

ISSUE 46

faith

INITIATIVE

EMBRACING DIVERSITY

CELEBRATING OUR 22ND YEAR

"If I destroy nature,
I destroy myself as well."

Hindou Oumarou Ibrahim

WINNER

SHAP AWARD 2011

Divine Melodies

Songs of Faith

Keeping Faith

The Ugandan Expulsion

The Child Artists of Carrolup

Language of Art

Recital

He did not say a word about the church
but came with fingers fluent as a locksmith
to liberate the music from the grand piano.

Like Mozart, a magician. The sheltering arch
opened to landscapes of imagination,
perhaps a shadowed wood or garbled chalk stream.

The aisle became a dene, pews oak again,
siren outside a frantic hunting horn;
Franck downpour through a hammer-stringed skirl of squall.

Sound warmed medieval stone. An angel might
stretch wings again, a prophet carved in beech
might exercise through quiet a gift of tongues;
carved victim on a cross look back at us.

Or letting Chopin's sunlight dapple a Ballade,
the pianist paused; to share kingfisher's dart
electric blue along the morning water.

These were his songs of faith. No apostles' creed,
sermon or intercession, just the language
of rage or love shared among every country,

till, forcing her way through thickets of applause,
the curate added an amen vote of thanks;
and listeners left, to let the echoes settle.

Martyn Halsall

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editorial

The poem by Sr Katharine Holmstrom: 'Is this, then, faith?', featured on our back cover, encapsulates, for me, the magnificent mystery of faith and its ever evolving sense of wonderment, and of doubt. It is the lightest touch that can seem the most profound, a sunset or a sunrise, a full moon, a bird on the wing, or 'steel-sharp stars that pierce the night' – I find all of these spiritually enriching but it is other encounters that create doubt, such as the sight of refugees having to be rescued in the English Channel on a freezing cold night because their dinghy was overloaded and sinking. Who are these 'people smugglers' who expose desperate people to such danger, and why can't they be stopped. I can see no sense in punishing refugees fleeing conflict or the threat of torture, by sending them back overseas to be processed when it is all too obvious that they have suffered enough. The whole situation raises many questions, and also disbelief at the lack of compassion for one human being for another. Yet the courageous rescuers and those who are ready to help refugees as they land on our shores inspire hope, and a belief in something intangible and wonderful about the human spirit. Courage and resilience are themes that run through this issue of our magazine. Firstly, we have to applaud the bravery of Iranian women who are prepared to place themselves in great danger by visibly protesting against a regime that would deny them the freedom to practice their faith openly, and become the women they are meant to be – set into a religious context by our writer Shiban Akbar. Restrictions imposed by a hard-line regime which endeavours to destroy any creative instinct, and make women subject to male control in every aspect of their lives. Not all men would seek to do this and many have joined the groups of protesters to demonstrate their refusal to accept this mantle of superiority, and are seeking freedom to make their own choices. Freedom to believe and practice our faith, whatever form that takes, is a basic human right, and one that our Keynote writer, Managing Chaplain of HMP Garth, Muhamed Gani, considers central to his role in ensuring the wellbeing of those in his care. The wellbeing of humanity is at the core of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights created in 1948. These are fundamental to how we would choose to live our lives, but history has shown – illustrated within the pages of this magazine - that the arrogance of colonialism has led to children in the US and Australia being forcibly removed from their indigenous communities to be re-educated and assimilated into mainstream 'white' culture. Suffering dislocation and a loss of identity they have left their mark on the pages of history, and it is thanks to their resilience that we can honour them and learn from their experiences today.

Heather Wells

We thank all our contributors - writers, artists, poets and photographers – and of course subscribers. We also gratefully acknowledge the support of donors, who wish to remain anonymous. To sustain and develop the magazine however we need regular financial donations. If any readers know of Trust Funds, Grants or private donors who may be willing to help with funding, however small, the Editor (Heather Wells) would appreciate your advice and/or recommendations. For contact details please see above.



www.faithinitiative.co.uk

Initiative Interfaith Trust

Registered Charity No. 1113345

Trustees: Heather Wells, Lorna Douglas and Charanjit Ajit Singh

Object:

The promotion of religious harmony by: Providing educational resources and information to promote a better awareness of the causes and consequences of inter-religious tensions and conflicts; and educating the public in the diverse nature of religious belief.

Faith Initiative: Embracing Diversity Magazine

Editorial Panel

Editor: Heather Wells

Co-Editor and Design Consultant: Lorna Douglas

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Charanjit Ajit Singh

Sr Maureen Goodman

Shiban Akbar OBE

Jehangir Sarosh OBE

Eda Molla Chousein

Poet in residence: Rebecca Irvine Bilkau

Aim: The aim of the magazine is to open windows on the beliefs and practices of people of different faiths and cultures: to foster understanding and reduce racially and religiously motivated violence.

Statement: Whilst the contents of this magazine will always be in accordance with the 'object' of Initiative Interfaith Trust there will be freedom of expression.

Invitation: We invite you to contribute articles, poems, letters, artwork and responses so that the magazine reflects the religious communities it seeks to serve.

Editorial guidance can be obtained from:

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Issue 47 Themes:

1. Politics & Religion
2. What it is to be human in an unequal world

Front cover image: Heather Wells

Front cover quote: Hindou Oumarou Ibrahim, Chadian environmental activist and photographer.

Back cover: Poem 'Is this, then, faith?' by Sr Katharine Holmstrom

Design & Print: H&H Reeds T: 01768 864 214

SPIRAL: "This is an ancient symbol that reminds us of the womb and the protective mothering nature in all of us. It takes us from the broad sweeps of the outer life to an infinitely small centre where we cease to exist."

Cited:
Mandalas: Spiritual Circles for Harmony & Fulfilment
Laura J. Watts (2002) Pub. Hermes House,
London ISBN 1 84308 973 7

The spiral logo was designed by Caroline Jariwala for Initiative Interfaith Trust



FREEDOM TO Believe

Since 2013 I have been the Managing Chaplain of HMP Garth which is set within the Long Term High Security Estate. Prior to this position I was Managing Chaplain of Canterbury Prison in Kent and before that the lead Muslim Chaplain, both P/T and F/T, in a number of establishments. I can, therefore, say with a degree of confidence that my experience of Prison Chaplaincy is relatively extensive. Over the years the importance of human rights and religious freedom have remained central to how I function as a Faith Leader within the Islamic tradition and as a Chaplain. Furthermore, the need to defend not just the human rights of all religious expressions but also those who subscribe to a secular spirituality. The latter being characterised by Robert Solomon in his book *Spirituality for the Sceptic* as an approach to meaning making without the 'other worldly' (2003).

It is important at the outset of this article that I highlight the distinction between being a Faith Leader and a Chaplain in the Prison Service; these two roles are distinct yet, at times, overlap. As a Faith Leader my role and function is to nurture, teach, model and be pastorally attentive to those, in my care, who are part of the Muslim community. Whereas, the role of a Chaplain who subscribes to either a religious or non-religious tradition, has an overarching responsibility to pastorally care for all prisoners irrespective of religious affiliation or none. On occasion the role of Faith Leader and Prison Chaplain will dovetail together and others be more defined. Nevertheless, what has become clear to me is that Chaplaincy needs to inhabit and own the role of being an 'Enabler', 'Facilitator' and conduit for 'Meaning Making'. I am now going to briefly explore these three ideas through the prism of Human Rights and the freedom of religious belief.

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ENABLER

The term 'enabler' refers to someone who persistently behaves in enabling ways, justifying or indirectly supporting someone else's behaviour or desire to make something happen. Enabling someone can, of course, be both negative and positive. For example, directly or indirectly supporting someone's unhealthy patterns of behaviour such as unlawful action is a form of enablement. However, it's the positive aspect of being an enabler that I wish to comment upon.

Time and again the role of the Chaplaincy Department is called upon to enable positive relationships flourish amongst staff and prisoners alike. This takes place amidst the myriad of pastoral interactions. One way in which this is achieved is through providing physical space where rehabilitative activity can gain significant traction. Very often Multi-Faith Prison Chaplaincy Departments provide and protect the human impulse to worship or find refreshment by enabling sacred space. Such space is not exclusive to religious traditions as the term perhaps, at first glance, may suggest. Rather, it's about creating a safe reflective environment set within what many would regard as inhospitable surroundings.

What underpins the enabling of sacred space is the desire for Chaplaincy to act as host for relational encounters with oneself, others and sometimes the divine. In other words, Prison Chaplaincy seeks to underscore the precious nature of human relationships by enabling all who encounter the provision we offer to see prisoner's lives, irrespective of assent to any religious tradition, as infinitely precious.

It could be argued that sacred spaces, and particularly Prison Chaplaincy Departments, are becoming broader and broader as they fully embrace the human family's instinct to create meaning on both a religious and secular front. Chaplaincy Departments are often places where all prisoners, irrespective of religious conviction or none, receive life changing news. For example, bad news is broken; such as a loved one who is receiving end of life care or the death of a family member. These precious moments require Managing Chaplains to ensure the physical Chaplaincy environment speaks of undiluted care and empathy.

The interface between the relational and physical space is a hallowing process that sets aside the Prison Chaplaincy Department as distinctive from other areas of the establishment.

FACILITATOR

In order to uphold Human Rights and the Freedom of Religion in a prison environment requires more than enabling a safe and sacred space in which relationships can develop. I would argue that Prison Chaplaincy is required to be a facilitator of community life in order to make sure there is a sense of belonging. Belief and belonging can often be seen as separate entities when in reality they interact with one another often bringing a fusion of rich cultural diversity. Prison Chaplaincy handles and facilitates community life by delicately handling the complexity of human relationships and the contexts in which they have emerged. Listening carefully to the stories of prisoners and above all being attentive to what is being said is crucial to the facilitating and modelling of relationships.

Many prisoners come from chaotic backgrounds and socially difficult circumstances. It is the role of the Prison Chaplain not to judge these life experiences nor demean individuals who have such lived experience. Prison Chaplaincy, in part, exists to organically re-shape previous examples of living by modelling

and facilitating wholesome interactions. This is often achieved through respectfully acknowledging the narratives of prisoners as authentic representations of *life lived*, even when human dignity has been compromised and unlawful activity has taken place. In my experience it is crucial prisoners are given a 'voice' so that their humanity is dignified in an often hostile environment.

The Governing Governor and SMT need to be co-facilitators of Chaplaincy based activities in order to humanise the prison experience for those within our care. This is achieved by continual dialogue and communication through the management structure. However, more importantly are the informal gatherings between Chaplains and various members of the SMT who are invited to attend a meal before Jum'ah Prayers on one Friday in the month. This, in turn, exposes SMT to the rich diversity of traditions within the Chaplaincy Team, and above all generates a greater depth of appreciation of how such a diverse group of people deliver faith and pastoral services based on genuine mutual respect.

It is crucial prisoners are given a 'voice' so that their humanity is dignified in an often hostile environment.

MEANING MAKING

Written into the DNA of Prison Chaplaincy is the ability, often by osmosis, to encourage prisoners and staff to reflect upon their life and what direction they wish to travel. Prison Chaplaincy, at its best, encourages people to deeply consider what it means to live a meaningful life and attentively reads the context in which they are set. For example, when a Prison Officer suddenly died at home the Chaplaincy Team worked together to provide a Memorial Service, in a matter of hours, to gather the staff and collectively reflect on the life of the individual and to consider the precious gift of human life. Memorial Services were also held for prisoners on the same day on the Wings. Prison Chaplaincy inhabits such *kairos* moments whilst at the same time enabling and facilitating opportunities for personal growth and perspective¹.

Encouraging religious freedom by supporting and equipping autonomous meaning making is something that is achieved through a Multi-Faith and Non-Faith Chaplaincy provision that values the diversity of community life. Perhaps one of the best things I have observed as a Managing Chaplain is the power of the story. When people are given the space to tell their story in a safe environment such as Prison Chaplaincy Centres, perhaps over months and years, others who hear can become inspired and challenged to look more closely at themselves. Above all else, when an individual looks truly at themselves they are often enlightened to discover that we are all part of each other; a family of complexity but rooted and grounded in our shared humanity, with the right to live, love and worship in a freedom gifted by one another.

¹ The term *Kairos* is a Greek word that denotes the intersection between life and heaven.

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Together on Skirrid

"Skirrid", Archbishop Lord Rowan Williams replied when I asked him if he knew of a sacred mountain in Britain. Forested until close to the summit, beautiful, accessible and not too high, it was the perfect place. The idea, inspired by the Elijah Interfaith Institute, was to echo the declaration to be made by leaders of the world's faiths at Mount Sinai, timed to correspond with the gathering of governments at COP 27 at nearby Sharm el-Sheikh. On mountain tops across the globe similar statements would be offered, expressing remorse for our treatment of the planet and our heartfelt commitment to care for it to the best of our ability from now on.

In the event, the gathering at Sinai could not take place. But two weeks later, timed to take place between COP 27 and COP 15 with its focus on biodiversity, fifteen of us, Christians, Muslims and Jews, gathered at the foot of Skirrid. Most of us had never met before, but immediately a warm feeling of solidarity embraced us all: we felt a shared deep love and concern for our world.

The weather held as we began our climb through the autumn woodlands of Skirrid. We paused halfway for a meditation led by Archbishop Rowan and Zakarya Gangat, Imam of the Cambridge Central Mosque:

*Eternal Spirit, Earth-Maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver,
source of all that is and that shall be...*

We hold brothers and sisters who suffer from storms and droughts intensified by climate change. We hold all species that suffer. We hold world leaders delegated to make decisions for life.

Might love and wisdom inspire our own actions, and our actions as communities. so that we may, with integrity, look into the eyes of brothers and sisters and all beings and truthfully say, we are doing our part to care for them and the future of the children.

(adapted from New Zealand Prayer Book online and <https://www.faihtclimateactionweek.org/prayers-and-climate-blessings/>)

Climbing steeply to a viewpoint across the hills and fields, we made ten declarations in Welsh and English, focussing on climate repentance, justice and love, culminating in the determination to keep our hearts open to the suffering caused by climate change, so that love and compassion motivate us to do everything within

our power for the sake of all life, and with the commitment to act to the best of our capacity in every sphere, individually, collectively, locally, nationally and internationally.

We concluded by sounding the shofar, the ram's horn, a raw cry from the very depths of nature.

Our declaration: 10 Principles for Climate Repentance

Introduction: Archbishop Lord Rowan Williams

"As religious leaders we offer our voice as a contribution to the gathered leaders and to humanity. Ours is a voice of hope and unity, grounded in a spiritual vision. We seek to give hope and meaning to faiths, groups and individuals struggling under the burden of climate anxiety, who seek to find their place and identify their responsibility at this time of crisis. We must also confront honestly the destructive habits which continue to limit the possibilities and the hopes of human beings, in a call for wake up and self-examination. With the following ten principles we seek to initiate a process of climate repentance, broader understanding, and effective action. Our call is a call to action; and a call to return to a correct vision of the creation, the creator, and the harmonious relationship of humanity with creation."

1. Creation is not our possession. It is God's gift, entrusted to our care. We therefore acknowledge our responsibility to care for God's creation.
2. We are all part of a greater whole, interdependent with and dependent on the rest of nature. We therefore undertake to care for each other and for all life with which we share our planet.
3. We recognize our responsibility not just towards all life today but towards the world's children and children's children. We therefore commit ourselves to avoid behaving or condoning behaviour which will harm or destroy future generations.
4. We acknowledge that self-centeredness, greed and short-sightedness have led us into destructive habits. We therefore seek to develop the material, moral and spiritual disciplines which can help us change our ways and overcome the challenges of climate change.

