

07. Care for the Poor and Sûrahs 1-2





## Care for the poor

Another central thrust of the Qur'an is God's will that we care for the poor. Muhammad was orphaned as a child, an experience that remained with him all his life

*'By the morning brightness, and by the night when still, your Lord has not forsaken you; nor does He despise. And the Hereafter shall be better for you than this life. And surely your Lord will give to you, and you will be content. Did He not find you [that is Muhammad] an orphan and shelter you, find you astray and guide you, and find you in need and enrich you? So as for the orphan, scorn not. And as for one who requests, repel not. And for the Blessing of the Lord, proclaim'* (Surah 93, from Mecca).



Sûrah 89 speaks of the fate of those *‘who honour not the orphan, nor urge you the feeding of the indigent. You devour inheritance with rapacious devouring, and love wealth with abounding love’* (Sûrah 89:17-20, from ?).

We find the same theme in other sûrahs:

*‘The steep pass is the freeing of a slave, or giving food at a time of famine to an orphan near of kin, or an indigent, clinging to the dust, while being one of those who believe and exhort one another to patience, and exhort one another to compassion. Those are the companions of the right. And those who disbelieve in Our signs, they are the companions of the left. Upon them is Fire enclosed’* (Sûrah 90:13-20, from ?).



The Jewish Scriptures are full of the call to justice, especially in regard to the poor.

It is the same in the sacred writings of the Christians. Luke has Jesus define his ministry as ‘bringing good news to the poor’ (Luke 4:18). Jesus challenged his contemporaries: ‘When you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame’ (Luke 14:13). It is sufficient to recall Jesus’ parable in which he speaks of what ultimately matters in human behaviour (see Matthew 25:34-46). We will be judged on how we treat the poor.



# Sûrah One

from Mecca. Quoted in full.

*'In the name of God, [the basmalah]  
the Compassionate [Ar-Raḥmân],  
the Merciful [Ar-Raḥîm].  
Praise be to God,  
Lord of the worlds,  
the Compassionate, the Merciful,  
Master of the Day of Judgment.  
Thee we worship, and from Thee we seek help.  
Guide us upon the straight path,  
the path of those whom Thou hast blessed,  
not of those who incur wrath, nor of those who are astray.'*



## 1. The Compassionate, the Merciful

Compassion and Mercy are frequently attributed to God in the Qur'an.

They are also key attributes of God as portrayed in the Christian Scriptures.

The birth of Jesus is introduced with the words: 'By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us' (Luke 1:78).

Paul prays: 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation' (2 Corinthians 1:3).

'When the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, because of his mercy' (Titus 3:4-5).

God is 'rich in mercy' (Ephesians 2:4).



A central tenet of the Christian faith is that God's mercy is 'for all' (Romans 11:32). James writes: 'The Lord is compassionate and merciful' (James 5:11).

For Christians we know that God is compassionate and merciful because we see Jesus being compassionate and merciful. 'A leper came to him begging him, and kneeling he said to him, "If you want to, you can make me clean." Moved with compassion, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him, "Of course I want to. Be made clean!" (Mark 1:40-41)

'Jesus saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things' (Mark 6:34).

'When there was again a great crowd without anything to eat, he called his disciples and said to them, "I have compassion for the crowd' (Mark 8:1).



Jesus' image of God is expressed beautifully in his story about a father's love for his wayward son. Desperate, the boy decides to return home. Jesus says: 'While he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him' (Luke 15:20).

Jesus calls his followers: 'Be compassionate just as your Father is compassionate' (Luke 6:36). 'Blessed are they who show mercy' (Matthew 5:7).

Jesus tells a story of a man who is attacked by brigands and left half-dead by the side of the road. Three people pass along the road. The first two ignore him. Then 'a Samaritan while travelling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with compassion. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him' (Luke 10:33-34).



We believe that Jesus gives us a share in his compassion, the compassion of God. Paul writes: ‘God is my witness how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus’ (Philippians 1:8).

