

# A PRAYER OF HOPE

*Daniel Faivre*

**T**O CROSS SPIRITUAL BOUNDARIES is to share in the faith of others. Whether it be through dialogues and inter-faith celebrations, or through friendships developed over many years, the Christian's glimpse of another human being's inner world is an enormous privilege. It may be a painful experience, yet it can be life-giving in an extraordinary way. In their different ways all the contributors to this, the last Way Supplement of the 'old dispensation', have touched upon deeply personal issues. It is fitting, therefore, that we should end with a brief contribution which crosses another boundary and dares to address God directly. It reflects something of the life of faith of one of the most extraordinary pioneers of inter-faith dialogue in the United Kingdom.

Brother Daniel Faivre first found himself involved in inter-faith dialogue in the early 1980s. He was then working as a catechist in the Catholic parish of St Anselm in Southall, a strongly multi-cultural area of West London. Thirty years earlier he had been sent by his congregation, the Brothers of St Gabriel, to teach in a secondary school in Thailand. He was a young man from a village in the west of France, a fairly typical missionary of the pre-Vatican II Roman Catholic Church. The encounter with different cultures soon made its mark on him. He taught alongside Buddhists and Muslims and witnessed a religious world of deep beliefs and great holiness. His colleagues and pupils helped him understand how a Christian should respond to people of different faiths. The diocesan agency which he founded in Southall, Westminster Interfaith, quickly became a powerful example of what is possible when imagination and generosity are allied to Vatican II's theological vision of a humanity united, not divided, in faith. Seen in this light, faith appears as a quality of all human living, transcending both culture and the more narrow sectarian concerns of particular religious communities.

Faith which is inter-faith is not some 'common religion' or set of beliefs shared by people with feet in both camps, as it were. On the contrary, it is a faithful sensitivity to the way the Spirit of God is always at work drawing people across boundaries. It is this sensitive response to the prompting of the Spirit, says Brother Daniel, which has been developed in him through his engagement with people of other faiths. This is not to say that the Spirit's role is merely to duplicate or prolong what Jesus does. The Spirit helps us to see with a different light, with the eyes of Jesus. To see people in this light is to

*recognise them as people of faith. 'Inter-faith has been for me the source of enormous personal blessing', he says. 'It has given me a much greater understanding of what an individual person is, what "the other" is: each person I meet, of whatever faith, is what I call a unique manifestation of God.'*

*This extract from a meditation he first wrote in 1989, and originally entitled 'Prayer of Hope of an Interfaith Man', is dedicated to 'all those who have welcomed me into their places of worship; shared with me spiritual and theological insights; entrusted me with the secrets of their visions and of their quest for faith; responded warmly to my requests for scriptural references and liturgical artefacts; walked with me on multifaith pilgrimages; and, above all, accepted me as another person of faith and given me, through the holiness of their holy lives, the opportunity to reflect on how to be more true to the message of the Gospels'. It is based largely on familiar verses and themes from the Bible; it alludes to the texts of different religions; it brings in important ideas from the teaching of the Church. These have formed Brother Daniel's prayer in a particular way. It is offered here very much as a personal view, as one man's record of an honest and humble journey of faith into God.*

**Michael Barnes SJ**

O Lord of the Universe,  
to you belong the earth and all it holds,  
the whole world and all who live in it.  
We are the clay, you are the potter;  
we are all the work of your hands.

The psalmist says you created us from dust;  
the Holy Qur'an that no female conceives  
but with your knowledge;  
the Gita that you are the flavour in water,  
in sun and moon the light.  
Lord, you made the world and everything in it,  
you gave breath to its people  
and life to the creatures that move in it.  
You are the Lord of the East and the West,  
you know all that goes into the earth,  
and all that comes down from the sky  
and all that ascends thereto.

From one single stock  
you not only created the human race  
so that they could occupy the entire earth,  
but you decreed how long each nation might seek you,  
and by feeling their way towards you,  
might succeed in finding you.  
For it is in you that we live and move and have our being.  
We are all your children.