5. We deeply regret the harm we have caused our fellow humans, animals and all of nature. We therefore determine to use our feelings of sorrow and remorse to motivate us to act courageously, creatively and urgently to help save and restore our world.
6. Just as we have the capacity to hurt each other through our thoughts, words and deeds, so we have the capacity to heal. We therefore intend to use every opportunity to speak out and act to heal our wounded humanity and our damaged planet.
7. Knowing that every deed counts and that nothing is too small to matter, we resolve to act in every sphere, individually, collectively, locally, nationally and internationally to protect and nurture all life.
8. We recognize that all our abilities, spiritual, intellectual, scientific, economic, ecological, legal, educational, artistic and political are needed in this, humanity's most urgent task. We therefore resolve to engage all our collective resources in the urgent task of saving our planet.
9. We acknowledge that the impacts of global warming are experienced unjustly across the world. Poorer nations almost always suffer most from what richer nations have done, and often continue to do. We therefore resolve to pursue climate justice vigorously for the benefit of all humankind.
10. We know that the greatest human qualities are love and compassion. We therefore determine to keep our hearts open to the suffering caused by climate change, so that love and compassion motivate us to do everything within our power for the sake of all life.

The 10 declarations are adapted from the declarations prepared collaboratively by the Elijah Interfaith Institute

Alive to the Fire Within

In this paper we will meet an inspiring Native American Indian suffrage activist of early 20th century Pan-Indian movements, a writer and editor of fiction and nonfiction, a translator, a musician, an educator, and the first indigenous woman to receive a higher education degree, Zitkála-Šá.

Zitkála-Šá, her birth name (meaning in Lakota language: Red Bird), Gertrude Simmons, her missionary name, and Gertrude Simmons-Bonnin, her married name, was born on February 22, 1876 into the Yankton Sioux Tribe, in South Dakota Territory, U.S. Her father was a white man named John Haysting Felker Simmons, about whom little is known. Her mother was Ellen Tate'lyohinwin (Lakota: "Reaches for the Wind") Simmons, a full-blooded Yankton Sioux woman. She was raised in traditional Indian ways by her mother after her father abandoned the family.

When she was 8-years old, Quaker missionaries visited the Yankton Sioux Reservation to take children to Wabash-Indiana to attend the boarding school, White's Indiana Manual Labor Institute. Zitkála-Šá was one of the

children taken despite her mother's disapproval. At this school, Zitkála-Šá was given the missionary name Gertrude Simmons and she attended it until 1887. She had two joys, learning to read-write and play the violin. But she was conflicted about the experience with the deep grief and pain of losing her spirit and heritage by being forced to cut her hair, dress and eat like a white person, write and speak only English, and pray as a Quaker. She felt rather tortured and culturally disturbed, as she described herself in her book *The School Days of an Indian Girl*: "neither a wild Indian nor a tame one". After 4 years she returned home, yet she felt alienated from her community. Her years of forced assimilation, with the confusion and trauma she experienced she no longer felt she belonged anywhere. She decided to leave again and chose to enrol at the Santee Normal Training School,

which was not too far from her Reservation. In 1895, against her mother's wishes for her to return home, she decided to accept entrance and scholarships to Earlham College in Indiana. There she won an oratorical contest with her collected stories from Native tribes, which she translated into Latin and English. After graduation, she became a teacher at the Carlisle Indian Boarding School in Pennsylvania. This was similar to the school she had attended in the past, and soon she realised that she was contributing to a system designed to destroy her own people's culture. She remained there for 2 years and developed great musical and literary talents to such an extent that she was sent as a music teacher to the Boston New England Conservatory of Music and was selected to accompany a musical troupe to the Paris exposition in 1900.

She realised that she was contributing to a system designed to destroy her own people's culture

She realised that to hate difference was to hate life

While in Boston, she became an excellent violinist and composed an Indian opera based on the *Plains Sun Dance*. Also, she began to write stories and essays, using her penname Zitkála-Šá (Red Bird), as she wanted to become a professional writer to advocate for the rights of her people. Her writing criticised the current assimilation policies of the government, and the Carlisle Indian School, as she still struggled with the issues of cultural dislocation and injustice which had brought suffering to her people. But her authorial voice was not merely critical, she was also committed to using her customs and personal experiences as a bridge-builder between cultures to connect more Americans, and further understanding between each other's cultures. Harper's Magazine published two of her stories at the turn of the century, and three of her autobiographical essays appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly*. In 1901, her first book, *Old Indian Legends*, appeared and received a cordial reception, on the other hand, it caused her dismissal from Carlisle School.

By this time, she was back on the Reservation, where in 1902 she met and married U.S. Army Captain Raymond Talefese Bonninn, a Dakota descendant and BIA assigned Captain. After their marriage, Gertrude and her husband were assigned as teachers for the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) Uintah-Ouray Reservation in Utah, where students could remain within their culture and with their families. They lived and worked there with Ute people for 14-years and she gave birth to their son,

Alfred Raymond Ohiya (Lakota: Winner) Bonninn.

In 1911 she became active in the Society of American Indians, an organisation of educated Native Americans dedicated to the improvement of the conditions of their people. The group was interested in the integration and assimilation of the Indians, favouring equal rights for all people, and strongly opposed the continuance of the BIA which was perceived as bureaucratic, and harmful in its mismanagement of Native American affairs. She continued her passion for music believing that opera was a powerful way to share her family's values, and reach a new audience because many Indigenous customs were passed down orally through music. She wrote the libretto and songs for *The Sun Dance Opera* (1913), the first American Indian opera. It was composed in a romantic musical style and based on Sioux and Ute cultural themes. In 1916, she became secretary for the Society of American Indians and moved to Washington, DC, to lobby for the organisation and edit the *American Indian Magazine*. She wrote stories that were critical of the boarding schools that many of her people were forced to attend, and the assimilation enacted upon them.

In 1926, she founded the National Council of American Indians which identified and highlighted land and resource issues facing Indian people through public speaking and lobbying efforts among the various officials in the Capitol. Also, she helped persuade The General Federation of Women's Clubs

to form their Indian Welfare Committee. Under pressure from the Women's Clubs and others, the federal government agreed to the appointment of a commission to investigate the Indian situation. That eventually resulted in the Merriam Report (1928) which resulted in reforms in United States Indian policy. In 1926, Zitkála-Šá also founded the National Council of American Indians which was established to lobby for Native people's right to U.S. citizenship and other civil rights they had long been denied. She did this by seeking unity between all tribes in a pan-Indian political power. From 1928 till her death, she worked for improvements in education, culture preservation, health care, and legal issues among Native Americans and served as the council's president.

Zitkála-Šá, a lifelong advocate for Native American rights died at the age of 61 on January 26, 1938, in Washington, U.S. As a person of mixed blood, her life could be looked upon as an example of the beauty and accomplishments that can be made when two cultures can live cooperatively within the same body of land. She realised that to hate difference was to hate life. Through her teaching, writing, and organising, she fought to obtain fairer treatment for her people by the federal government and helped make Indigenous People's voices heard and their lives to be valued. She criticised dogma, and her life as a Native American woman was dedicated to the evils of oppression. Her written work has been reissued by the University of Nebraska and research continues.

"I was not wholly conscious of myself but was more keenly alive to the fire within. It was as if I were the activity, and my hands and feet were only experiments for my spirit to work upon... I fear no man."

Zitkála-Šá, *American Indian Stories* (1921), *Old Indian Legends* (1901)

Resources:

<https://www.colorado.edu/amrc/sites/default/files/attached-files/0506-1995-005-00-000006.pdf>

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Image of Zitkála-Šá sourced from https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Zitkala-Sa_American_Indian_Stories.jpg

This work is in the public domain in the United States because it was published (or registered with the U.S. Copyright Office) before January 1, 1927.

PROMOTING A CULTURE OF Tolerance

In a multi-cultural situation that prevails in many parts of the world, and especially in my country of India, it is necessary to be increasingly inclusive and outgoing, reaching out to the people of varied religions and cultures. Prejudices, suspicions and hate only get further strengthened in an exclusionary way of life. That is why, as the Roman Catholic Diocese of Poona (Pune), we have been following a strategy of inter-faith dialogue and action.

1. We encourage the study of other religions and cultures which help to discover hitherto unknown values and facets in them. People of other faiths express surprise and pleasure when they know of our familiarity with their religion.
2. An intellectual approach is important but insufficient. Therefore along with formal inter-religious dialogue programmes, we promote interaction, intermingling, interrelationships and bonds of friendships.

3. In a joyful atmosphere we celebrate religious feasts and festivals. We visit sacred temples.
4. We share the joys and sorrows of one another, joining them on happy occasions of birthdays, anniversaries and successes etc. and visiting the sick and attending funerals, etc.
5. Working together for helping the poor, the suffering and the needy. During the Covid 19 pandemic we helped the helpless and unfortunate people with finance, oxygen concentrators etc.
6. In recent times initiatives are taken to promote basic human communities for the purpose of living in peace, harmony and for collaboration and common projects.



“Many of these developments are eating into the vitals of the religious identity of those in the minorities”

“It is saddening that the real life issues of poverty, climate change, gender discrimination, superstition, trafficking of women and children, corruption etc. are ignored.”

All such efforts are helping us to live in peace, joy and harmony. These actions certainly have generated better understanding among various communities.

Most of the students and patients in Christian schools and health care institutions are Hindus and followers of other religions. In fact the demand for admissions to our institutions by people of other faiths is very high. Such is the trust they have in us. There are many inter-faith marriages and these work well, in spite of some difficulties.

There are however, inherited wounds and vulnerabilities and in recent times these are being reignited by fundamentalists and some present-day politicians. It is beyond doubt that the rising ascendancy in India of the pro-Hindutva, RSS, BJP and their outfits have created an atmosphere of concern, anguish and anxiety throughout the country. Many of these developments are eating into the vitals of the religious identity of those in the minorities. This current atmosphere does not augur well for the unity, integrity and prosperity of India.¹

That the Indian Body politic is passing through an unnerving and disappointing phase in its history is beyond doubt. There are aggressive attempts to impose a unitary mono-cultural nationalism on the country as a whole, from Northern Aryan region to the Southern Dravidic region, and from the Westernized Bombay to the multi-tribal hilly society of the North East, including the adivasis and the dalits. This unrealistic and outdated vision for a nation poised to take its due place in the comity of nations of our highly secularized modern world, is at the root of all our woes in the present times.

All the instances of violence, force, moral policing, vigilantism, and prohibitions in different parts of the country emanate from this root doctrine of unitary cultural nationalism.



There are also systematic attempts to re-write the humanist, secular and inclusive Constitution of India. All this certainly will not be beneficial for the nation's future. Such trends cause pain, distress and worry to all minorities. It is saddening that the real life issues of poverty, climate change, gender discrimination, superstition, trafficking of women and children, corruption etc. are ignored.

Thus these are tough times for people of different faiths. Trusting in divine providence we have to have patience and endurance. There is no alternative to this. But in all honesty we Christians must also realize that in the past some of the missionaries were negative towards other religions and cultures. And evangelization was not promoted with respect and appreciation by some of them in their enthusiasm.

Of course, we affirm the right to proclaim the Good News and the Lord Jesus as Universal Saviour but all this should be done in love and humility. So as Christians we need to have a dialogue, and attempts are being made for it at the highest level.

Dialogue does not mean that there are no differences and that everything that is happening is acceptable, no, not at all. Dialogue is an attitude of listening, openness, appreciating the good and building up relationships and bridges. Only then are we able to discuss points of difference.

The spirit and attitude of dialogue is an affirmation that different religions can live together on account of basic common values and therefore the thesis of the clash of civilizations, though existentially there are tensions, is not acceptable. God wants us all to live as brothers and sisters even as we follow different religions.²

So also, no system of human invention can be considered perfect. All systems have their positives and negatives. It is, therefore, a manifestation of human hubris to opine that humanity has reached the end of history.³

Bishop Thomas Dabre is Bishop of Poona

- 1 Constitution of India
- 2 Samuel Huntington. 1996 *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. Pub. Simon & Schuster
- 3 Francis Fukuyama 1992 *The End of History and the Last Man*. Pub. Free Press

THE TYRANNY OF MORAL POLICING

Iranian women fight for justice

Iran is a country rich in cultural heritage. It is home to poets such as Mevlana Rumi, Hafez Shiraz, Ferdowsi, Saadi, Attar, Omar Khayyam, Nizami Ganjavi, whose works have been translated into different languages, enriching world literature. Iran, recognised for the immense variety of its distinguished architecture, can boast 19 UNESCO designated world heritage sites. It is shocking that a country that has nurtured creativity and originality can suppress the individuality of women.

Iran's inflexible and uncompromising attitude towards women leading up to physical and psychological torture can only be seen as a type of colonial subjugation where women are seen as the strange other and not an integral part of its society. A recent arrest by morality police and subsequent death in custody on 16 September 2022, of the 22-year-old Mahsa Amini has left the world stunned. What was Mahsa Amini's crime? She was wearing her head scarf loosely over her head, and deemed, by the morality police, not to be complying with the strict dress code issued by the authorities.

Mahsa Amini's brutal murder has brought thousands of women spilling onto the streets in condemnation, many discarding their hijabs in protest, symbolising their support for Mahsa and their rejection of the restrictions placed on women. The anti-hijab protests, have however, culminated in a crackdown on the protesters by the authorities, with mass arrests, detention and several deaths. One tragic example is the disappearance and resultant discovery of the body of 16 year old Nika Shahkarami in a detention centre.

The overt denunciation of the state machinery by women is unprecedented for that country and they were joined by their male counterparts on the 40th day of belligerent mourning despite the ban on rallies. The public protests must serve as a wake-up call for Iran to seriously address institutional oppression based on gender and sexuality. By taking to the streets and sparking off a non-cooperative movement, Iranian women are themselves speaking for their right to exist in a meaningful manner, and fighting for justice and individuality. The collective voicing of their grievance at institutional intolerance of individual choice is an effective manoeuvre to counter government appointed morality enforcers. There was no presence of morality police in early Islam and nor does the Qur'an mention it. *The Qur'an* and the *Sunnah*¹ are the best forms of moral guidance.

The Qur'an states: **"There is no compulsion in religion: true guidance has become distinct from error, so whoever rejects false gods and believes in God has grasped the firmest hand-hold, one that will never break..."** (2:256) In Islam, religious tenets and obligations are prescribed and not imposed on us. The Prophet Muhammad *peace & blessings be on him*, never enforced religion on anyone but preached it, taught it and lived it. Observing his exemplary manners that included moderation, compassion and generosity and humble lifestyle non-Muslims were drawn to him and accepted religion in his hands. Ironic, it may be, but one of his own uncles that he loved and respected dearly and who loved and cared for him and supported him in his prophetic mission, never himself embraced Islam.

The Noble Prophet never manipulated or forced him to accept it. Nor did he implement moral policing to harass women or violate their personal space. He famously taught: **"part of the perfection of one's Islam is his leaving that which does not concern him"**.² To put it bluntly, it means that a strong Muslim will not get involved in things that has no benefit to him and only focus on minding his own business.

I am a practising Muslim woman and I wear the headscarf. Sometimes I wear a tight one for practical reasons and sometimes I wear it loosely. And Muslim women all over the world wear it in the manner that they feel comfortable with. And many choose not to. If I were to participate in a public demonstration of this kind, it would be to denounce tyranny against women but not to take an anti-hijab stance. I would not take off my hijab or burn it to make a point because such is the nature of my personal relationship with my Maker, and nor would I advocate that for my daughter or sister. But many of the Iranian women took it off to show their defiance to the brutality inflicted on Mahsa Amini. A Muslim woman's head covering should be as a result of her submission to the Almighty, and not to the State but when externally enforced on women who would otherwise not wear it, will be an oppressive imposition.