‘If then there is any appeal in Christ, any consolation from love, any communion in the Spirit, any movements of compassion and feelings of love, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being of one soul and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition. Do not strive after or seek to find your value in things that are worthless, but in humility regard others above yourselves, so that not everyone is focused on themselves, but each is looking to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus’ (Philippians 2:1-5).

‘As God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion’ (Colossians 3:12).



## 2. Praise and worship

Sûrah 1 *'Praise be to God, Lord of the worlds ... Thee we worship.'*

Jesus addresses God in prayer as 'Father, Lord of heaven and earth' (Luke 10:21). We Christians are called to 'worship the Lord your God, and serve only him' (Luke 4:8).

## 3. Prayer for God's guidance

Sûrah 1 *'Guide us upon the straight path, the path of those whom Thou hast blessed.'*

For Christians it is Jesus who shares with us his intimate communion with God, and who walks with us, for he is himself 'the Way, the Truth and the Life' (John 14:6).



*not of those who incur wrath, nor of those who are astray.'*

Some Muslim commentators read this as referring to the Jews (*those who incur wrath*), and the Christians (*those who are astray*).



# **Sûrah Two** (from Medina)

.This is the longest sûrah in the Quran. Verses 6 to 20 are a sustained warning against ‘hypocrites’: those who pretend to believe, but fail to submit to God’s will as revealed to Muhammad There are many references to the Hebrew Scriptures, including the narrative of creation and the sin of our first parents (verses 29ff), the escape from Egypt (verses 49ff), and the journey through the desert when the unfaithful worshipped a calf (verse 54).

Much of this Sûrah echoes the ancient prophets of Israel, who criticised the failure of the people to obey God’s revealed will. Muhammad is presented as the ultimate prophet and his words as God’s ultimate revelation. It warns of the dire consequences that will befall those who do not submit to God by following the Qur’an.



Sûrah 2:43 *‘Perform the prayer (salah) and give alms (zakah) and bow with those who bow.’*



Sûrah 2:45-46 *‘Seek help in patience and prayer, and this indeed is difficult, except for the humble, who reckon that they shall meet their Lord, and that they shall return unto Him’.*

Christians are at home with this beautiful and wise advice. Jesus assures us: *‘Whatever you ask for in prayer with faith, you will receive’* (Matthew 21:22).

Paul writes: *‘I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone ... so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity. This is right and is acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth’* (1 Timothy 2:1-4).

*‘Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God’* (Philippians 4:6).



Sûrah 2:62 *‘Truly those who believe, and those who are Jews, and the Christians and the Sabaeans, whosoever believes in God and the Last Day and works righteousness shall have their reward with their Lord. No fear shall come upon them, nor shall they grieve.’*

Such positive statements about Christians are typically found in Muhammad’s period in Mecca.

The New Testament, too, speaks of ‘reward’: *‘Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven’* (Matthew 5:12). The reward now is expressed by Paul: *‘God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.’* Of the reward in heaven Paul writes: *‘no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him’* (1Corinthians 2:9). The reward is to be with the Risen Jesus in the embrace of God.



Sûrah 2:87 *‘Indeed We gave unto Moses the Book and caused a succession of messengers to follow after him. And We gave Jesus, son of Mary, clear proofs, and strengthened him with the Holy Spirit.’*

Christians believe that everything, insofar as it is free from sin, reveals God: creation itself, and the life and writings of holy people in every culture. Christians believe that God revealed God’s Self and God’s will through Moses, and through the other prophets of Israel. We believe that God’s Self-revelation reached its fullest expression in Jesus of Nazareth. This belief differs from the faith of Muslims, who recognise Moses and Jesus, but for whom Muhammad is the Messenger who reveals God’s will in its fulness. But this difference need not stop Muslims and Christians listening to each other, respecting each other and recognising the values that we share. By the term ‘Holy Spirit’ we mean the love-communion that united Jesus to God. The Christian life is a sharing in this love-communion.



