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Spirititan NEWS

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The Play
of Light

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The Play of Light

The sanctuary in Laval House Chapel seemed to lack something: colour? warmth? something to take us beyond Calvary to Easter Sunday, to reach towards Pentecost and the showering of the Spirit?

We surveyed Jonathan Kearns' architecture and envisaged the possibilities: why not work with the clear glass windows already in place rather than add a rival piece of art? We were introduced to Sarah Hall, Toronto's internationally recognised stained glass artist whose work has received numerous awards. From design to final installation she took us through the composition of a window that felt right for our particular chapel and those who would assemble in it to pray and celebrate the liturgy.

In the course of our association she showed us prints and slides depicting her work in Canada and the United States — works of art that have brought beauty to many churches and synagogues. As we marvelled at her treasures a thought began to take shape. What if she would allow us to use her pictures in our upcoming calendar? A conversation at a Toronto exhibition led to our request and her immediate willingness to say yes. We are very grateful to her.

For a thousand years stained glass has lured into churches tourists who would not otherwise visit them and has provided an environment for believers to come in touch with their God through prayer and silent contemplation. One thinks of the rose windows in Notre Dame and Chartres, the walls of glass in the Sainte Chapelle, the beautiful windows of countless local churches ancient and modern.

The dark interiors of the 12th and 13th centuries called out for rich, saturated colours. Their interlacing of blues and rubies still compel even the most casual of visitors to pause and gaze. The play of light colouring these sombre spaces gives them a beauty and a warmth to balance the austere stone of walls, floor and pillars.

Renaissance art emphasized the human form. Stained glass became an alternative canvas on which its practitioners could paint. In so doing, it grew less and less transparent. The triumphant Christ of the Middle Ages gave way to the human Jesus, in particular the Man of Sorrows.

Elaborate Baroque churches with their heaven on earth motifs needed clear interior light to make visible their detailed beauty. Stained glass was out of place. It became a defeated rival banished to extinction for two hundred years.

Then came the revival architecture of the 19th century, especially the neo-Gothic reconstructions. Antique and mediaeval glass was rediscovered. A gentle, soft and sometimes sad Christ appealed to our Victorian predecessors.

20th century stained glass benefited from the techniques of modern technology. No longer easily classified, each artist had his or her approach — Harry Clarke and Evie Hone (Ireland), Marc Chagall (Russia) Georges Roualt, Le Corbusier and Henri Matisse (France), contemporary artists such as Sarah Hall. Their work is self-revealing and increasingly abstract. In Germany and England the necessary post-World War II rebuilding challenged artists to create a stained glass of and for its own time. In Coventry for example, John Piper's floor to ceiling Baptistry Window — hundreds of panels of blues and reds and greens surrounding a central diamond of gradually lightening yellow panels — summons outside light and bids it colour everything within.

"What is the point of making church windows that do not connect to something beyond themselves?" asks Sarah Hall. May the visual experience of this year's calendar draw you into the beauty of her contemporary stained glass. May its glory and transparence colour your world and nourish your spirit.

Patrick Fitzpatrick CSSP

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The Power of Acceptance

Kathy Murtha

“She pondered all these things in her heart” Lk 2:19,51

I have never been overly fond of the word “acceptance”. It has always suggested to me a certain weakness — a failure to combat disappointment and loss, a victim mentality. Yet many wise and spiritual people have emphatically declared that the path to peace lies in changing what you can and should, and accepting what you cannot change. People who embrace this wisdom find serenity in the midst of turbulence and tragedy.

Peace through acceptance has been widely reiterated. But acceptance as the only way to live your life fully has recently inspired and intrigued me. That power of acceptance is brilliantly expressed by Deena Metzger. She says that to live our own life “is to claim it no matter what it is. Not to fix it, not to alter it, not to make it something else, or someone else’s, simply again and again to explore it, to come to know it, ... and then to live it whole, wholeheartedly, from the heart. That’s all there is, really”. (*Oriah Mountain Dreamer, From the Heart*)

In the life of each human being a story is unfolding that the universe has not yet heard. What a shame not to allow it full expression. Acceptance enables us “to jump into our own skins” and live our life to the fullest.

There are many forces at work in our world clamouring to convince us not to accept ourselves and our life situation, tempting us to hand over to external authorities the power to determine what our lives should look like, to buy more and more things so that we can live the “real life”. A lot of money and brainpower is employed to drill into us that “we are not enough” and “we don’t have enough”. Our fear of failing to live up to the “ideal” holds us back further from entering passionately into the story of our lives. Hence too many of us live in exile from ourselves, our inner rhythm, and the fabric of our lives.

