

COMMENDATION FOR 'DUST'

Like the peace building processes it depicts, *Dust* is a singular and astonishing work. By turns travelogue, memoir, historical record and mediation manual, it is a testament to the possibilities for reconciliation between past enemies when all parties are respected and listened to and yet are also persistently prodded and cajoled towards acts of goodwill. Undaunted by repeated warnings about the intractable nature of the ethnic and religious divides within post-war Bosnia, operating under the banner of the Soul of Europe, Donald Reeves, the long-time Rector of St James's Piccadilly, and Peter Pelz, the book's author, facilitated a number of cross-faith reconciliation projects in the region. Among these was the reconstruction of the Ferhadija Mosque in Banja Luka. The destruction of the mosque during the Bosnian War and the fading memory of its absence in the years that followed were acts of ethnic cleansing and cultural erasure that threatened to be complete. Against all reasonable advice and insurmountable odds, the Soul of Europe shepherded the reconstruction project to a point where others could pilot it to its unexpected completion in July 2014. Among many other things, *Dust* tells the story of this preposterous triumph, detailing the courageous yet unglamorous work of painstaking negotiation required to create the trust and cooperation between members of the Catholic, Orthodox and Muslim communities needed to make this possible.

Beyond its undoubted importance as an historical account of these events and its educative value for those embarking on similar peace building ventures, the most remarkable feature of *Dust* is its ability to transcend form, so that rather than being merely a report it is in fact a work of art. Peter Pelz writes with a painter's eye, capturing perfectly the rugged beauty of the Balkan countryside, the nuance of a glance or gesture in a crucial meeting, the telling features of a person's face. Backlit and burnished by his rich life experiences, his erudition and wisdom, *Dust* tells a complex yet compelling tale of hard-won hope.

At a time when conflicts between the so-called Muslim and Christian worlds are particularly acute and are often analysed in terms of a clash of civilizations, the work and example of the Soul of Europe could not be more apposite or more urgently needed. This work, and Pelz's account of it, reminds us that the only civilization worthy of the name is one based on respect for difference and a commitment to peace, making *Dust* a book the world desperately needs to read.

Dr Roger Averill, author of the award winning *Exile: The Lives and Hopes of Werner Pelz*