faiths' International Interfaith Journal: Jenny Miller, "Is Interfaith Worship a desirable Practice?" *Interreligious Insight*, Vol. 18, No.1, (June 2020), 48-60.

Appendix B

Photographs of the church arranged for the Inter Faith Week Service and the table of candles, lit for each faith by each of the speakers on each of the World Faiths and also by myself as the speaker giving the 'closing words' on behalf of Interfaith.



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