Relationship with our Maker is a deeply personal matter. For those who believe in an Unseen Supreme Being, whether they follow an organised religion or simply a spiritual calling or both, what they feel towards the Almighty, how they want to submit to Him, to what degree and intensity they want to submit to Him - defines their private space and unique relationship with Him. External interference with that unique space is by no means welcome as it dilutes faith and diminishes devotion. One must also be mindful that religious identities can be different from social identities too. For example, one may not wear their faith on their sleeve but deep down may be a person of faith. However, as the Blessed Prophet taught us, let us focus on our own actions and how we can please our Maker because that will benefit us in our after-life. *The Qur'an* warns: **"Believers, avoid making too many assumptions – some assumptions are sinful – and do not spy on one another..."** (49:12)

The Loom of Memory

The cuttings from our busy lives are
Woven in the loom of memory.
All the colours of the sun and wind,
The spinning images of youth, the
Spare and fruitful days gone by that changed
The way we dipped and stirred and poured our-
Selves into the fabric that we are.
The happy days, the unblessed moments,
The grounded qualities of pilgrim
Strangers we met along the way, with
Whom we walked a mile or two, and friend-
Ships made, for all too brief a while in
Big workshops and in city places,
Are woven in the warp and weft re-
Minding us of good times past and God
Whose generous love has brought us here.

"Singing Birds and Silence" Pub: books@ahstockwell.co.uk

¹ Sunnah is the lifestyle of the Noble Prophet

² Tirmidhi Hadith. Hadith means the teachings & sayings of the Noble Prophet of Islam. Tirmidhi is a particular collection.

The Song of Joy

“Bhai Mardana, please start playing the rabab,
the divine melody is descending”

These are said to be the words of Guru Nanak to his Muslim companion, in relation to the revelation of the hymns contained in *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, the Sikh Holy Scripture. Guru Nanak's melodious singing of the hymns was accompanied by Bhai Mardana's accomplished playing of the rabab (rebeck), a stringed instrument.

Thus began the devotional Sikh classical musical tradition in the late fifteenth century.

Guru Nanak, the first Guru, not only created *Bani* (the word of God) in poetic form but sang it (ragas), making it accessible to the ordinary people in its pure vocal medium. The singing is enhanced, even today, by the playing of musical instruments as first performed in the revelation of the scriptures. Bhai Gurdas, whose ballads tell the story of Guru Nanak's daily routines, says

*Ghar, ghar baba gaaviyeh, wajjan taal mridang, rababa*¹⁰

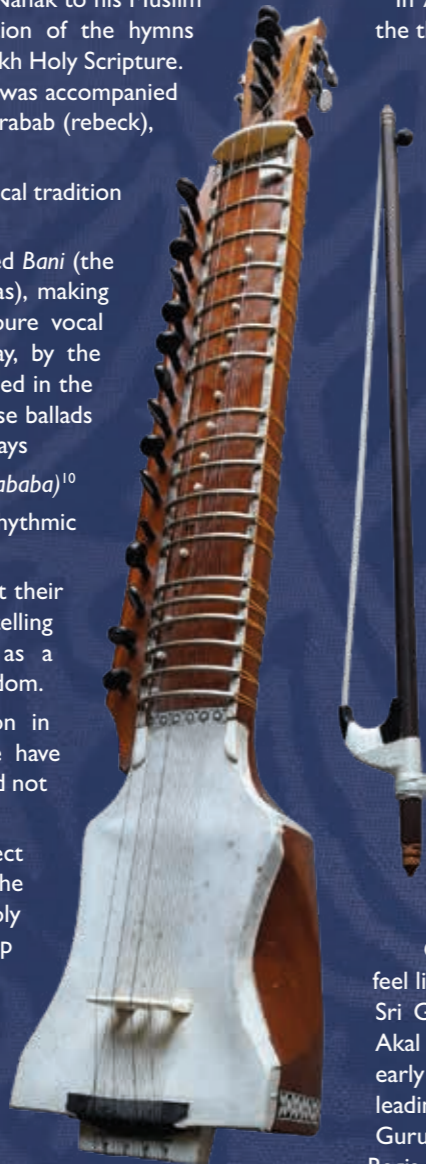
In every home, Baba Nanak sings, with the rhythmic beat of mridang (drums) and rabab.

The Sikh Gurus could have chosen to impart their teachings in prose such as lectures and storytelling but they chose instead verse-poetry/song as a medium of sharing divine experiences and wisdom.

Music therefore has a paramount position in the lives of the Sikhs, and in this piece we have concentrated on the Sikh religious tradition and not on the folk and cultural music.

Music is not simply about the physical aspect - the auditory experience of playing, and the pleasure of listening; if music does not deeply touch our inner spirit, and affect our deep emotions, it loses its lasting value.

The awakening of the inner spirit is an essential requisite for music to inspire the devotee, and this can only be achieved by singing the praises of the Divine, usually called Kirtan or Gurmat Sangeet. Reciting the scriptures may be considered an alternative, but when the scriptures are rendered to music the spiritual impact is much more pronounced, and meaningful.



In *Anand Sahib*, the song of Bliss, Guru Amardas, the third Nanak reminds us in verse 23:

'Come, Oh loving devotees of the True Guru, sing the true hymns

Sing the true hymns, the Hymns of Hymns!

With God's benign grace, the true hymns will enter the hearts of true devotees Imbued with the love in meditation, forever drink the holy nectar

Nanak says, sing divine praises forever!

He considers the human body as a musical instrument when he says: *in its deep cave, God installed the soul and blew the breath into it, the rhythm of the beating heart and what an instrument it is without which there is no life (Verse 37). The body is the temple which continues to play the song of Joy and urges us to sing this true Song of Joy in the True Temple.* In the final verse, he says: *the ordinarily unheard celestial trumpets blow in the honour of those who deeply concentrate in the worship of the True Divine and in meditation.*

In congregational worship, the effect of devotional singing is enhanced manifold because there is the strong belief that the Divine presence is manifest in the congregation. Those who have had the experience of visiting Harimandir Sahib, the Golden Temple, talk about the inner peace they feel listening to the Kirtan there. The Holy Scripture *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* is taken ceremonially from Akal Takht, the place of Rest for the scripture, early morning, to Harimandir Sahib with a Bugler leading the procession. After the installation of *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, the Kirtan is performed by Ragis (singers) throughout the day, with the playing of harmonium, introduced in the 19th century, and tabla, and now there seems to be the increasing use of traditional instruments.

“The body is the temple which continues to play the song of Joy and urges us to sing this true Song of Joy in the True Temple.”

It is said that the Sikh Gurus designed and created new instruments, such as the Saranda, designed by Guru Arjan, the fifth Nanak; the Taus by Guru Hargobind, the sixth Guru; and Dilruba by Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Guru. These new instruments together with the earlier ones such as the rabab helped create an environment in which the sharing of the singing of sacred *shabads* (poetic compositions, hymns) with the instrument, to elevate the soul to be in tune with the Creator. We are also instructed to sing the *Bani Kirtan* day and night (*har din ran kirtan gayiyeh*).²

Such is the precision of the ragas as composed by the Gurus, Hindu and Muslim saints of different social classes, that the Gurus clearly instructed in which typical notation and beat it should be sung. In the *Guru Granth Sahib*, the *Bani* composition is in 31 Key pure ragas, and also in 31 sub ragas in the Northern Indian classical tradition. Some ragas are also taken from the South Indian tradition such as Ramkali Dakhni (Daccani)³, Bilawal Dakhni⁴ and Wadhans Dakhni⁵. Other ragas are unique to the *Guru Granth Sahib* and do not exist in the Hindi Shastri (Indian classical) tradition; for example' Tukhari⁶ raag, which is considered to be the innovation of Guru Nanak Dev Ji. There are some ragas that are not contained in the Classical Shastri Musical tradition and are unique to *Guru Granth Sahib*. For example, Raga Gauri is of 12 types such as Gauri Guarari⁷, Gauri Chetti⁸, Gauri Poorbi Dakhni⁹.

Bhai Mardana stayed with Guru Nanak all his life. His devoted companionship, his expertise in playing the rabab and his service to Guru Nanak is revered by the Sikhs. After the partition of India, Bhai Mardana's descendants moved to Pakistan where the family continues the tradition of devotional singing while playing the rabab. A few years ago, Bhai Lal, 17th generation singer from Bhai Mardana passed away in Lahore, Pakistan. He was the last one from Bhai Mardana's descendants to sing in Harimandir Sahib (Golden Temple) in 1962.

In *Guru Granth Sahib*, the different chapters and sections are put into specific ragas and many begin with the praises of the raga, e.g.

*Har uttam har prabh gaawya kar naad bilawal raag*¹¹

The top quality singing of verses in God's praise was achieved in the sound of Bilawal raga (the raga of happiness)

*Sorath taam suhavani ja har naam dhandholay*¹²

The beat of Sorath (raga) is pleasant when there is intense search of the Divine Name

*Gauri raga sulakhni jay khasamay chit karey*¹³

Gauri Raga is auspicious when one remembers the Divine spouse.

In Sikh places of worship, apart from the recitation and singing of the hymns in *Guru Granth Sahib*, the compositions of Bhai Gurdas (whose writings are considered the key to understanding of the Holy scripture), Guru Gobind Singh (whose writings are separate) and the poet Bhai Nand Lal are also included.

Sikh history stories especially about the lives and teachings are performed by Dhadis. There are usually 3 minstrels who stand and sing ballads and heroic tales using Dhadd and Sarangi, the folk instruments of Punjab. According to Kahn Singh Nabha's *Mahan Kosh* the definition of *dhadhi* is "One who sings ballads of warriors playing Dhadd"¹⁴. They owe their origin to Guru Hargobind, the sixth Guru in the early 17th century.

In most Gurdwaras worldwide, women usually have a specific day for their own congregational worship in addition to their participation in the regular services. Their preferred musical instruments are the harmonium, dholaki, chimta and cymbals for singing hymns.

What is very heartening to note is that more and more people are becoming aware of the proper Gurmat Sangeet as instructed by the Gurus in its classical vocal and instrumental musical expressions. An increasing number of young people have a growing interest in these musical forms in the UK, and some are developing an expertise. This gives us hope and confidence for a brighter future of the classical Sikh music and we pray for it to flourish.

“If music does not deeply touch our inner spirit, and affect our deep emotions, it loses its lasting value”

1. *Guru Granth Sahib* p.922
2. GGS p.623
3. GGS p.937
4. GGS p.843
5. GGS p.580

6. GGS p.1107
7. GGS p.157
8. GGS p.207
9. GGS p.152?
10. Bhai Gurdas Var 24, Pauri 4

11. GGS p.849
12. GGS p.642
13. GGS p.311
14. Bhai Kanh Singh p.565

Reviving Pure Consciousness with Song

Although “Hare Krishna” has become a household word in the UK, few know what it actually means. Is it merely a repetitious incantation designed as a form of escapism? Or is it a genuine meditation that can actually summon higher awareness?

“Hare Krishna” is actually part of a powerful and ancient mantra. With spiritual practices like yoga and meditation becoming more popular, it seems mantras are in vogue. But what exactly is a mantra then?

The word mantra can be broken down into two parts: “man,” which means mind in Sanskrit, and “tra” which means to transport or liberate. In other words, a mantra is a repetitive sound, vibration or song that you can use to enter a deep state of meditation, beyond the usual confines of the mind.

The Hare Krishna mantra was made publically famous around India in the 15th Century by Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu, as a deeply spiritual process based on loving service to God as the Supreme Person. Later it was made world famous by A. C Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada - a renown saint born in Bengal. At the age of 70, in 1965 he arrived in the US with no more than \$5, ancient Sanskrit texts and an abundance of faith in God, he knew as Krishna. In those days, he first caught the attention of the youth by the public singing of Hare Krishna in cities like New York and San Francisco. From such humble beginnings grew the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, which today has over 800 temples around the world.

Chanting for a while takes one immediately to the spiritual platform, and one shows the first symptom of this in the urge to dance along with the chanting of the mantra.

In this extract from an essay, recorded in late 1966, Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada illuminates the inner meaning of the Hare Krishna mantra:

The transcendental vibration established by the chanting of:

***Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare
Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare***

is the sublime method for reviving our transcendental consciousness, the original, pure consciousness.

By chanting this transcendental vibration, we can cleanse away all misgivings within our hearts. The basic principle of all such misgivings is the false consciousness that I am the lord of all I survey.

Krishna consciousness is not an artificial imposition on the mind. This consciousness is the original, natural energy of the living entity. When we hear this transcendental vibration, this consciousness is revived. This simplest method of meditation is recommended for this age. By practical experience also, one can perceive that by chanting this maha-mantra, or the Great Chanting for Deliverance, one can at once feel a transcendental ecstasy coming through from the spiritual stratum.

In the beginning, there may not be the presence of all transcendental ecstasies. But there is no doubt that chanting for a while takes one immediately to the spiritual platform, and one shows the first symptom of this in the urge to dance along with the chanting of the mantra. We have seen this practically. Even a child can take part in the chanting and dancing.

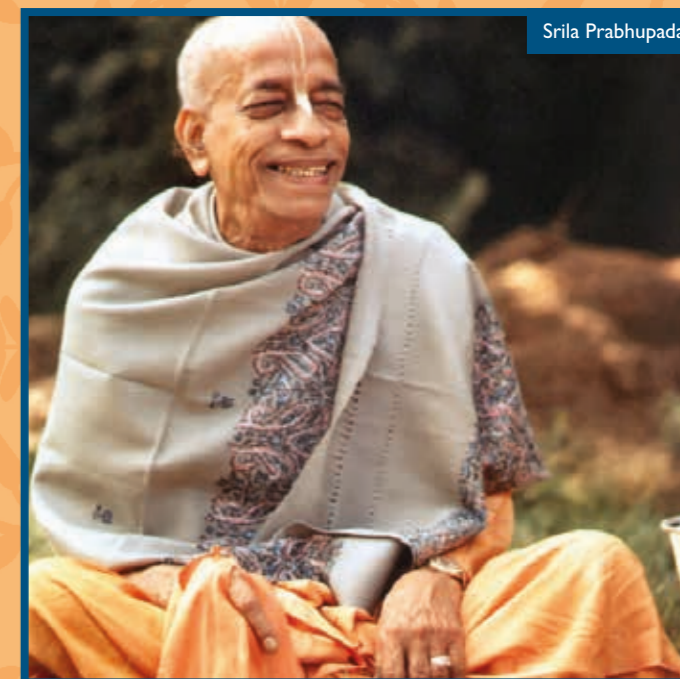
When the mantra is chanted by a pure devotee of the Lord in love, it has the greatest efficacy on hearers, and as such this chanting should be heard from the lips of a pure devotee of the Lord, so that immediate effects can be achieved. As far as possible, chanting from the lips of non-devotees should be avoided. Milk touched by the lips of a serpent has poisonous effects.

The word Hara is the form of addressing the energy of the Lord, and the words Krishna and Rama are forms of addressing the Lord Himself. Both Krishna and Rama mean “the supreme pleasure,” and Hara is the supreme pleasure energy of the Lord, changed to Hare in the vocative. The supreme pleasure energy of the Lord helps us to reach the Lord.

No other means of spiritual realization is as effective in this age of quarrel and hypocrisy as the chanting of the maha-mantra:

***Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare
Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare***

***Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare
Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare.***



Srila Prabhupada

In 1967 The Beatles travelled to India, something very much part of a sudden fascination of everything Indian by the youth of the time. Despite their incredible fame and fortune, the pressures of touring and the constant attention from public and media, peace of mind and happiness had escaped the four young musicians, and their trip to India opened up new possibilities.