I’m beginning to believe that failure, loss, disappointment and slammed doors are precisely the triggers that allow us to passionately take up our own lives. Gandhi would never have embarked upon setting his people free if he hadn’t been ordered out of the first class compartment of a train and told to go to third class where his type belonged.

And there is no greater example of acceptance than Mary. She is the one who truly listened and said “Yes!” “She pondered all these things in her heart.” Her story confirms how difficult it is to accept. One day she knocked on the door of a house where Jesus was preaching. She had come to take him home, where he’d be safe. But he had left home for good and would not be coming back. That the mother of Jesus was able to make her way to the foot of the Cross and hold her dead son in her arms has given her the power to proclaim acceptance to all generations. Truly, the more we are able to embrace and accept the truth of our lives the more our words too will resonate with the experience of others, and the deeper we will enter into communion with ourselves, with others and with God. ♦

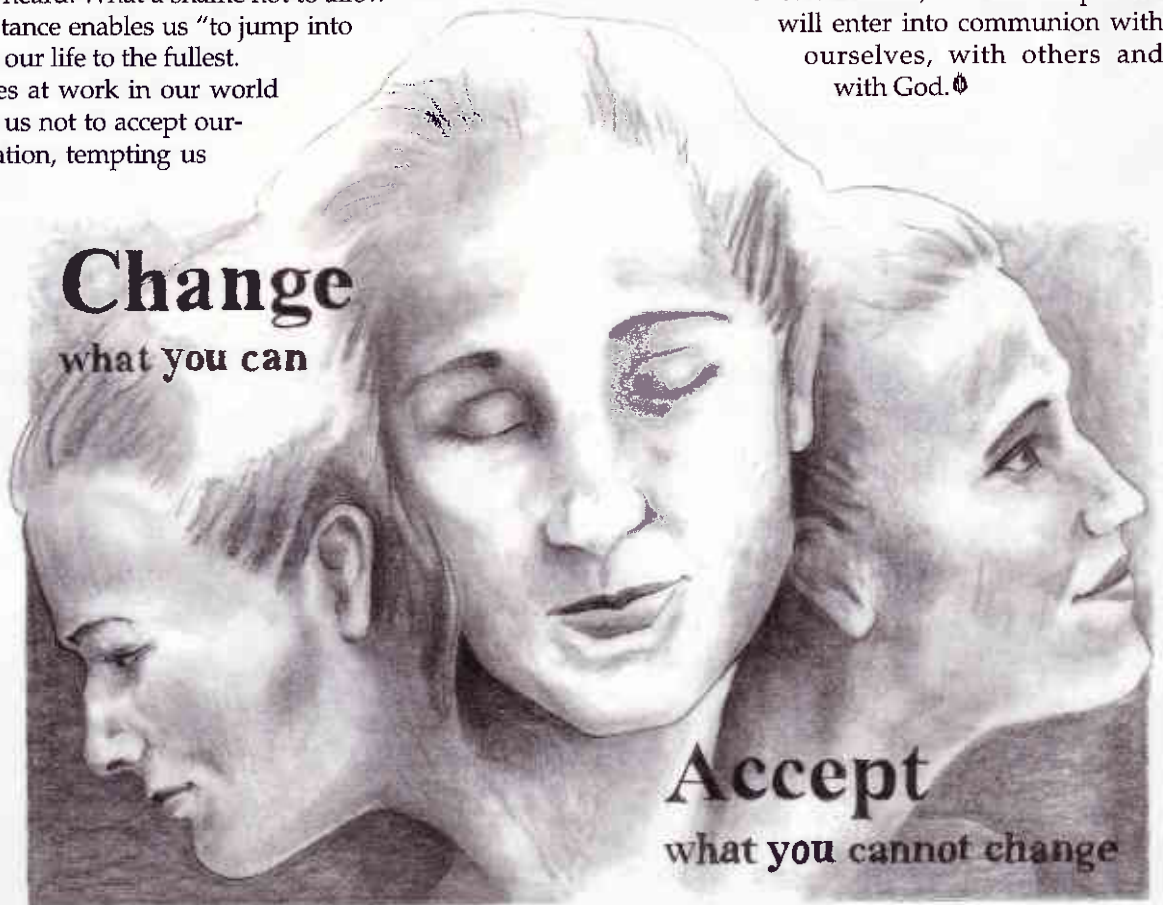


Illustration by David Wysotski