Sûrah 2:98 *‘Whosoever is an enemy of God, His angels and His messengers, and Gabriel and Michael: God is indeed the enemy of the disbelievers’.*

Jesus revealed that we are free to reject God’s offer of grace, but, as we demonstrated earlier, for Jesus God does not have enemies. On the contrary God continues to love and grace everyone – and we should do the same.

Sûrah 2:106 *‘No sign do We abrogate [naskh] or cause to be forgotten, but that We bring that which is better than it or like unto it. Dost thou not know that God is Powerful over all things?’*

We studied this text and others like it Presentation 4, slides 9-11.



Sûrah 2:115 *‘Wheresoever you turn, there is the Face of God’.*

We Christians believe that all creation reveals something of the Creator, that ‘wherever you turn, there is the Face of God’.

For us Jesus is God’s most beautiful human revelation, so we look to Jesus, especially, to see the ‘Face’ of God. Paul writes: **‘It is the God who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ’** (2 Corinthians 4:6).





Sûrah 2:136 *“We believe in God, and in that which was sent down to us, and in that which was sent down unto Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and in what Moses and Jesus were given, and in what the prophets were given from their Lord. We make no distinction among any of them, and unto Him we submit’.*

Christians are at home with this statement of belief, except for the fact that we see Jesus as the ultimate and perfect human revelation of God. He is God’s focal Word.

Sûrah 2:165 *‘Among mankind there are some who take up equals apart from God, loving them like loving God.’*



Sûrah 2:177 *‘Piety is he ... who gives wealth, despite loving it, to kinsfolk, orphans, the indigent, the traveller, beggars, and for [the ransom of] slaves; and performs the prayer and gives the alms; and those who fulfil their oaths when they pledge them; and those who are patient in misfortune, hardship and moments of peril. It is they who are the sincere, and it is they who are the reverent’.*

Christians share the Muslim concern for the poor. We looked at this earlier in this presentation (slides 2-4).



Sûrah 2:190-191 *'Fight in the way of God against those who fight against you, but do not transgress. Truly God loves not the transgressors. And slay them wherever you come upon them'.*

In the previous presentation we examined the teaching of the Qur'an that authorises the use of force in defending and propagating religion.

Sûrah 2 goes on to speak of family relationships, of contracts, of prayer, fasting (verses 183-187), almsgiving, pilgrimage (verse 196ff), and other matters.

Verses 222-243 focus on the relationship between husbands and wives. It includes the statement: "*Men are a degree above women*". In the fourth presentation we examined the teaching of the Qur'an in regard to the relationship between man and woman.



Sûrah 2:256-257 *‘There is no coercion in religion ... God is the Protector of those who believe. He brings them out of the darkness into the light. As for those who disbelieve, their protectors are the idols, bringing them out of the light into the darkness They are the inhabitants of the Fire, abiding therein’.*

These verses seem to be addressed to Muslims, inviting them to embrace Islam willingly (see Sûrah 22:78). By contrast non-Muslims (disbelievers) are in darkness and are headed for the eternal Hell of divine punishment (For the implications of this see Sûrah 9, verse 73). Muhammad forced pagan Arabs to become Muslims.

In presentation 5 we looked at the teaching of the Qur'an on hell.



Sûrah 2:263-264 *'An honourable word and forgiveness are better than an act of charity followed by injury. God is Self-Sufficient, Clement. O you who believe! Do not annul your acts of charity through preening and injury, like the person who spends his wealth to be seen by men and believes not in God and the Last Day'.*