In an interview with the International Times in 1967, George Harrison explained how sitar player Ravi Shankar was not only a music teacher but a spiritual teacher to him as well. For Harrison, music and spirituality were very connected. Being a musician himself, on his own spiritual quest, it is not surprising that he developed a friendship with Ravi that was to last a lifetime. Together they recorded and produced albums including Shankar Family & Friends (1974), Ravi Shankar's Music Festival From India (1976) and Chants Of India (1997).

In 1969 George believed that his sincere search for ‘pure spirituality’, was fulfilled when he met some American Hare Krishna devotees at a function at Apple Records. After spending some time together, George invited them to his house and the relationship grew from there. When Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada arrived in Britain both George and John Lennon were deeply impressed by him. Once, on a car journey from France to Portugal, George and John chanted Hare Krishna for 17 hours virtually non-stop!

George's interest in Krishna Consciousness continued to grow and during 1969/1970 he wrote many songs which included devotional references. One such song was ‘My Sweet Lord’ which included the Hare Krishna mantra in the chorus:

A Symphony to God



As a little girl I was brought up with music in my home listening to Jim Reeves, Johnny Cash and many more artists. The house was always full of Christian music and my mum also played the piano at home and sang. So, the richness of music and singing I would say, is in my blood. As a born-again Christian having returned to my Faith in the past 4 years, music and songs have been an integral part of my journey.

About 4 years ago I felt my whole world was falling apart, everything that was familiar to me was about to change. My boyfriend had gone back to his country and my son left home at 14 to pursue his football career and I was left all alone. I travelled abroad to see my boyfriend but then on my last visit to see him, I just knew I wouldn't be returning. When I was there, I told myself when I return home, I would find myself a little Church and start to attend.

I did not rush out looking for a Church to attend, I just went back and got caught up in life again. I often sensed a deep, hollow feeling in my life, but I could never really understand what it was, and I would just dismiss it as normal because it would come and go for no apparent reason. However, a few months later I was on my way home from work but not at my usual time - I was earlier than usual. Just as I got to my gate I bumped into my neighbour, and she proceeded to tell me that she had found a Church just down the road that she had started to attend. There was a sense of joy inside of me as I asked her attentively for more information about the location and times. At that point I had already made up my mind that I was going to attend with or without an invite.

When I entered the building which was in fact a medium size theatre my body rejected everything about it. It was not like the church that I was brought up in and the music was not to my liking at all, but I enjoyed the message that I heard from the speaker. At the end of the service, they said "KEEP COMING BACK", so I did. On one of my visits, I will call it "The Visit" I heard an amazing song that just spoke to me in a way that it felt so personal. The words said everything that I was feeling and then the tears came rolling down my cheeks I couldn't stop myself.

"I'M A CHILD OF GOD, YES I AM"

**Who am I that the highest King would welcome me?
I was lost but He brought me in oh His love for me oh His love for me
who the Son sets free oh is free indeed I'm a child of God Yes i am
Free at last, He has ransomed me His grace runs deep
While I was a slave to sin, Jesus died for me yes, He died for me
Who the Son sets free oh is free indeed I'm a child of God yes, I am
In my Father's house There's a place for me I'm a child of God yes, I am
I am chosen, not forsaken I am who you say I am
You are for me, not against me I am who you say I am
I am chosen, not forsaken I am who you say i am
You are for me, not against me I am who you say I am I am who you say I am
Who the Son sets free Oh is free indeed I'm a child of God yes I am
In my Father's house There's a place for me I'm a child of God yes, I am
In my Father's house There's a place for me I'm a child of God yes, I am**

(Song by Hillsong Worship)

On one of my visits, I will call it "The Visit" I heard an amazing song that just spoke to me in a way that it felt so personal.

There is a deep spiritual connection when I sing and feel my faith grows stronger.

All these years of avoiding being in the presence of God had come to an end, I knew I was at the right place, I was back home. For me music and song is about worshipping the Lord, when I am feeling down I put on a song and I get lost in the music and lyrics and sing away my sorrows or sing a song of victory, happiness during the good times because of God's love. The scripture reminds us to make a joyful noise unto the Lord in Psalms 100:

*Make a joyful sound to the Lord, all you lands!
Serve the Lord with gladness;
Come before His presence with singing.
Know that the Lord, He is God;
It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves;
We are His people and the sheep of His pasture*

There is a deep spiritual connection when I sing and feel my faith grows stronger. Singing removes my own thoughts and feelings from a situation and lets me trust in God for whatever is going on in my life. My life is in God's hands alone. It's a Symphony to God as He inhabits praise.

**I raise a Hallelujah, in the presence of my Enemies
I raise a Hallelujah, louder than the Unbelief
I raise a Hallelujah, my weapon is a Melody
I raise a Hallelujah, Heaven comes to fight for me**

**I'm gonna sing, in the middle of the storm
Louder and louder, you're gonna hear my praises roar
Up from the ashes, hope will arise
Death is defeated the King is alive!**

**I raise a Hallelujah, with everything inside of me
I raise a Hallelujah, I will watch the darkness flee
I raise a Hallelujah, in the middle of the mystery
I raise a Hallelujah, fear you lost your hold on me!**

**I'm gonna sing, in the middle of the storm
Louder and louder, you're gonna hear my praises roar
Up from the ashes hope will arise
Death is defeated the king is alive!**

Sing a little louder...

(Song by Bethel Music)

I have taken you on a journey when my life was void of God's presence and I had that hollow feeling. Today I am free from that feeling of emptiness because I am now in relationship with my heavenly Father through Jesus Christ His son who fills me with joy and gives me all the Spiritual blessings I need. Life still has its challenges, but I don't face them alone, I am secure in the Fathers Loving Hands. Music and Song is important for me as that is me offering up my thanks, worship and praise to God for who He is, what He has done and what He is still doing. I get to empty my soul while He fills it with His presence. To God be all the Glory (Jeremiah 29:11-14).

Honouring Ugandan Asians

KEEPING FAITH

“When we think of the lives of our mothers and grandmothers, and what they endured, we know there is nothing we cannot achieve.”



Sejal S & Sejal M together

In the summer of 2021, Sejal Majithia-Jaswal and Sejal Sachdev met through a Facebook community group seeking likeminded individuals to create events to commemorating the 50th anniversary of the expulsion of the Asians, from Uganda in 1972.

On their first meeting, the two Sejals were struck by how much they had in common besides their names. Tororo, a town in Uganda's east, was not only where Sejal Majithia-Jaswal's maternal grandparents had made their home upon arriving in the country in 1929 from Gujarat, India (and where eight years later her mother was born), but was also Sejal Sachdev's birthplace and home until her family's expulsion in October 1972.

It was clear that the two women shared a deep desire to document, and bring to a wider audience, the history of the Ugandan Asian diaspora. For them, it was not just about sharing stories of expulsion, but also explaining how the community had come to be in Uganda in the first place. They were keen to highlight that the presence of the Asians in East Africa from the 1890s onwards was down to the British Empire which had brought indentured labourers, and later support workers from the Indian sub-continent. This is a particularly brutal part of colonial history which has largely been forgotten.

A shared experience: telling our stories from the perspective of the women who lived through it.

Shortly after their first meeting, the Sejals were contacted by Dolar Vasani through their Facebook group, ‘**Ugandan Asians – A Living History**’. Dolar is the producer of a podcast series ‘**Expulsion@50**’ which is a collection of interviews with Ugandan Asians from around the world. This led to a ripple of further connections with the diaspora.

Through digital platforms, the Sejals' growing collective of women shared stories of their traumatic expulsion many of whom had never spoken of their experiences before. As the year unfolded and the group grew, they were fascinated to learn of the varied circumstances of Asians during the years that followed Uganda's independence, and the community being forced to leave the country of their birth.

Even within the group, it was not widely known that many Asians had been compelled to leave prior to Idi Amin's expulsion order in August 1972. Sejal Majithia-Jaswal recalls how her family were driven out of Uganda at the end of 1969, a year after her birth, due to the Africanisation policies of President Milton

Obote's government. These laws prevented non-Ugandan citizens from renewing their trading licences. As a consequence, Sejal's father, Shantilal, who held a British passport, was unable to continue operating his 'duka' (small shop). Despite him holding a British-issued passport he, alongside many others, neither had the means nor an automatic right of entry into Britain and chose to head to India from where his parents had migrated.

The theme of nationality - and who held what passport - was an interesting thread of the wider story which the women unraveled. It is estimated that of the 80,000 Asians expelled from Uganda, 28,000 held British passports and were eventually taken in by Britain. The others, without British passports, found themselves scattered across the globe including in Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Sweden, Australia, Canada, India, New Zealand, Pakistan and the USA. Where households had a mix of passport nationalities, families were torn apart as parents were forced to go their separate ways.

“Where households had a mix of passport nationalities, families were torn apart as parents were forced to go their separate ways.”

One of the members of ‘**Ugandan Asians – A Living History**’, has talked of how her family was pulled apart over the issue of passports. Her father, sisters, nieces and nephews all left Uganda for Pakistan whereas she - through marriage to a British citizen - came to the UK. Her mother, a British passport holder, eventually arrived in the UK (via Ethiopia and Germany), but on the journey suffered a medical emergency which left her with memory loss and a heart condition causing her premature death, seven years later, at the age of just 66. It was a tragedy which meant she never saw her family reunited.

“Listening to the different women's stories, and reflecting on the journeys of our mothers and grandmothers, we cried tears of sadness for their suffering - but also experienced feelings of gratitude for the immense courage and fortitude they showed throughout their lives and how that shaped ours.”

Many of the group's grandmothers had left India in the 1920s for Uganda. Often child brides with no say on their future, mostly (but not always) they were accompanied on their perilous journeys across the Arabian Sea by male relatives. Making their way from the safety of villages in the Punjab and Gujarat via Karachi or Bombay to the port of Mombasa, Kenya – and from there undertaking the arduous and hazardous trip into the interior of British East Africa - their journeys could take up to twelve weeks.

“For our grandmothers, this was what was expected of them – they accepted the hardships as a means of helping those early pioneers establish a new life and community, leaning on their religious faith to guide them.”

Their faith - and coping without complaint – was a characteristic the group's women all recalled in their mothers. It is a quality detected in themselves too when confronted by the prospect of having to start life over again in a foreign country – just as their mothers and grandmothers had done before them.



“Their faith - and coping without complaint - was a characteristic the group's women all recalled in their mothers.”

Sejal Majithia-Jaswal's personal story:

Faith and resilience combine for a happy ending

"Shradha rak" – "keep faith" was a phrase used by my mother, Manglaben, both as a means of encouraging me to confront life's difficulties, and as a way of dealing with her own hardships as her life was thrown into disarray in the late 1960s.

When we left Uganda for India in 1969, the toll on my mother was the hardest. Aged 32, with seven children ranging in age from one to fourteen she had already suffered loss, including my nana (her father). Now in 1969, she was forced to leave my nanima (her recently widowed mother) behind in Uganda, all alone. During the sail from Mombasa to Bombay (my father had elected for us to go to India following the revocation of his trading licence), my mother was struck down with prolonged sea sickness. Despite making it to Bombay, we enjoyed little respite as my father had no work, little money, and lots of hungry mouths to feed.

During our time in India, I, aged two, fell over the balcony guard rail of our third floor apartment, hitting the concrete floor down below with an almighty thud. A neighbour, who saw what happened picked up my tender, bruised body and carried it back upstairs to the apartment. My mother, who had been oblivious to the accident was distraught on seeing my limp body. Neighbours who had gathered around, presumed me to be dead. As a devout Hindu, however, my mother refused to accept that all was lost. Instead, she turned to Mina, my older sister and told her to light a diya (a traditional oil lamp) to Jalaram Bapa, a saint who the family revered. Together, they prayed and meditated until I let out a cry. That day, through her unshakeable faith, my mother instilled in me the power of prayer and belief – an unshakeable faith.

Displacement for the family continued as my father struggled to get permanent work in India, resulting in us having to move several times around the state of Gujarat before arriving in Porbander. It was here that he took the difficult decision to leave us behind in the care of distant family and return to Uganda, to see if life under President Idi Amin, who had recently ousted Milton Obote in a military coup, was better. However, upon his return, he realised the situation in Uganda had noticeably worsened for the Asian community, so he now sought ways to make it to the UK. In November 1971, he was finally granted entry to Britain, and took up factory work in Southall, west London, regularly sending money to us in India. After two-and-a-half years of separation, we were reunited with him. My mother, six siblings and I were granted a right to settle in the UK in September 1973, and my nanima - who was expelled from Uganda, arrived the year before us.

I had struggled with concepts of 'home and identity' for a long time until I made my first visit back to Uganda in 2018. There ostensibly to run the country's marathon, I took the opportunity to retrace my family's history. It was on this trip, through the spirit of my parents and my own 'shradha', that I found the very room my mother gave birth to me in, enabling me to finally fit a missing piece of the jigsaw of my life.



Sejal Majithia, 2018, in the room where her mother gave birth to her...



...and at the temple in Tororo where maternal grandparents lived, and her mother was born

A shared experience: without their mothers, the Sejals' stories could have turned out very differently

Upon arrival in the UK, the role of our mothers changed significantly. Overnight, for the first time in their lives, they went out to work. Manglaben began at a knitwear factory in Leicester, whilst Sudhaben quickly learnt how to manage an off-licence in Carpenders Park, Hertfordshire. Culturally too, they had to adapt too – their workwear became western clothes, instead of the traditional sari which they were used to. The change in their economic status also brought new freedoms (as well as pressures to fit in). Like the men, our mothers faced racial abuse too.

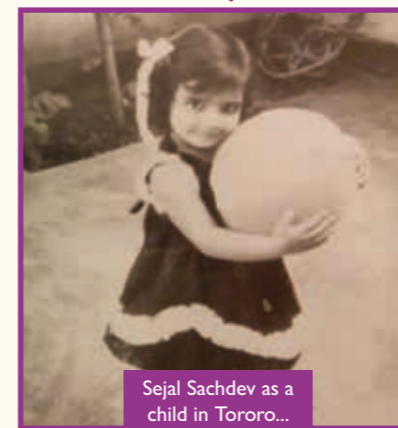
Their sense of responsibility and hard work was passed on to us and our siblings, and we often helped with family finances by working in the family shop, or by taking part time jobs, and by doing household chores - in addition to focusing on our studies. Both of us were told by our parents that education was key to us thriving in the UK, and were encouraged to go to university so that we could take advantage of opportunities which had been denied to them.

Sejal Sachdev's personal story:

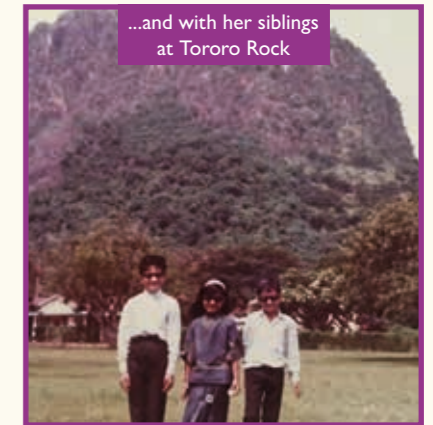
Belief and courage result in a successful new life in the UK

Until August 1972, my family had had a very happy life in Tororo, Uganda. My dad, Manubhai, was a bank manager, while mum Sudhaben, was a housewife caring for four children and the home. When Idi Amin announced that Ugandan Asians had 90 days to leave, it was a shock to the community with many believing it to be a joke.

