



A Chicago Mystic's Call to Action

Author Andrew Harvey talks about “networks of grace” and how they’ll help fuel the change our country needs

INTERVIEW BY MAUREEN EWING

Andrew Harvey’s latest book, *The Hope: A Guide to Sacred Activism*, could not come at a more auspicious time. Our country seems poised for a shift from big business and big politics to all things local—particularly activism. In fact, we are already in the middle of that shift.

In *The Hope*, Harvey marries his practical side with his idealistic side, his mystical beliefs with his political ones, and details how small groups, groups he calls “networks of grace,” will help fuel the change this country needs.

We sat down in his Oak Park home and discussed how the idea of sacred activism evolved, how networks of grace will lead to transformation and how he hopes Chicagoans will affect change locally.

What led you to the concept and term sacred activism?

I think it’s very hard for us in our culture of extreme disassociation, mindless entertainment, rampant consumerism and appalling narcissism to begin to face the devastating suffering everywhere. We are in a collapsing world, and yet we are also, especially in America, terrifyingly insulated and terrifyingly scared of feeling anything, because we all know that if we begin to feel something we will be broken up. Yet, it’s being broken open that will help us really be effective. This is where we all stand before the door marked heartbreak. Going through that

door requires enormous courage. But what is on the other side of that door is sacred passion for life and tremendous passion to do whatever you can in the depths of sacred consciousness to transform the situation.

If we do allow this sacred consciousness to emerge, then it can empower us, guide us, transform us and make us far more intelligent than we can imagine. So, we are at a threshold at which everything is at stake.

It's going to be a very, very difficult time, which is why I wrote my book, to guide people, to give people a template, to offer people a way through.

Can you explain how you hope “networks of grace” will function?

This is the core of the book. What I have been baffled by for a very long time, and everyone who thinks about this is baffled by, is why the dark can organize itself so brilliantly and the good is so individualistic, so naïve, in a bad sense innocent and until now hopelessly disorganized. We can no longer afford the good to be disorganized. This thought led me to look at terrorist organizations and to see that their great frightening strength resides in their extraordinary organization in cells.

The words came to me, networks of grace, because we cannot do this transformation alone; no one has the complete picture, the complete answer. What happens when people come together in a group is that synergistic energies are born, enormous new insights are created, extraordinary resources are pooled and enormous progress can be made very fast. When these networks of grace are interlinked, they will provide the key to the transfiguration of the world.

In my discussion of sacred activism, there are two different sides, love and wisdom. Wisdom is not simply an understanding through God's grace of how nature works; it's also becoming aligned, again through God's grace, in a way that can be expressed through community. Networks of grace are going to be networks of grace given divine power to affect radical change.

We have to unlearn our addiction to individualism. We have to unlearn our loneliness, and we have to come together in these networks of grace and galvanize ourselves at a local level so we can rediscover meaning,

passion and joy. It's amazing. Everywhere I go and talk about it, this idea absolutely thrills people. There are already 50 networks of grace in this country, and I'm convinced this is going to be one of the ways in which humanity transforms itself.

How are networks of grace already working?

Let's talk about Chicago. Let's talk about how all cities now are anthills of disassociation in which lonely people live in lonely rooms, cut off from nature, cut off from the divine, and cut off from each other.

What a network of grace does is to provide sacred friendship, sacred companionship, sacred inspiration, so what I'm discovering is that these networks are built around many different things—some are networks built around the professions: doctors really devoting their time to treating people without money; lawyers who are trying to defend people from corrupt corporations; networks of people joined around a passion—a passion for meditation, art, helping children, networks for people who are joined around heartbreak, a heartbreak in animals.

I don't think Chicago is any worse than any other cities, and in certain ways Chicago has a wonderful down home, decent energy which I love. With all of its corruption, all of its racism, all of its great complexities and difficulties, I see that there is a bedrock of decency, and cultural depth, and warmth and concern. There's a realism about Chicago which can be gritty and ferocious, but can also be very warm, down home and decent, and it is on that warm and down home and decent grittiness in which I place my trust. There's something wonderful in the Midwestern friendliness. It does have its conservative shadow, that's true. It does have its resistance to change, that's true.

I think I would have coasted and been more trivial in a less terrifying, demanding time. This time has compelled me to really focus my whole being on what I truly believe, and I think that is the greatest possible gift. Rumi has this wonderful couplet where he says, *be grateful for the friend's tyranny, not his tenderness / so the arrogant beauty in you can become a lover that weeps*. A time like this can turn you from being an arrogant

ARE YOU A SACRED ACTIVIST? QUIZ



IF YOU ANSWER yes to two or more of these questions than you are being called on to become a sacred activist—what author Andrew Harvey defines as a humble and divine agent of change to birth a new world of compassion, peace, justice and harmony.



Do you have a burning desire to change the world or make a difference?

Is there a cause or issue that breaks your heart?

