

with a message of hope when it was returned undamaged Friday.

— The Associated Press

Caron, 55, also built an altar for Pope Benedict VI's visit to Washington in 2008. The carpenter is on a tight deadline and is reluctant to take a break of any kind.

Caron said he is just as excited for Pope Francis to come as he was for other papal visits; he has no favorites among the popes, he said. He says he believes that God gives

an altar. So whenever I get the chance to build an altar — not for the pope, but whenever you have a chance to build an altar — it's where heaven meets earth."

INTERFAITH INSIGHT

Religious difference, religious violence, and a religious challenge

By Douglas Kindschi

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We have been looking at some of the writings of Eboo Patel, who will be in our area Oct. 8 speaking at Aquinas College and Grand Valley State University.

One of his major themes is the prevention of alienation that can lead to violence.

The Interfaith Youth Core, or IFYC, which he founded, works on college campuses across the country to help students find meaning by being of service to others, especially through interfaith efforts. It is a way to, not only understand another person's faith, but to deepen one's own religious understanding and reinforce those values we share.

Concern about the misuse of religion by those who would promote violence is also the theme of a recent book by Rabbi

Jonathan Sacks, who until recently, was the chief rabbi in Great Britain.



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His book, "Not in God's Name: Confronting Religious Violence," opens with this line: "When religion turns men into murderers, God weeps."

He then recounts the early chapters of Genesis, describing the disobedience of the first humans, followed by the first murder; Cain's killing of his brother, Abel.

By the time we get to chapter 6, God is decrying the wickedness of humankind: "And the Lord was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart." (Genesis 6:6)

Sacks continues: "Too often in the history of religion, people have killed in the name of the God of life, waged war in the name of the God of peace, hated in the name of the God of love and practiced cruelty in the name of the God of compassion."

Sacks is a member of the House of Lords, and in a speech there last month, he continued his analysis and call for action.

It is worth quoting at some length: "We must do the theological work," Sacks asserted. "That is fundamental. That is what happened in Europe after the wars of religion of the 16th and 17th centuries. A group of thinkers, among them John Milton, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Benedict Spinoza, sat down, re-read the Bible, and formulated some of the most important ideas ever formulated about state and society: the social contract,

the moral limits of power, liberty of conscience, the doctrine of toleration, and the very concept of human rights.

"These were religious ideas based on the Bible, which is what John F. Kennedy meant when he said in his inaugural address, 'the same revolutionary beliefs for which our forebears fought are still at issue around the globe — the belief that the rights of man come not from the generosity of the state, but from the hand of God.'

"We have not yet done the theological work for a global society in the information age; and not all religions in the world are yet fully part of that conversation. If we neglect the theology, all else will fail."

Outlining religious challenges before us, he concludes: "We must stand together, people of all faiths and of none, for we are all

at risk. Christians are being persecuted throughout the Middle East. Jews are facing a new and resurgent anti-Semitism.

Muslims who stand on the wrong side of the Sunni/Shia divide are being killed in great numbers. Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Baha'i and others face persecution in some parts of the world.

"There must be some set of principles that we can appeal to, and be held accountable to, if our common humanity is to survive our religious differences. Religious freedom is about our common humanity, and we must fight for it if we are not to lose it. This, I believe, is the issue of our time."

This is the challenge for each of us. Can we see this as our common mission? Can we respect our differences and find common ground in seeking respect and peace?

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