To you, Lord, belong indeed heaven  
and the heaven of heavens,  
the earth and all it contains;  
and though you set your heart on Israel,  
and of all the nations chose its descendants,  
you are the Lord of Lords, the great God,  
never partial, never to be bribed.

It is you who see justice done to the orphan and the widow;  
who love the stranger and give them food and clothing,  
and command us all to do the same.  
There is no way of my hiding in a dark corner  
without your seeing me.  
You are full of wisdom and knowledge,  
and you are ever watchful of me.

Ah, what are man and woman  
that you should spare a thought for them?  
Yet you made them little less than gods;  
you have crowned them with glory and splendour  
and made them Lords over the work of your hands!

O Lord, how great is your name through all the earth!  
To you belong the most beautiful names!  
The Upanishads say that in the beginning there was only the Self.  
But the one who is alone has no delight.  
So you desired a second,  
and you created the worlds.  
With the psalmist I sing your praises.  
With Nanak I ask that men and women contemplate your Name  
always.

You created humankind in your image.  
Male and female,  
black, brown and white,  
we are your work of art,  
and in your image  
there is no room for distinction  
between Greek and Jew,  
between slave and free,  
between male and female,  
between Muslim and Hindu,  
between Jain and Buddhist,  
between Christian and Baha'i and Zoroastrian.

O Lord, I thank you for Jesus, my model and exemplar,  
in whom is unity and peace.  
In the society in which he lived  
he rejected all forms of segregation and racism,  
in his words and in his actions.

Yet I remember, Lord, the long arguments  
regarding the work of your Spirit  
among early Christians.  
Some, rightly proud of their Jewish upbringing, said:  
'unless you have yourselves circumcised in the tradition of Moses,  
you cannot be saved'.  
The first reported instance of discrimination  
on the level of faith in the Christian Church?  
Am I not right, Lord?  
And it took nearly two thousand years,  
filled with so much un-Christian behaviour,  
for your Church, Lord, to acknowledge  
that the blood of Christ  
flowed in the veins of Jesus the Jew.

The Vatican Council recalled the spiritual bond  
'linking the people of the New Covenant with Abraham's stock'.  
The Church, it says, 'cannot forget that  
she draws sustenance from the root of the good olive tree  
on to which have been grafted the wild olive branches of the  
Gentiles'.

And 'it deplores the hatred, persecutions and displays of anti-semitism directed against the Jews at any time and from any source'.

I am glad, Lord, that you do not see as we see.  
We look at appearances,  
but you look at the heart.  
You did not make us equal in life;  
in the richness of your gifts,  
you made us all different;  
but whether Jew or Christian,  
believer or unbeliever,  
rich or poor,  
you made us equal in death.  
God has called us all so that in our entire being  
we might be joined to him  
in an endless sharing of a divine life beyond all corruption.  
Christ won his victory when he rose to new life,  
since by his death he freed humankind from death.

Paul wrote that as all died in Christ  
so all will be made alive in Christ;  
all in their proper order;  
Christ as the first-fruits  
and then, after the coming of Christ,  
those who belong to him.

That phrase puzzles me, Lord,  
for there are those who do acknowledge you,  
do worship you,  
do fix their hearts on you,  
but have never heard of your Christ, Lord.  
Oh, I know they have 'heard' the preachers,  
shouting through megaphones.  
They may have queried their Christian neighbours,  
often with little success.

But you know it, Lord:  
my friends have not refused to believe!  
You will not disappoint me,  
and you will not separate me from those with whom,  
united in prayer,  
I praised and thanked you,  
walked on pilgrimage to holy places,  
and made a commitment to work for peace.  
Moreover, I know that my friends have been honest with you,  
with others, with me, with themselves—  
in dialogue and multi-faith celebration.