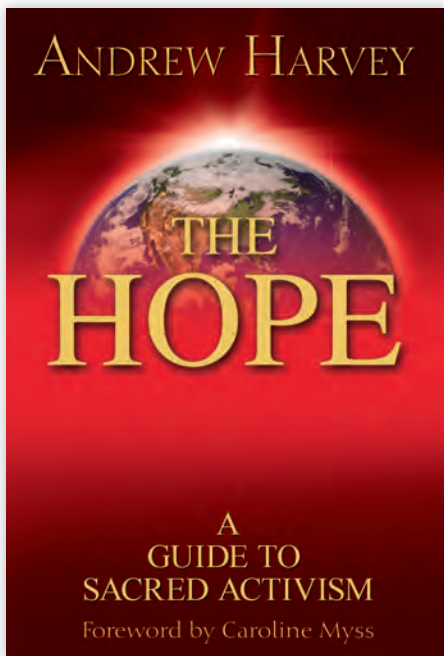
Are you devoted to a spiritual practice such as prayer or meditation?

Are you concerned about the environment, social justice, non-violence and personal wellness?

Are you seeking for deeper meaning in your life?

Do you believe love is the essence and creative force of life?

Are you anxious about the current state of the world and looking for a way to pitch in?



beauty and narcissist into a lover that weeps for the pain of the world, the suffering, but also weeps in awe and wonder at what is trying to be born in this place.

What would you call our attention to here in Chicago?

There are four areas that everyone in Chicago should become truly aware of. The first area is the obvious and total corruption of the government. We've had endless scandals now, and it's extremely important that everyone becomes aware of it and not just demonizes it but starts becoming active citizens to change the whole atmosphere.

The second thing I think everyone needs to be aware of is the appalling and painful racism that continues in Chicago. It's less terrible than I think it was in the '50s and '60s, but it's still there. I have many African-American friends, and they make me weep with stories of police brutality, police oppression, the sense of helplessness and hopelessness that they have even after Obama's election. I think it's extremely important for everyone to really start facing the level of racism, and it's not just the African-American community, it's the Hispanic community, and to start having honest and naked conversation about that.

The other area I would say is education. Our educational system in this country is absolutely dreadful. I think Chicago's system is broken and really needs radical attention.

The fourth is the general broken down

apathy of the youth. So many of the young people I've met in Chicago are in a state of profound despair about the world, think the older generations are hopelessly stupid and corrupt, and are really sinking into drugs and desolation. I don't blame them, but I think it's time for all of us who are becoming elders and who are older to really face what is happening to our young, face the pain that they are in, face the dreadful ravaging of their psyches and their cultural understanding by a culture that is really stuck in terminal ADD, drug addiction, violence, and completely meaningless pop culture. [It's time] for the people who are aware of this to start reaching out to young people, having conversations with young people, inspiring young people, mentoring young people.

I think these are the four things that [need] immediate attention. The Dalai Lama said of the world's situation a few months ago that this is not a crisis, this is an emergency. Chicago is in a state of emergency in these four areas, and it's time that everybody in Chicago calmly addresses this. This really requires the Midwestern temperament to amp up the heat a bit and start getting engaged. I think once it does, amazing things can happen. Don't you think?

I think the drawback of this down home decent temperament is that it believes its own propaganda that everything is fundamentally okay. Everything is not fundamentally okay. Talk to any young African-American man who isn't wealthy, even if he is wealthy, and you'll find out. Talk to any young person who's been through the school system and you'll find hardly any grasp of history, any deep culture, not through any fault of their own but because they've been raised in a cataclysmic situation. This goes on and on.

There are many unsung, simple heroes out there. What I hope sacred activism will do is to give them a way to identify themselves through networks of grace joining together to inspire each other.

The Hope: A Guide to Sacred Activism comes out on September 15. For more information visit andrewharvey.net.

Maureen Ewing is a recent graduate of Columbia College Chicago's MFA-Creative Writing Poetry program. She also teaches First Year Writing at Columbia and works as a freelance writer.

ANDREW HARVEY EVENTS

September 16

Yoga Trek Center
911 S. Lombard Ave.
Oak Park, Ill.
708.660.0868
yogatrekcenter.com

September 17

Theosophical Society
Book Signing
306 W. Geneva Rd.
Wheaton, Ill.
theosophical.org

September 18

Yoga Now
742 N. LaSalle, Suite 201
Chicago
312.280.9642
yoganowchicago.com

September 19

Theosophical Society
Workshop
306 W. Geneva Rd.
Wheaton, Ill.
theosophical.org

September 20

Sermon & Lecture
Unity Church
1925 W. Thome Ave.
Chicago
773.973.0007
unitychicago.org

September 21

Lecture & Book Signing
Lake Street Church of Evanston
607 Lake St.
Evanston, Ill.
lakestreet.org

September 30

Sacred Activism Lecture & Book Signing
Life Force Arts Center
3148 N. Lincoln Ave.
Chicago
lifeforcearts.org

For more information on these events, visit andrewharvey.net