I was seven years old when expulsion was announced. During the 90 days, my father made 17 desperate and dangerous trips to the capital, Kampala, to obtain exit visas for the family, while my mother wound up our lives packing only the essentials. It was a frightening time for us all as Amin's soldiers were looting and intimidating Asians trying to flee the country. Throughout this time, I recall my mother reassuring me and my three siblings (aged ten, eight and one), that everything would be alright as "there is a God for everyone". I never saw any despair, just practical conversations and visits to the temple with other members of the community.



Sejal Sachdev as a child in Tororo...



...and with her siblings at Tororo Rock

On 23 October 1972, we arrived at Stansted Airport on a cold, grey, wet morning. My parents were anxious and had no idea what lay ahead. I remember vividly with fondness being given a secondhand red fur coat by a volunteer before we were all taken to the refugee camp in Maresfield, Sussex. There, we lived for a month in a dormitory, and were grateful for the kindness shown by the volunteers running the camp.

Initially, my father struggled to find a job earning enough money and somewhere for us to live. However, six months in, he acquired a lease on a post office and off-licence (liquor store) and found a two-bedroom flat (for the family of six) to rent.

Commemorating the 50th anniversary of expulsion

It is our life in the UK, which has afforded us the opportunity to pursue the project to mark the 50th anniversary of the Ugandan Asian expulsion. Through our recent events at Brent Cross Shopping Centre in northwest London, and at the Migration Museum in southeast London, we have recreated a sense of the strong, vibrant community spirit which our parents enjoyed in Uganda. The events have been a rich, cultural celebration with food, dancing, henna painting and arts and crafts, combined with

engaging ways for visitors to learn more about the diaspora through film, storytelling, poetry and panel discussions. Attendees have had the opportunity to record their own experiences of expulsion with the intention being to create a legacy for future generations. We are determined that the Ugandan Asian story is not just left to the history books. It should be an inspiration to younger audiences, and a timely reminder of the benefits of having an open and welcoming approach to migration.

BBC Woman's Hour and beyond: creating a legacy for future generations

With the positive reaction to our recent interview on BBC Radio Four's Woman's Hour, our work must turn to ensuring that the story of our forefathers is not forgotten. One of our aims in the months and years ahead is that colonial history becomes a feature of the British school curriculum. As children of empire, we all need to have a much better awareness of where we have come from – as this gives us a much better sense of where we are going.



Sejal S & Sejal M with Anita Rani

You can listen to our Woman's Hour interview on BBC Sounds via: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m001d5n7>

You can listen to the Expulsion@50 podcast series via <https://open.spotify.com/show/5N7IKhWeDQ74ODLJFRHQrY?si=toG5u5jZStWj>
The Expulsion@50 episode 'When Sejal met Sejal' will be aired on the 20th December 2022.

Tracing the Art of a Stolen Generation

THE CHILD ARTISTS OF CARROLUP

This thought provoking exhibition came to Glasgow University Memorial Chapel this autumn. It tells the story of Australian First Nation's children who were forcibly taken from their homes in the 1940s by government authorities. The beautiful artwork displayed at the exhibition illustrates the strength and resilience of the children.

The children were taken to the Carrolup Native Settlement where they were subjected to a programme of assimilation to colonial 'white' culture, under government legislation operating at the time. In a toxic environment of overt racism, control and suffering inflicted on the children, two teachers – Noel and Lily White – arrived at the school, bringing with them a glimmer of hope and respite. The two teachers encouraged the children to draw: and through their drawings came their ultimate survival, giving testament to their stories.

What struck myself and others, as we discussed this exhibition, was the contrast between the textual narrative given alongside the drawings, and the actual drawings themselves. The drawings, in the mediums of chalk, charcoal, pastel and/or pencil conveyed a peaceful calm that totally jarred with the stories of brutality, which included rape, physical abuse and solitary confinement.

The young people who had created these drawings had been stolen from their families and communities, and thrust into an environment that was wholly alien, and even hostile, to their known world and cultural identity. Their language: their way of dressing: their way of living... all banned... in fact every aspect of their identity was banned in the assimilation process. Especially their spirituality. But incredibly those that enforced these restrictions on the children, with the sole aim of suppressing and severing ties with their Aboriginal heritage, culture and identity had failed, and the evidence lies in this exhibition.

For in their drawings, the children had found a means of expressing and connecting to the culture and the land of their heritage. Their work oozes an energy of honesty and spirituality that is almost tangible. The drawings invite the viewer in to capture that peaceful moment expressed in soft yet vibrant colour. I can only speculate that in all their trauma they took respite in the land, the Noongar Boodja (Noongar Country) around them: even though to many this landscape was not the landscape of home, the environment, the land, would have been a key factor of the children's cultural identity.



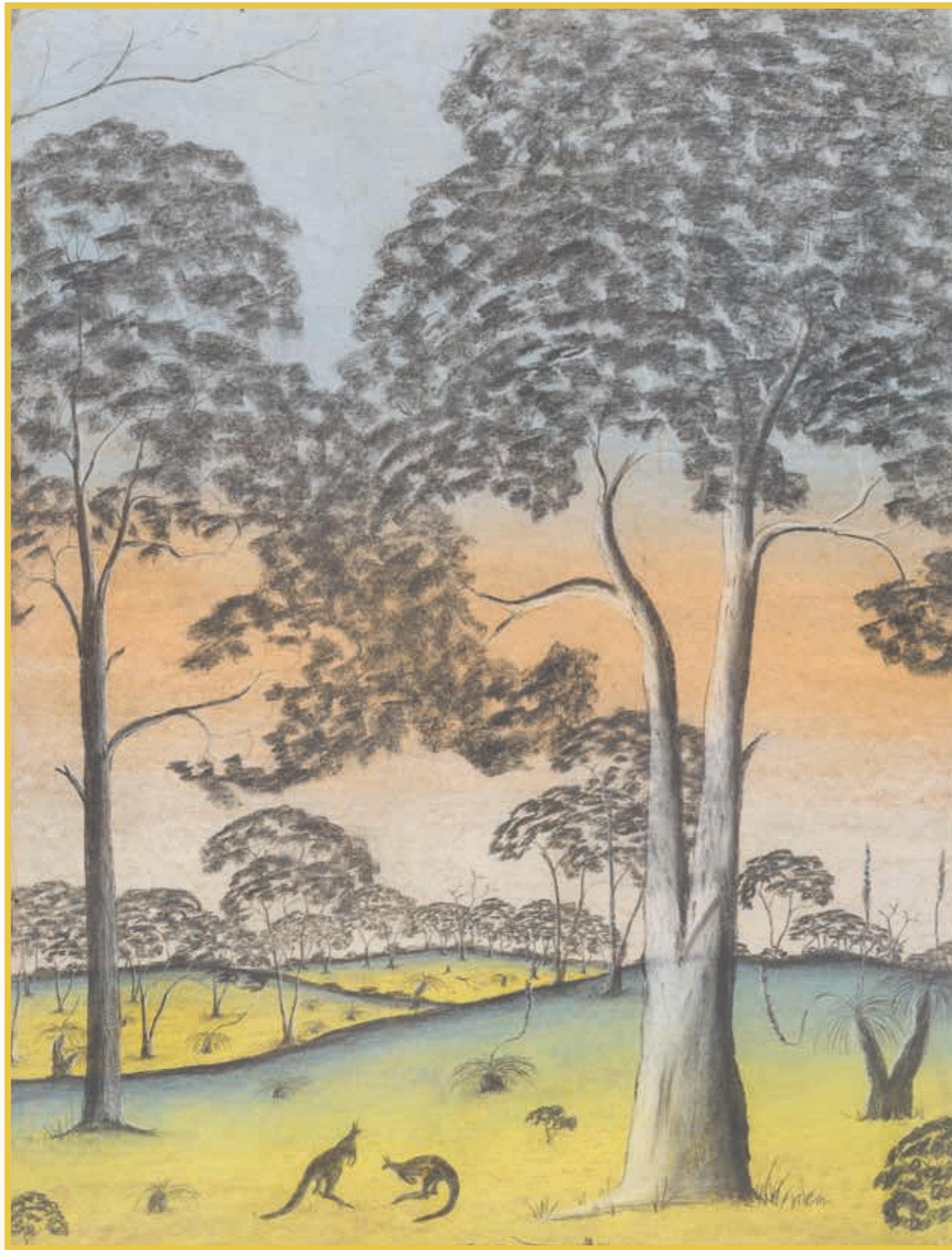
Barry Loo, *Bounding for Home*, 1950. Watercolour and ink on paper, 302mm x 505mm.



Once known child artist, *The Blue of the Sky* c1949. Pastel and charcoal on paper, 277mm x 279mm.



Once known child artist, *Teapot*, c1949. Pastel on paper, 175mm x 245mm.



Revel Cooper, *Contentment* c1949. Pastel on paper, 750mm x 565mm.



Phillip Jackson, *Deep Sky* c1949. Pastel and charcoal on paper. 247mm x 180mm.

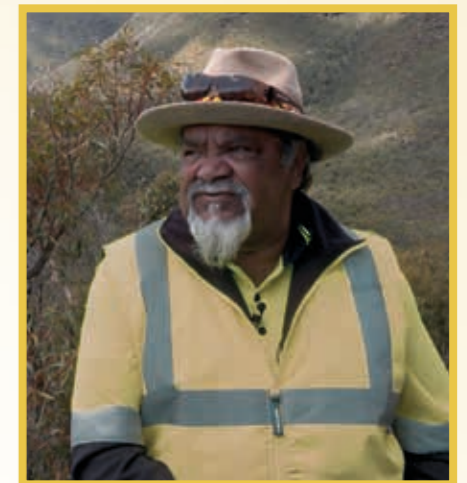


Reynold Hart, *A Native Corroboree* c1949. Pastel and charcoal on paper. 725mm x 1070mm.

Today we would understand their suffering as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and class it as an Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE). Some of the children suffered multiple ACE's for they were not only forcibly taken from their families but many also suffered isolation and physical and sexual abuse over a prolonged period of time.

Many of the children are now accounted for and named in their paintings but a number of the paintings are by: 'Once known child artist'. I found this really emotionally moving. As I write, I sense the loss of this person, and anger at the injustice of the circumstances that they had to endure. Only their artwork exists to speak and communicate a painful time in their life. I hope that they moved on to a better life, but I am not confident in that thought. The school may have been closed down but colonial attitudes and racism still exist today.

I originally came to the exhibition to hear a talk by Alastair McIntosh 'Decolonising Lands and Minds'. A talk given in the University chapel surrounded by the children's artwork only 70 odd years on from their traumatic lived reality under a colonised mindset, and I am acutely aware of the precious legacy and wisdom that these children have left us.



Goreng Noongar Elder Ezzard Flowers

In 1949 Mrs Florence Rutter, from England, visited Carrolup to meet the children and their teachers. She arranged a series of exhibitions in the UK and many pieces of the children's artwork were sold. These exhibitions brought the children's stories to public awareness and put the treatment of Aboriginal people by the State Government under scrutiny: the school was closed in 1950 and the children 'dispersed' to other institutions.

The Carrolup Elders Reference Group and the John Curtin Gallery, as the custodian of The Herbert Mayer Collection of Carrolup Artwork, hope to locate the children's artworks sold by Florence Rutter. Identifying these artworks will contribute to the healing process for Stolen Generations.

If you may have found one of the Carrolup artworks please contact John Curtin Gallery at gallery@curtin.edu.au or via <https://jcg.curtin.edu.au/carrolup/>

Tracing the art of a Stolen Generation, the child artists of Carrolup

University of Glasgow, Memorial Chapel, 5 October - 10 November 2022

Curated by Michelle Broun, Curator of First Nations Art, John Curtin Gallery, and Dr Helen Idle, Curtin University, Western Australia, with guidance from the Carrolup Elders Reference Group. Supported by the Australian Government as part of the UK/Australia Season 2021-22.

All artworks are reproduced courtesy of The Herbert Mayer Collection of Carrolup Artwork, Curtin University Art Collection, John Curtin Gallery, Curtin University, Western Australia. Gift of Colgate University, USA, 2013.

FROM THE DARKEST PART OF OUR HISTORY, THIS COLLECTION IS THE BRIGHT LIGHT. LONG MAY THE STORY OF CARROLUP ARTISTS AND THEIR ARTWORK RESONATE AND CREATE RIPPLES AROUND THE WORLD.

Ezzard Flowers, Goreng Elder of the Noongar Nation and Senior Culture Advisor

Jainism

A Way to Sustainable Living

Jainism is one of the oldest world religions, stretching over tens of thousands of years. The last great teacher lived around 2,600 years ago. He was Lord Mahaveera, a prince who undertook severe penance as a monk. His suffering during that time led to his spiritual enlightenment and the wisdom of his sermons endure today in Jain scriptures.

Lord Mahaveera and Lord Buddha lived around the same time and were born in the present state of Bihar in India. There is no record of them meeting but both preached on similar lines with an emphasis on compassion and non-violence towards all living beings. Buddhism went on to spread all over Asia and beyond, but Jainism remained mainly in India where, despite Jains being less than .4% of the population, their contribution to India's economy is huge, and they play a prominent role in Indian society. Some of the grandest temples in India are the Jain temples. Most of them are high up on mountains and, as with many ancient buildings, one can't help but wonder at the ingenuity of those who would build in such a place. The intricate workmanship on the temple walls is exquisite in its storytelling. In the state of Gujarat, in a place called Palitana, there are 700 temples on the hills of Shatrunjaya. Pilgrims have to climb 3,700 steps, preferably without taking any food or water.

Jainism teaches about conquering not external enemies but internal enemies. There are **5 central vows**, or *Mahavratas*, that Jains are encouraged to take and they are *Ahimsa* (non-violence), *Satya* (truthfulness), *Aparigraha* (non-attachment), *Asteya* (not stealing) and the last vow is *Brahmacharya* (with celibacy as the ideal).

“The teachings are to use a minimum amount of the world's resources. So wasting water and other precious resources and increasing their possessions is discouraged.”

The greatest good a Jain can do is give someone protection from fear of death. It is called *Abhaydaan*. This is translated into avoiding harm to the smallest form of life and to the largest, which extends to the food they eat. Jains are vegetarians and increasingly vegans: strict Jains also avoid potatoes and other root vegetables as they carry bacteria. Jain monks and nuns cover their mouths to avoid inadvertently swallowing any germs or insects. They never use any form of transport and walk from one city to the other. One idea behind this is to restrict their movements beyond what is absolutely necessary. The Jain laity or householders known as *Sravakas* (Men) and *Sravika* (Women) have a duty to provide food and tend to the needs of the monks and nuns.

Jains run thousands of animal sanctuaries throughout India, and often buy animals going for slaughter to protect them from the trauma of the abattoir. They then live out their natural life span in the sanctuary. Jains are, and have always been, ecologically conscious. The teachings are to use a minimum amount of the world's resources. So wasting water and other precious resources and increasing their possessions is discouraged.

Mahatma Gandhi before he came to England in 1888 was taken by his mother to visit a Jain monk who encouraged him to take a vow not to eat meat, consume alcohol or indulge in sexual relationships. It was Gandhi's vow of not eating meat which brought him in touch with many famous people of the time such as George Bernard Shaw, Annie Besant and Madame Blavatsky. His nascent ideas of justice and freedom developed from there. Gandhi was later deeply influenced by the Jain visionary and poet Srimad Rajchandra.

It is now increasingly acknowledged worldwide that the biggest threat facing our planet today is global warming. The world is on a precipice and one of the biggest causes of the state of

the planet is meat consumption. It is estimated that almost 80 billion animals are raised every year for meat. So this planet has to sustain 80 billion animals and around 9 billion human beings: it is just not sustainable. The cutting of the rain forests of the Amazon, the methane gas released by billions of farm animals, the loss of woodlands, the spread of deserts are all contributing factors to the declining state of the planet. Almost 40% of the world's freshwater resources is used up in raising animals for meat, and almost 40% of all cereals produced. Trillions of fish and other marine life are caught and killed every year, many in methods that are especially detrimental to the condition of our rivers and oceans. So Jainism's care and compassion towards all living beings, and respect for all that nature provides, can be seen to be highly relevant in modern times, and indeed is a major part of the solution the world is crying out for.