Of course, I am constantly reminded that Jesus said,  
‘I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.  
No one comes to the Father except through me’.  
And you know how often I have prayed to you  
to enlighten me about what this text means.

I think I have seen something of the answer—  
in that vision of the Son of Man coming in glory,  
with all the nations assembled before him.  
My friends will no doubt be on your right hand  
for they have certainly tried  
to satisfy the requirements of the King—  
though whether with more generosity and self-denial  
than those who wear on their lapel  
the ‘disciple of Christ’ button,  
that I leave to you, Lord.

O Lord of justice and compassion,  
I cannot see you revealing your anger from heaven  
against my friends of other faiths,  
as Paul says you do against the depravity of those  
who keep truth imprisoned in their wickedness.  
People who do wrong will not inherit the Kingdom of God.  
That I know.  
But should I include my friends among the thieves and adulterers,  
the usurers and drunkards,  
the slanderers and swindlers?

Yet, far from me, Lord, to take away from you the right of the potter.  
I do not seek to cross-examine you, my God.  
Surely the potter can do what he likes with the clay?  
It is for you to decide how you will use the particular lump.  
You know, Lord, how grateful I am for the gift of Christian faith  
and for the constant replenishing with your grace  
of the earthen vessel of my soul.  
And for this vessel you want to use, dents and cracks and all,  
until it crumbles to the dust  
from which it was taken.

But, Lord, are we not all called,  
as Isaiah tells us,  
to your mountain where you will prepare for all peoples  
a banquet of rich food  
a banquet of fine wines!  
On this mountain you will remove the mourning veil  
covering all peoples,  
and the shroud enwrapping the nations;  
you will destroy death forever.

I bow with gratitude,  
for the gift of my Christian faith.  
So do the Hindus—and I with them—  
for your gift of the Word in the Veda,  
which is eternal, imperishable.  
So do the Jews—and I with them—  
for the gift of Torah and the prophets.  
So do the Muslims—and I with them —  
for the gift of Islam.  
So do the Sikhs—and I with them —  
for your Name which is Eternal Truth.  
So do the disciples of the Buddha— and I with them—  
for the Noble Eightfold Path.  
Praise be to God,  
to whom belong all things in the heavens and the earth!  
To God be praise in the hereafter!  
Indeed your works are sublime, Lord,  
and those who delight in them are right to fix their eyes on them.

Surely, Lord, the Buddhist monk who, early in the morning,  
goes through the local village,  
carrying his alms-bowl for daily food;  
the Muslim who fasts through Ramadan  
pondering your everlasting goodness;  
the Sikh offering food to all who come;  
the devout Hindu who offers their heart  
and worships you as the Lord supreme;  
all these, Lord, are practising virtue,  
the true wisdom which you have revealed.

Thank you, Lord, for the grace  
which has made me realize  
that every being is an abode of God,  
worthy of respect and reverence.  
Thank you for the grace  
which has given me a glimpse of the faith of others  
and some degree of appreciation  
of what it means to them.

Without the help of your Spirit  
my admiration of that faith  
might have been an exercise in comparative religion.  
But it would not have become the spring and foundation  
of a relationship of spiritual communion.

And so I give thanks for what I have been given:  
for Hindu concepts of *Brahman* and *Atman*;  
for the faithfulness of Sita and the virtue of Draupadi;  
for the meditation skills of Theravada  
and the compassionate practice of Mahayana;  
for the lives of Guru Nanak and Shri Ramakrishna;  
for the Jain concept of *ahimsa*;  
for the Muslim example of fasting during Ramadan  
and the symbolism and liturgy of *salat* prayer;  
for the code of holiness you gave to Moses on Mount Sinai;  
for what the Holy Qur'an says about Mary;  
and for the Law of Love given us by your Son.



I give thanks for all the people of God,  
shedding their blood for justice,  
preaching and practising the gospel of peace,  
sharing their material goods and spiritual riches with others.

To the God of heaven and earth,  
Father and Mother of the Universe,  
I give thanks now and forever.