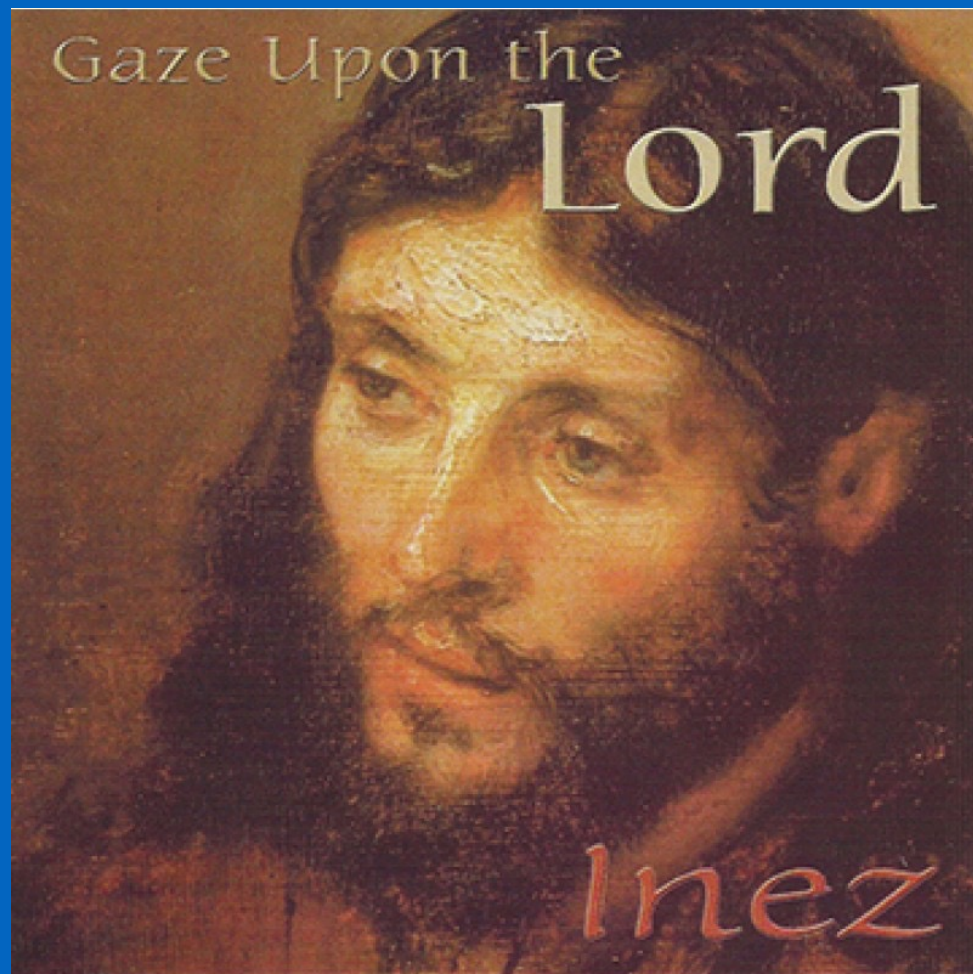
Elements of this good advice are found in the words of Jesus: 'Whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you' (Matthew 6:2-4).



Sûrah 2:286 concludes the Sûrah with the prayer: *‘Our Lord, impose not upon us that which we have not the strength to bear! And pardon us, forgive us and have mercy on us. You are our Master, so help us against the disbelieving people’.*

In the New Testament Paul assures us: *‘God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it’* (1 Corinthians 10:13).