To put this concept of *Ahimsa* or non-violence in practice Jainism advocates an idea called *Anekantwad*. It means that truth can be arrived at from different angles. The belief therefore, that different religions and ideologies are to be seen as different ways of perceiving the world, rather than a cause for violence, is fundamental to Jainism. If we look at history we see that tens of millions of people have been killed by people claiming their religion is the only right one, and that others should not exist. Millions of people have died in the name of Communism, Capitalism and in the name of a so-called 'superior' race looking down on those who are perceived to be 'inferior'. All this would have been avoided if the Jain idea of accommodating differences had been practiced.

Jainism today is a vibrant religion with a huge cultural heritage and though small in numbers, there are around 40 thousand Jains in the UK today, its message of sustainable living is supremely relevant both here and the world over.

Extract of talk on Jain Perspective of Ahimsa given at the Hounslow Friends of Faith July 2022

www.nitinmehta.co.uk

Image from magazine archive
Lord Bahubali, Jain Saint in Sravanabelogola, India
Monolithic state 981 AD

Transformational Journey

I see you but I don't know you.
For I only see what you can become.

I see your untold story,
I hear your unsung song.

Unlike you or others, I don't focus on your past,
Even though, it made you who you are today.

You need to separate yourself from that,
And go this new remarkable way.

I see you wanting to emerge,
Like a butterfly, from a cocoon,

But sometimes you hold yourself back,
Lately procrastinating, getting off track.

This future is yours to behold.
Your successes will soon be told.

But you must step forth now... and be bold,
Transformation's inevitable, for a life full of gold.

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Editorial Note from Heather Wells

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INCORPORATING LEGISLATIVE LANGUAGE AND THE LANGUAGE OF FAITH



Jessica Hazrati

We were honoured to be invited as youth representatives for the Faith & Belief Forum at the International Ministerial Conference on Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) in London this July. The conference brought together governments, parliamentarians, faith and belief representatives, and civil society to urge increased global action on freedom of religion or belief for everyone.

The conference presented to us an amazing opportunity to learn from global experience and practice. In addition, it allowed us to reflect on the context of FoRB in the UK which seemingly is often conflated with interfaith movements.



Lauryn Duncan-Rouse

PERSONAL HISTORIES

We both were coming into the space as two British-born and British-educated people - holding also, personal familial histories and ancestral memory that would influence how we interacted with the space. Jessica's grandfather was Iranian and so she has a personal interest in how religion can be used as a tool to limit freedoms and for political domination and violence. Lauryn is a child of Jamaican grandparents and wanted to see how conversations would represent and acknowledge non-western thought.

In addition, we are both people of faith. Therefore, we have a vested interest in showcasing how religion can motivate and offer systems for positive social change and understanding.

Moving around the conference centre we saw many familiar faces from the UK interfaith sector but were also impressed by the number of delegates who represented governmental and 'secular' institutions such as the UN. This did give us pause for thought about how the experiences of faith communities will be used in this space - would they be an abstract idea, a 'people' to be acted upon or would they be centred in the conversation and have a platform?

Through the day we identified two moments which we would like to share. Firstly, an uncomfortable moment and secondly a moment in which people of faith were positively included.

UNCOMFORTABLE MOMENTS

A truly impactful session we attended under the theme of 'protection' was the Declaration of Humanity. The session focused on the critical role that faith and belief leaders can play in dismantling harmful misinterpretations of religious texts used to justify conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) and denouncing the stigma facing survivors. This session, for us, showed the positive impact that can be made through collaboration between faith leaders and state led initiatives, both parties needed to work together and deeply understand one another to create and promote the Declaration. It also highlighted the importance of listening to and responding to the needs of survivors.

That said, a key aim of the panel discussion was to galvanise support for the Declaration and it concluded with an invitation to participants to add their names to the list of signatories to the Declaration. To encourage this, a survivor was invited onto the stage to share her story. This felt extremely performative and unnecessary. It raised questions for us about re-traumatisation of victims in the FoRB sphere who seemingly have a heavy burden to carry in which they must share distressing experiences in order to gain support from predominantly western faith leaders.

WE HAD WITNESSED MANY CONVERSATIONS THAT FOCUSED ON LEGAL PHILOSOPHICAL LANGUAGE AROUND RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS THAT LACKED CONTEXT OF PEOPLE OF FAITH.

INSPIRING MOMENTS

Perhaps unsurprisingly, a highlight session for both of us was under the theme of ‘promotion’, entitled engaging the next generation. This wasn’t just because we felt generationally closer to the speakers. The incredibly diverse panel with speakers from Pakistan, USA, Iraq, Nigeria and England gave us a real insight into the lived experience of a people of faith, and how this varies depending on the political and power structures of the countries they live in. They all also spoke from the grassroots – a really important reminder that change needs to be both from the bottom up as well as top down.

A thought shared by an American contributor was the importance of taking religious belief seriously at the cultural level, even in countries that do not have high levels of religiously

motivated conflict or restrictions on religious and non-religious belief. She shared that many people would not consider themselves persecuted because they are not being physically attacked or imprisoned like others may be experiencing around the world. However, we can all relate to feeling alone or misunderstood at some point during our lives due to our religion or culture. Everyone has experienced this type of “persecution” at some point in time; and this discussion was an important reminder that in the UK we should shy away from sharing our beliefs with others. By sharing lived experiences of faith, we can build understanding of and empathy with each other. This in turn motivates us to speak out against the persecution of others when possible.

FINAL REFLECTIONS

Leaving the conference, we both felt a renewed sense of purpose and mission, but also felt the need to reflect on how what we had learned would impact our work.

We had witnessed many conversations that focused on legal philosophical language around rights and freedoms that lacked context of people of faith. Although we understand that legislation is needed in order to unite nation states behind legal principles that can hold people to account, there is a difference between how the law operates in writing and practice. As we saw amongst those gathered for discussion, there was little disagreement with neutrally worded legislation offering and securing religious freedom. But the work does not end there.

To have greatest effect, the principles contained in legislation

must be disseminated into the communities in which they are to be implemented and culturally specific issues must then be engaged with to achieve the desired results in practice. This cannot be a top-down imposition. Therefore, the way grassroots movements, organisations, and young people (who will carry this work forward and help to secure it in society) are brought into the implementation of these big conversations will be increasingly important moving forward.

Sitting in the plenary session, we felt that this had been missing from the conference. Following the important and inspiring conversations in the break outs, the question ‘what now?’ was on the lips of many attendees. This was a question that remained unanswered from the podium on the main stage.

SO, WHAT NOW?

As for us, we know that we will be continuing the work at the grassroots, bringing communities together for dialogue and understanding. We want to focus attention on how people within the UK hold freedom to practice their religion and beliefs. Our work on university campuses, for example, shows

that many students do not feel safe to practice their faith openly or reveal their full selves. We seek to address this through our ParliaMentors programme, equipping young people with the skills they need to become leaders and hold the space for others to express themselves freely.

FAITH COMMUNITIES IN BUSINESS

Providing Religious Dividend

Research shows that a growing number of top multinational corporations are embracing religion and belief as part of their diversity, equity, and inclusion commitments. Just as companies allow and encourage employees, for example, who are women, LGBT, of colour, or of differing abilities, to form company-sponsored, employee-led affinity groups or Employee Resource Groups (ERGs), companies are increasingly allowing and encouraging employees to establish similar groups around faith, interfaith, and/or belief.

These ERGs are global and can be faith-specific, such as at the Intel Corporation, which has ERGs for Agnostics, Atheists, and Allies; Baha’i; Christians; Hindus; Jews; Muslims; and Sikhs. The ERGs can also be interfaith with sub-chapters for faith-and-belief communities, such as Google’s Inter Belief Network (IBN), with chapters for Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Jews, Muslims, and Interfaith – for groups that are not yet ready to establish a formal chapter.

Faith-and-belief ERGs provide a platform for employees to support one another and give employees of faith an official voice within the company to make their concerns and ideas known, including business insights. Indeed, these give a company a competitive edge that increase employee morale and, therefore, retention. ERGs make it easier to recruit new talent among people for whom their faith and belief are core identities, by letting them know that people like them work successfully here. These, of course, benefit a company’s bottom line, which provides a pragmatic reason for companies to support freedom of religion and/or belief in the workplace.

But more than that, research also shows two things. First, including faith and belief as part of a company’s diversity, equity, and inclusion commitments both reinforces attention to other affinities.

As part of the initial launch of the Corporate Religious Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (REDI) Index, the Religious Freedom & Business Foundation (RFBF) analyzed the level of attention Fortune 100 companies place not only on religion, but also the following categories: race/ethnicity, women/gender, sexual orientation, veterans/military, dis/ability, age, and family.

The analysis showed that the level of focus companies place on each of the seven diversity categories is higher among companies that acknowledge religion than among companies that do not. We refer to this positive association between companies that place focus on religious inclusion and their commitment to the other categories of diversity as a “religion dividend.”

For example, companies focusing on religion score 69% higher on age inclusion, 63% higher on veterans/military inclusion, 60% higher on dis/ability inclusion, and 47% higher on race/ethnicity inclusion. Sizable “religion dividends” include companies acknowledging religion scoring 35% higher for women/gender inclusion and 31% higher on family inclusion. While the smallest religion dividend is for sexual orientation (scoring 4% higher), it is still notable that the relationship is positive.

This also coincides with global RFBF research showing that religious freedom fosters a positive environment for LGBT people, and that LGBT rights are increasing in countries with higher levels of religious freedom.

The second thing that research shows about the value of including religion and belief as part of a company’s diversity, equity, and inclusion commitments is how respecting freedom of religion or belief (FORB) in the workplace opens the door for a corporation to stand up for other human rights, such as those violated by human trafficking, or modern-day slavery. There are an estimated 40.3 million people enslaved right now, according to A21, one of the largest organizations in the world that is solely fighting human trafficking.

Various human rights violations occur at different stages of the trafficking cycle, including unassailable rights such as: the right to life, liberty, and security; the right to freedom of movement; and the right not to be subjected to torture and/or cruel, inhuman, degrading treatment or punishment.

So, how does respecting freedom of religion or belief (FORB) in the workplace open the door to combatting the human rights violations concomitant with human trafficking?

Dell Technologies – a company that develops, sells, repairs, and supports computers and related products and services – is based in Austin, Texas. It is a global employer of more than 150,000 people. Until a few years ago, it didn’t have a faith-related ERG.

Dell started its Interfaith@Dell ERG after its acquisition in 2016 of EMC, which had an interfaith ERG. Dell employees had had a robust Christian Bible study and prayer group for many years, but it was not official, not a company-sponsored group. The merger with EMC created an opportunity to keep the Christian activities but elevate faith and belief to a much higher level. The large informal Christian group decided to get behind the interfaith group from EMC as an official Dell ERG.

“Companies focusing on religion score **69%** higher on age inclusion, **63%** higher on veterans/military inclusion, **60%** higher on dis/ability inclusion, and **47%** higher on race/ethnicity inclusion”

“The *LENS OF FAITH* brings things into focus that might otherwise be left unnoticed”



As the new Interfaith@Dell gathered people from all the different faiths and beliefs working at Dell, they looked beyond being just affinity groups for their respective faiths to envisioning how to put their faith-inspired virtues and ethics into action. As they deliberated, all gravitated toward a concern for one of the most marginalized groups in the world – people being trafficked for labour or sexual exploitation.

Interfaith@Dell proposed to the company that this issue was larger than just a concern for faith communities, but one that touched every human community. Thus, Interfaith@Dell proposed the first-ever pan-ERG initiative to combat human trafficking. Top Dell leadership embraced the proposal, which now has become a global campaign, in partnership with A21, to end human slavery forever.

Dell Technologies Interfaith ERG received the A21 Catalyst Award for leading the charge in combatting human trafficking. The Award was presented in Washington DC by A21 on the opening day of Dare to Overcome, the Religious Freedom & Business Foundation's annual faith-and-belief national employee resource group (ERG) conference. The conference is held in partnership with the Busch School of Business at The Catholic University of America, and brings together faith-and-belief ERGs from top Fortune 500 in allyship with diverse communities, including those with disabilities.

The Interfaith@Dell ERG has now successfully invited other companies to join the “Initiative for Freedom” (a human trafficking awareness effort), also in partnership with A21. Thousands of Dell employees are now equipped to spot human trafficking and report it to the authorities.

The example of Interfaith@Dell is an illustration of how workplace freedom of religion and belief is realized by embracing religion and belief as part of their diversity, equity, and inclusion commitments, resulting in a broader initiative to combat human rights abuses, in this case those associated with human trafficking.

The illustration of Interfaith@Dell taking on human trafficking reveals several principles.

First, freedom of religion and belief (FORB) can be built, not just advocated for. Faith-and-belief ERGs are religious freedom in practice, and it is built from the ground up. ERGs don't happen by executive dictate, but from a groundswell of interest that executives support because of principled and/or pragmatic reasons.

Second, majority faiths (in the case of Dell in Texas, Christian), can have multiplied impact when they work in coalition with others. Majority faiths become stronger when they, as St. Ignatius of Loyola said, “See God in all things”. Finding God in all things is at the core of Ignatian (Jesuit) Spirituality and is rooted in a growing awareness that God can be found in everyone, in every place and in everything. When we learn to pay more attention to God, we become more thankful and reverent, and more willing to work with people of differing faiths.

Third, the lens of faith brings things into focus that might otherwise be left unnoticed, e.g., trafficking victims. It's not that people of faith are the only ones to care about such abuse, but when the better angels of religion are set free, they are compelled to put to practice their ideas, concisely summarized in the Golden Rule: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”

And fourth, it challenges ideas about corporations. They are more than the products or services they provide. They are communities of people. And that is where human rights matter the most.

In conclusion, a growing number of top multinational corporations are embracing religion and belief as part of their diversity, equity, and inclusion commitments. This means there are new allies for building freedom of religion or belief, which, as described, results in greater resources to combat human rights abuses. It is incumbent upon human rights advocates to better understand how to engage with people in businesses, especially faith-and-belief ERGs, who work for freedom of religion or belief for all.

THE Sacred & THE Not So Sacred



Although I have a multitude of international experience, as well as living in the UK and Italy for four years, and in India for a total of six months, I am about as American as you can get. I love Apple Pie, I love Baseball, I love veggie hot dogs and veggie baked beans, I love that I have had access to some of the best educational institutions in the world, and I love that I can move about freely, not only in my country, but throughout the

world, for the most part. This, all of this, I recognize is a privilege that I am very aware of and very attuned to, and mostly, very grateful for.

The granddaughter of Mexican and Indigenous Immigrants who crossed the border into the US over a century ago for a better life, I am a proud Chicana, a Latina, I was raised Catholic, and I am now a United Methodist. I am steeped in gratitude for the racial, cultural, and religious diversity of my country, and the richness that diversity has brought to my life, personally, as well as professionally.

In the same breath, I can say that I am afraid. Very afraid – of where my country is headed. I believe the United States is in deep trouble. We are steeped in ultra-violence, in somewhat outrageous, vitriolic divisive politics, a massive rise in Christian Nationalism, a rise in Antisemitism, an overall mentality of Xenophobia, and a skewed sense of who we were, who we are, and what we are “supposed” to be. We seem to all be walking through this shadow that tells us we are still OK, still welcome, still embraced - regardless of who we are. Yet, in the same breath, we show every sign for pre-genocidal actions from extremist and political eugenicists. Paranoid, you ask? Perhaps. Yet, it's in the air, breathing, waiting, almost wishing...

The famous quote by Ann Frank comes to my mind often, “I still really believe at heart that people are good”. This, I believe, as well. However, given the right mix of all that is above, good humans can be bad humans too. I studied with Nobel Peace Prize Winner and Holocaust Survivor, Elie Wiesel, for three semesters throughout my educational career. Sometimes Professor Wiesel would be telling us a story from his past and he would stop short of saying what he thought of what humans are *really* capable of, and how religion can play a major role in causing great harm. As someone who lost most of his immediate family members, and understood how eight words can change someone's life forever, “Men to the left! Women to the right!” Professor Wiesel was witness to one of the greatest atrocities our world has ever experienced.

“As the Autumnal sunshine strewn through the windows created a warm golden hue throughout the room, all of us, his students, would follow his gaze and find ourselves lost in our own horror of what we knew his words would never convey.”

Sometimes in class, Professor Wiesel would recall a moment in time, either at the camp, or years later during his ongoing, lifelong reconciliation within himself and the world, and his voice would often trail off as he looked out of the window at the beautiful maple trees lining the streets of Boston University. As the Autumnal sunshine strewn through the windows created a warm golden hue throughout the room, all of us, his students, would follow his gaze and find ourselves lost in our own horror of what we knew his words would never convey.

With just the right dose of a perceived Divine dogma, righteousness, and armchair theology, the United States is at a crossroads. And, just yesterday November 15, 2022, former President Donald Trump has declared he is running for President of the United States. Again. The relevant point here is that there are people who claim that Donald Trump was literally chosen by God. And they say this out loud and proud. Although the United States has written into its very fabric that we are to have freedom of religion and belief – when, we have to ask, does this cross the boundary and go too far? Of course this question has a multitude of answers. depending on who you ask, yet there is also the reality that there will always be fundamentalist and extremist views of religions and politics – there always has been in human history, and there always will be.

Sitting with that knowledge, I am always thinking of ways to communicate, to understand and as difficult as it may be, to listen – to all sides. The great notion around listening is that we don't have to agree, we just have to listen. As the rise of QAnon* took hold throughout the world during the pandemic, it was very much attached to Christian Nationalism here in the US. We can easily dismiss these folks as deluded, yet that very action of dismissal is what we call freedom of religion and belief – until it hurts someone. And then, humans react with horror, or disbelief. A prime example of this was January 6, 2021 in the United States. A very bad and a very scary day for our Democracy, I think it was the end of the United States I was born in to. These men and women who stormed the Capital,

many who held signs claiming they had God on their side, threatened to hang the Vice President of the United States and even created a noose outside the White House and chanted for him to be found and killed. This, all based on freedom of religion and belief.

I went to the beach later that day to clear my head of all the images seen the world over. I thought of Professor Wiesel and what he might think and say, and I had several moments frozen in fear – of what might come, that it wasn't over yet, that we were just beginning: that this is how it all starts. In my work as an educator in Interreligious spaces, I tend to lean toward the good in all beliefs and religions and that we are culturally bound by our faith, but also by our values, our morals, and our ethics. If the pandemic taught us anything, humans are in need of stronger values, morals and ethics that put others before self – more so now, than ever before in our lifetime.

In closing, the notion that every human is sacred and therefore we are all deserving of every right afforded to anyone else, is very real for me. This includes *everyone* – even those we dismiss as delusional, and yes, even those that cause harm. This is not easy, but it is necessary for us to survive this metamorphosis we are living through right now. More, the idea that any faith is “right” or more holy than another, is not helpful, because the reality is, if God is the *All Mighty Creator*, then She created all of us. Every race, every ethnicity, every religion, every culture, every gender – *every single one of us*. He has gifted us this one life, on this incredible planet, with everything we need to survive. In that understanding, I have to ask, *Why? Why fight over it? Why want more? Why cause harm? Why not choose to recognize the Divine in all? Why not try love, instead?*

We are bound by the sacred and the not so sacred and the next several years are going to be bumpy. Not just here in the US, but worldwide. While I have no answers, I will continue to hope with all of my being that we can find better and more holy ways to coexist with all of our sacred brothers and sisters as well as all sentient beings and the planet.

Why not choose to recognize the Divine in all? Why not try love, instead?

Dr. Karen Leslie Hernandez is a Theologian and Interfaith Activist

* QAnon is an American political conspiracy theory and political movement which originated in the American far-right political sphere in 2017.

Pool

We are sitting at the water's edge, the wayfarers and I, considering our feet. Hard to remember their dancing days: remolded by the tramp, hot, cold, itchy they throb blue. Seem to resist the pool's comfort. Nobody speaks – we don't know each other – but we agree to take time, let immersion do its work, while the sun arranges shadows cast by the fruiting apple tree. Do we imagine lost gardens? Who can tell in this silence? Anyway. Something nudges my toe. Your foot? Yours? Revived by touch, I swirl mine through figures of eight. Am I signaling infinity in any of your languages? Or do you see my movement as a drawing of lines? Don't. I was never closer to anyone. We are all forcing our poor feet to walk us away from selves we find too imperfect to bear, towards better incarnations. May they exist. You call your divinity what you will, I will name mine. They will approve as we dry each other's toes, sent from the practical heavens we need to help us.

Photographer: Michael Bilkau

PEOPLE AND PLACE

Our need for spiritual connection

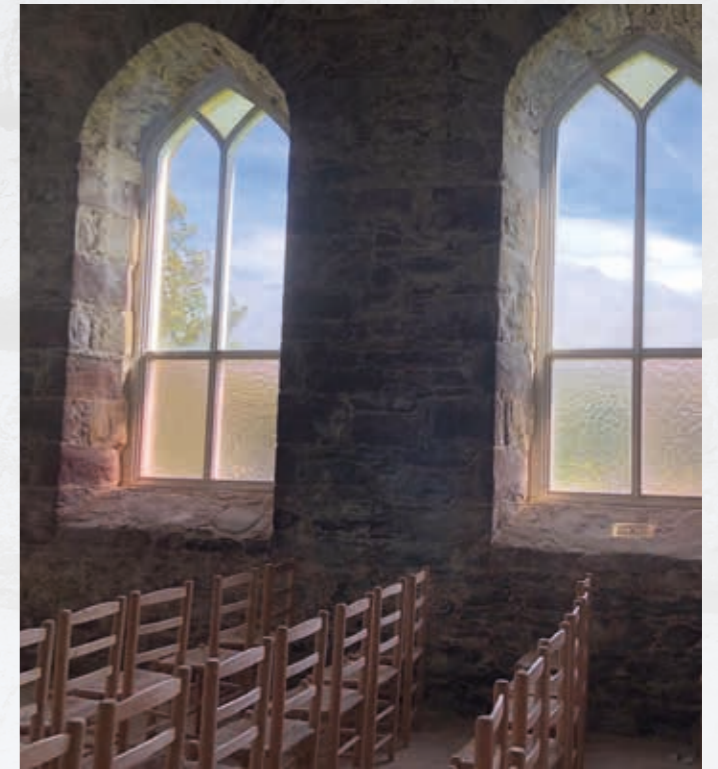


My ascent up the road to Bealach na Ba (the steepest ascent in the UK of 2,054 feet) in my VW van this summer was stressful to say the least, but not my most stressful! I began the route in glorious sunshine but soon entered fog that just got thicker and thicker the higher I went. I found myself behind three cars made visible only by their fog lights. Scary stuff on a single track road with nowhere to about turn. Prayer became a mantra... "please God don't let there be any cars coming down"... and eventually I made it to the top. A momentary pause to check that my mind, body and spirit were in alignment before... the descent. Sometime later, a very relieved me, arrived in Applecross, a peninsula in the North West of Scotland: the Torridon mountains behind me, the sea before me, with the mountains of the isles of Raasay, Rona and Skye off in the distance.

In many ways the journey to Applecross via Bealach Na Ba was a pilgrimage. I had had a real longing to return to Applecross this year - a persistent whisper within that only found peace on my arrival. There is something about this place that marks it out as special, and I sense a true spiritual connection to the land.

Humans have lived on this bountiful peninsula for thousands of years, the area providing a good living from sea and land. Their cumulative human histories now shaped into the landscape. Remnants of an Iron Age broch tower are clearly visible today, and the engineering behind these structures still continues to inspire. St Maelrubha established a monastery here in 673CE bringing Christianity to the North West Highlands. The area around the monastery was declared a 'Sanctuary' and indeed Applecross is known in the Gaelic, by its spiritual title, A Chomraich - The Sanctuary. The monastery inhabited for about 300 years is now gone, thought to have been destroyed by Viking raiders, and today this area is the site of the Clachan church. I am always drawn to this area and the idyllic way it is cradled by a backdrop of mountains and a foreground of sand and sea.

As I wondered into the church this year, I was struck by the plain unadorned interior of the building which starkly contrasted, and was lit up by, the colours of the external landscape that reached in through the church windows to transform them into stained glass works of art. Every window shone in brilliant light as the outer landscape became a fixed part of the building itself. It was an amazingly beautiful transformation to witness: the church bathed in the light of the landscape. My photographs can't truly do justice to capture that exquisite moment in time, but they help to remind me of my own deeply emotional response.



I have long been fascinated with places that have that extra dimension to them, a quality that marks them out in some way. But what is this quality - religious, spiritual, aesthetic, historic? Standing in the church it seems something more than all of these. Many ancient religious sites such as Applecross are visited by people professing no religious belief, but they can still relate to the notion of a 'sense of place', albeit perhaps not a 'sacred place' for them.

Many of us, for different reasons, have become detached or disconnected from the land and our rural landscape. We spend our lives walking and travelling on manmade roads and pavements and I sometimes wonder how often a child, for example, treads the natural earth in a day, week, year, lifetime, and what affect that has on their understanding of who they are, and their natural sense of 'placement'.

Maybe those who travel into the countryside, and to landscapes of special interest, do so to be reminded of their human connection to the land. I'm tempted to think that it is not humans that define a 'sense of place' at all, but the landscape that defines our 'sense of being human'. Maybe when we visit these special places we are connected to the best of what we truly are.

I was struck by the plain unadorned interior of the building which starkly contrasted, and was lit up by, the colours of the external landscape that reached in through the church windows to transform them into stained glass works of art.

EARTH GODDESS



I was invited by St Austell Bay Economic Forum (SABEF) in December 2019 to make a proposal for an artwork for the Cornish town of St Austell.

The curator, Alex Murdin, told me that they were commissioning artworks in clay, because they wanted to celebrate St Austell's world-wide china clay heritage. All around St Austell are the granite mountain rocks which weather to form china clay; a lovely white fine clay which is shipped to many countries from the seaport there.

In addition to celebrating the china clay heritage, the SABEF team said they were also implementing a full programme of greening of the town, by creating a lot of new plant beds and planting colourful flowers.

When I heard that, it struck me that the common denominator of both those aspects, ie China Clay and the new Green Planting is: Earth. Therefore I proposed making an Earth Goddess. She would celebrate the connection St Austell has, and that we all have, with Mother Earth. She would be as tall as I could make her, very tall indeed, so that she would make an impact. She would be made of the Earth: ie clay.

They loved the idea. So I went in to my studio to start working through my creative thoughts.

Earth Goddess would need to be made of a robust coarse sculpture clay, which fires to a light brown oatmeal colour. I would then brush the beautifully white and bright St Austell china clay over the coarse clay, so that it would provide a clean fresh base for my coloured glazes.

But first I needed to make the form.

I did not want her to be a literal representational of an identifiable female, but rather a simplified version, almost abstract. She had to have curves, without being too literal.

I acquired the clay and made some maquettes by playing. The first versions were only about 30cm tall as it is so easy, direct and fun to work on clay at that scale; it is very responsive.

As I played, I found that I was making large circles, which could be stacked up to give height, and are round and curved to suggest the female.

I liked what was appearing in the clay, which led me to embark on making the full-sized version.

Circles are the archetypal female symbol, and so it was natural that her body is represented by five round curvy circles; she has wide open arms in a long semi-circle welcoming us all, and her head is a small round form.

I am known for my exuberant playful use of coloured glazes, and when I applied them I played with the ancient shapes found on female forms; circles, spirals, wavy lines and dots and splashes. Earth Goddess expresses the life-force energy in the glaze painting.

She has a remarkable presence; full of colour and vibrancy.

And I am glad she is sited in the Earth, in a planter which has flowers and foliage and herbs blossoming. We have clad the planter with tiles I handmade from St Austell China Clay; the brown ones are glazed with the Appledore river Mud, which has produced a rich sepia colour. She is truly of the Earth.

Not only is she notable in being a powerful outdoor sculpture made by a woman, a topic the BBC emphasised in their broadcasts about her, but Earth Goddess was entirely handmade by me, the artist. She is, I think I can safely say as I have not been contradicted, at 12.5 metres. the tallest ceramic sculpture in the world.

This is one of many such responses I received:

"Earth Goddess absolutely took my breath away even as I approached her. I just wanted to congratulate you on the most stunning ceramic sculpture I have ever seen the design, the vibrant colours, the construction, the absolute glory of her she's a wonder and a joy."

I am proud of her; I think she is amazing.



SHE IS TRULY OF THE EARTH

The ARAB CHRIST

Towards an Arab Christian
Theology of Conviviality

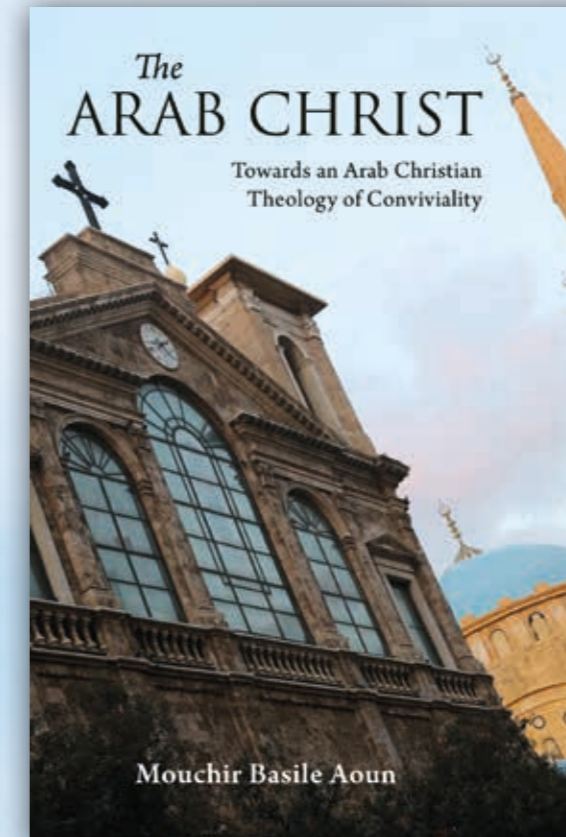
Mouchir Basile Aoun

Translated from the French by Sarah Patey

An analysis of the challenges facing Arab-Christians who seek to foster an understanding between Christians and Muslims in the Arab world.

Through a close analysis of the writings of four Lebanese theologians, the author outlines the challenges facing those in Arab Christian communities who seek to foster an accommodation and understanding between Christians and Muslims in the Arab world. The author examines the current position of the Arab Christian communities in the face of rising Islamic fundamentalism in the Arab world, with particular reference to the weakened position of those communities in Lebanon in the aftermath of that country's civil war between 1975 and 1990. The author goes on to call for a re-evaluation by Arab Christians of their attitude towards Arab Muslims and their faith, and for an engagement between the faiths based on mutual recognition of the shared traditions of Christianity and Islam and an understanding of the need for the faiths to act together in solidarity to address the socio-political and sociocultural challenges in the Arab world today. The author concludes by indicating the basis on which a shared spiritual quest for moral and political commitment can be realised.