## Gaze upon the Lord Clare of Assisi

*Woman's Song of God*

*Songs inspired by the writings  
of Women Mystics*

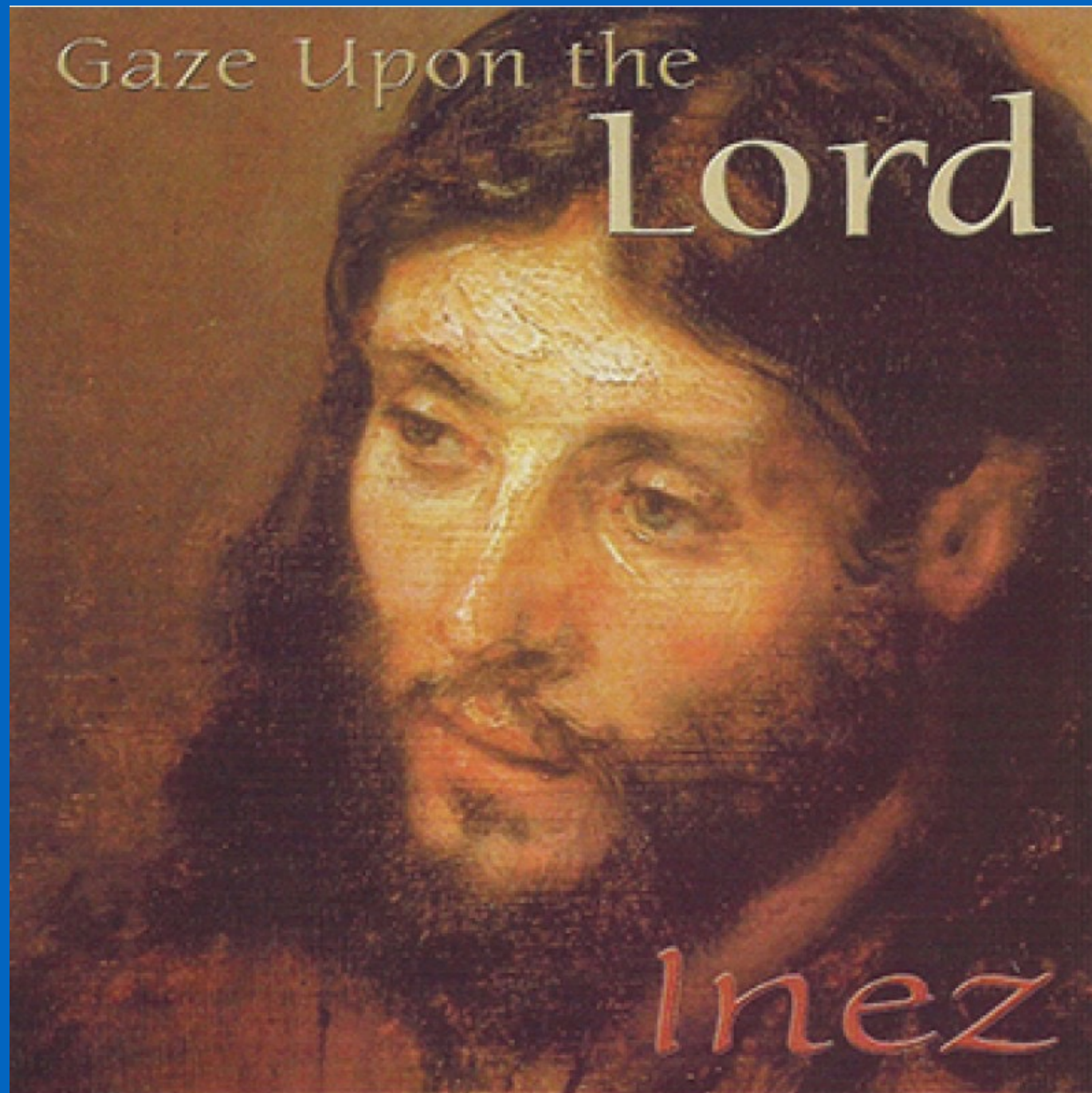
Briege O'Hare osc and Marie Cox rsm

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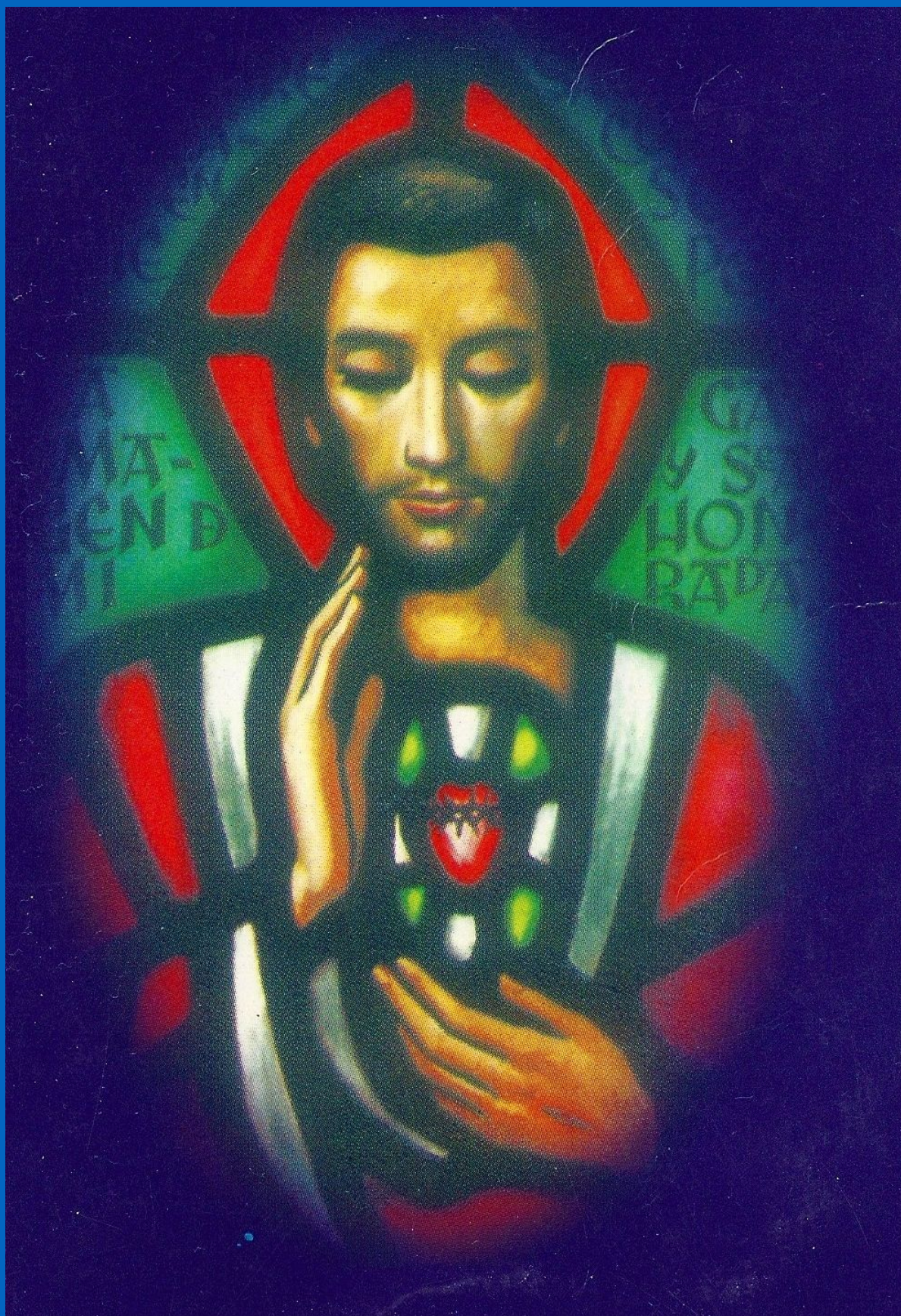




Gaze upon the Lord.  
Gaze upon his face.  
Gaze upon the One  
who holds you in his embrace.

Gaze upon his life.  
Gaze upon his love.  
Gaze upon his coming forth  
from heaven above.





Look upon the Lord.  
Look upon his way.  
Look upon his heart.  
It opens to each day.





Though he was despised,  
the lowest of all men,  
look upon his sacred cross  
which brings life again.

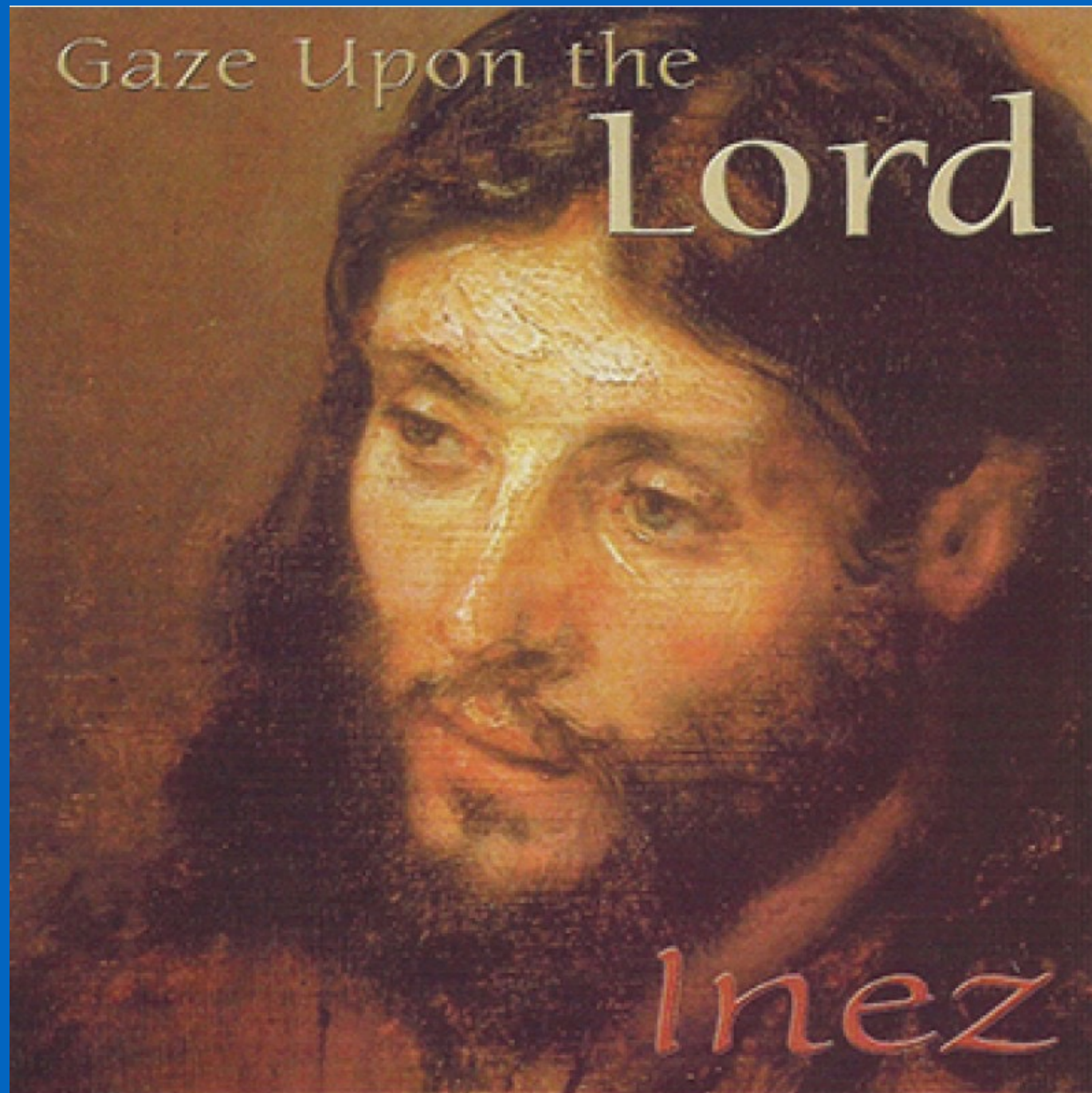




If you open to life's pain,  
then with him you shall reign;  
and allow your heart to hear,  
then with him you'll rejoice.

Open to his cross  
the wounds of each day's love.  
Then you'll know the splendour  
of his kingdom above.





Gaze upon his life.  
Gaze upon his love.  
Gaze upon his coming forth  
from heaven above,  
from heaven above.