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EXTRACT CHAPTER TWO

The challenges of a problematic political theology

THE CHALLENGES OF AN EMANCIPATORY FAITH

Because of their unique status and history, when Lebanese Christians have drawn on their faith to inspire their political thinking, they have always championed three major political causes: preserving Lebanon as a haven for Muslim–Christian coexistence; respecting and implementing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; and promoting the best possible social, cultural and spiritual outcomes for the people and society of Lebanon. Lebanese Christian intellectuals and spiritual leaders are drawn from and represent a variety of different Middle Eastern Arab Churches; they defend these three causes in different ways, and their commitment to them is prompted by a keen awareness of the demands that are fundamental to the Gospel message. Following a long process of synodical reflection and selfexamination (during the Special Assembly for Lebanon in 1995), the Church of Lebanon, and especially its Catholic elements, declared:

Strengthened by our hope in the risen Jesus Christ, here present in our Church, and renewed by his Spirit, we are now determined that, bearing witness to his love, we can rebuild our Lebanon anew, and we wish to share with you by means of this synodical message our faith and our hope.¹⁶

The Church of Lebanon is now called upon to live out in practice its professed faith in the evolving history of Lebanon and in Lebanese society. The major problem faced by the political theology advocated by the Churches in Lebanon is one of credibility. The Lebanese bishops of all the Churches are well intentioned, but their words are hobbled by a double handicap. On the one hand, the behaviour of the Lebanese clergy is hampered by their evangelical inauthenticity, and on the other, they display a woeful lack of intelligence in their assessment of local and regional issues. Officially, their political theology appears to project a Christian concern to protect the distinctiveness of life in Lebanon. However, a key feature of any political thinking that claims to be distinct from official Church policy is that it must be capable of exercising free judgement, and of openly denouncing the unavowed collusion between the sectarian tensions among Lebanese clergy and the sectarian manipulations of the Christian political class. But despite the ambiguity inherent in Lebanese political theology, some prophetic Christian voices have broken through, defending with an authentic voice the three fundamental causes of Lebanese life. So now, before suggesting a radical theological reform in Lebanese politics, we must first cast light on the distinctive nature of this theological voice.

THE FIRST POLITICAL CAUSE OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH: COEXISTENCE

To identify a theological defence we need to show that the notion of Muslim–Christian conviviality is clearly grounded in the requirements of the Gospel. Georges Khodr, an eminent Lebanese Orthodox theologian, highlights the ethical demands arising from the Incarnation:

Since the time of His incarnation and ascension, Christ is firmly situated in history until the end of time, when he will have gathered up all of humanity and returned them to the Father. In His travels through the centuries, Christ meets Arabs as much as He does other peoples, He talks to them, He walks alongside them, and will continue to do so until human time flows into eternal time.¹⁷

The mystery of the Incarnation, he is telling us, invites Christians to take the risk of communion:

Christians are a community of love, not a confessional community. For us who follow Christ, the only thing that binds us together is his promise to remain among us, and that has nothing to do with the tyranny of time. A testament of love is our binding force, and it is our only chance to help Muslims to taste fully the beauty of being human. We are the ones called to wash feet.¹⁸

When we celebrate the mystery of the Incarnation, we are committed to want, and therefore to seek, that it should become a political reality for Muslim–Christian coexistence,

not only in Lebanon but also in other societies in the Arab world. Should communion flourish and become an unconditionally open attitude to the Other, it would inevitably blossom in concrete politics as a freely agreed and cooperative approach to governing cultural, social, political and religious plurality. With such a vision before them, Christians must resist any form of ghettoisation¹⁹ or protective gated community. For the Christian faith is in its very heart an attitude of openness.

The Synod for Lebanon (November–December 1995) throws further light on the nature of the concrete politics Khodr mentions. Its reflections call for a pluralistic vision of Lebanese social space:

Any religion, because it is incarnate, is expressed in cultural form; our religious adherence, whether Christian or Muslim, therefore necessarily has a sociological and communitarian dimension, and it gives shape to our family, social and spiritual life. [...] And it is this intercommunity structure that makes it possible for our Muslim–Christian conviviality to flourish in an atmosphere of liberty, of equality before the law, and of sincere collaboration; conviviality that, as John Paul II has put it, has made Lebanon more than just a country, but a message and a model for the Middle East and for the West.²⁰

The Synod, by establishing this link between the intercommunity structure and the promotion of the democratic values of liberty, equality and fraternity, gave a stronger sense of coherence to the Christian vision for life in Lebanon. The Maronite patriarch Nasrallah Sfeir echoed this vision when he situated the Lebanese experience in the context of Eastern secular pluralism:

There are two religions in Lebanon: Christianity and Islam. Each one has its own value system and its specific understanding of humans and of the world. We can therefore state that there are two cultures in Lebanon, one turned to the West and one to the East. These two cultures intermingle and coexist in Lebanon, as do the Christians and the Muslims. This does not prevent us from living together under the same heaven, in a shared native country, and with a shared history and heritage.²¹

These words from the Maronite patriarch appear to endorse the theory of intercultural pluralism, a theory viewed with suspicion and disapproval by some Lebanese because of its potential separatist implications.²² Most Lebanese theologians, however, tend to share his view and its respectful acknowledgement of the mosaic of Lebanese life. Metropolitan G. Khodr praises Lebanese cultural diversity, which he sees as an opportunity for liberty and for creativity. He willingly speaks of ‘our inevitably pluralistic society, which may not be homogenous, but it is united.’²³ Lebanese theologians, realising that in a globalised world the uncertainties of Lebanese conviviality might serve to provide a focus for validation and interrogation, are rediscovering the eminently theological significance of religious and cultural pluralism.

Before the war, Lebanese Christians were unwilling to test the validity of such a model, thus missing out on the opportunity to benefit from illuminating critique and rehabilitation. Anxious to preserve their fragile Lebanese way of life, they sought only to extol the positive aspects of their lived coexistence, while silencing the demands that a true recognition of their pluralism might require. They are now revisiting this approach in the light of the war they endured, but they have no desire to weaken or reject it. One of the principal Christian theological voices locally, Mgr Grégoire Haddad, proclaims openly that

We are not thinking of a Christian Lebanon, but of Lebanon itself, a place where we live with others and work together as individuals, groups and institutional Churches, assuming responsibility in the light of Christian faith in Jesus Christ for the development [of Lebanon].²⁴

Having in the past taken a minimalist view of Lebanese coexistence, Lebanese Christians have now adopted a maximalist view, in the sense that they are aiming to unpack the theoretical and practical implications – social, political, legal, and ethical – of the concept of ‘Lebanese plurality’.

They are now working to promote the notions of deconfessionalisation, decentralisation, regionalisation and even federation, while preserving the principle of national unity. Their principal concern is to open up communication and interaction between the identity-based communities and social entities. The Middle East Council of Churches has highlighted the possibility of an enriching and distinctly Lebanese theological synthesis:

In the Middle East, and especially in Lebanon, the values of Western humanist secularism, which focus entirely on mankind, are in competition with theocratic values, which focus entirely on God. As a result, people are inclined to see God and mankind as mutually exclusive. We see Lebanon as offering a forum in which God and mankind are reconciled, thus ending the efforts to kill God in the name of mankind, or of killing people in the name of God.²⁵

The suggestions from the Council of Churches take a wider view of religious coexistence in Lebanon and confer on it a noble cultural mission.

The views here arise from a variety of differing theological positions, but most agree that there is an urgent need to preserve the distinctiveness of Christian presence within the framework of Lebanese conviviality. Some propose confessionalism (the Catholic institutions, and especially the Maronite patriarchate), others propose secularism (Mgr Grégoire Haddad), and yet others a neutral shared public sphere (Mgr Georges Khodr, the Middle East Council of Churches). In all cases, however, they seek to promote Christian faith and Gospel values. Differences in perception can nevertheless provoke genuine theological conflict between Christians. The second part of this inquiry will explore the theological diversity that characterises Christian approaches in Lebanon. They might in some cases suggest diametrically opposed paths, but they share the same motivation: to take ownership of Lebanese plurality and to deepen mutual religious and cultural conviviality.

16 Assemblée Spéciale pour le Liban (Synode des Évêques), *Le Christ est notre espérance: renouvelés par son esprit, solidaires, nous témoignons de son amour*, [Special Assembly for Lebanon (Synod of Bishops), ‘Christ is our hope: Renewed by his Spirit, in solidarity we bear witness to his love’] Publications of the Commission Épiscopale pour les Moyens de Communication Sociale, Centre Catholique d’Information, Beirut, 1995, § 2, p. 4.

17 G. Khodr, ‘Le christianisme, l’islam et l’arabité’, in *Contacts*, XXX, 110, 1980, p. 100.

18 G. Khodr, *L’espérance en temps de guerre*, Beirut, Éditions An-Nahar, 1987, p. 244.

19 G. Khodr, ‘Sion et les temples’, *An-Nahar*, 15 April 1984.

20 Assemblée Spéciale pour le Liban (Synode des Évêques), *Le Christ est notre espérance...*, *op. cit.*, § 19, p. 11.

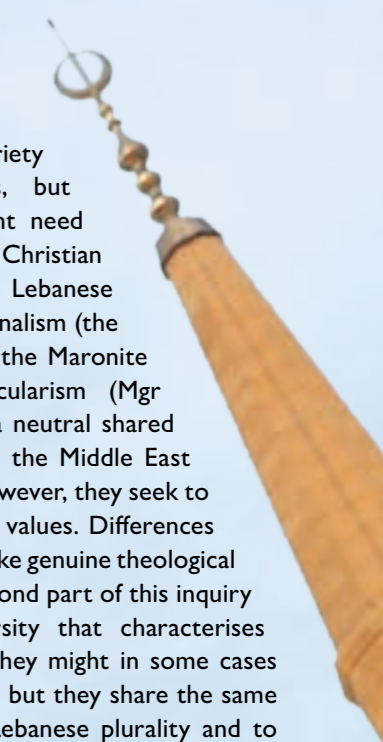
21 Interview in the Lebanese daily *An-Nahar*, cited C. H. Dagher, *Les défis du Liban d’après-guerre: faites tomber les murs*, in the series ‘Comprendre le Moyen-Orient’, Paris, L’Harmattan, 2002, p. 42.

22 According to A. Saad, Patriarch Sfeir’s vision for Lebanese identity evolved and matured. His early experience of Lebanese independence led him to see the principle of homogeneity as making mutual recognition necessary but also generous; as time went on he developed a more rigid and anxious view of religious and cultural plurality in Lebanon (cf. A. Saad, *Le soixante-seizième patriarche: Mar Nasrallah Boutros Sfeir*, ed. Jabalna, n.p., n.d., p. 83).

23 ‘Diversité culturelle et unité politique’, Lecture given in Beirut, 18 May 1993, and cited in C. H. Dagher, *Les défis du Liban d’après-guerre...*, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

24 G. Haddad, ‘Le Mouvement Social au Liban: un témoignage vécu’, in Centre d’Études et de Recherches sur l’Orient Chrétien (Cero), *La crise socio-économique et la doctrine de l’Église*, Beirut, Cero, 1988, p. 211.

25 Middle East Council of Churches, Lebanon on the MECC Agenda, 15–21 November 1994, p. 27.



Faith and the Artist

Goldwork footprints

My love of embroidery was reignited several years ago when I heard about classes being run by the Royal School of Needlework. Having decided to try one of the classes, Goldwork caught my eye and something inside me just clicked. Richly embroidered Orthodox church vestments, covered in golden thread, came to mind, as well as images of glittering and bejewelled historical robes of the royal Romanian courts. They were rooted in the opulent Byzantine tradition, where more is definitely more, and they were beautiful examples of Goldwork embroidery technique. I am originally from Moldova, which used to be part of Romania and shares the same language and culture, so my cultural identity is Romanian. I am Christian Orthodox, hence the familiarity with the church vestments, and am a little bit of a magpie and attracted to beautiful shiny things, so the decision was made and I booked myself on a class to study this amazing Goldwork technique at Hampton Court.

Continuing my interest in goldwork, I visited Chelmsford cathedral where I saw the famous banner embroidered in goldwork by Beryl Dean and depicting the Blessed Virgin Mary in Byzantine style. In 2016 I visited the Opus Anglicanum exhibition at the V&A in London, which celebrated masterpieces of English mediaeval embroiderers, with most of its preserved examples coming from European church treasuries. That, for me, echoed with the examples of Romanian historical ecclesiastical tradition of the 15th century preserved in museums, the Romanian church and royal embroidered vestments, liturgical banners and cloths, which show the influence of the Byzantine tradition, where goldwork was widely used. Such embroideries were usually produced under royal patronage at monastery workshops.



▲ Stephan the Great banner, XV century

I realised that embroidery resonated so strongly with me because it evoked my family and my culture.

The first goldwork piece I personally designed and made was based on the Canterbury cross. It struck me as appropriate, since our Orthodox church community of St Theodore of Canterbury is based in the city of Canterbury and the 9th century Saxon brooch that was my inspiration combined all the aspects that appeal to me: spiritual, historical and decorative. My piece was not perfect, but it was a start. After several more classes at the RSN, I had the courage to design and make a small piece for our Orthodox church community in Canterbury. As my interest continued, I tried my hand at making other pieces using the goldwork technique and sometimes combined with embroidery with coloured threads.

What started as a hobby turned out to be much more important to me. I realised that embroidery resonated so strongly with me because it evoked my family and my culture. On a personal level, stitching is part of my family history. As a child, we were taught basic stitches in school, but I could also observe how, at home, my mother made and embroidered traditional blouses and skirts for me and my sister, for a school event. My mother would also tell us stories from her own childhood, how, when embroidering at home, in the evenings, in the dim light of an oil lamp which made it hard to distinguish colours, she would discover in the morning that the leaves finished last night were blue instead of green!

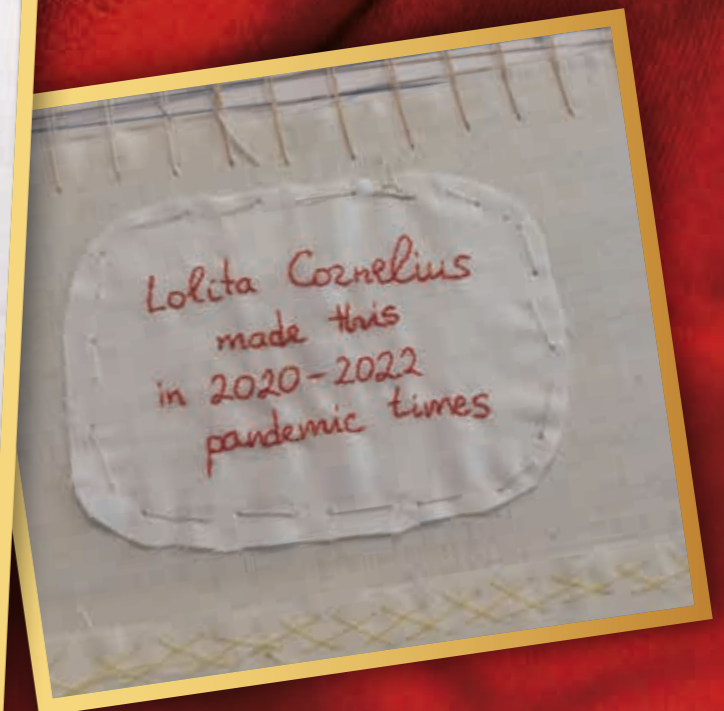
On a wider cultural level, embroidery is a traditional craft in Romania and Moldova and is recently enjoying a strong revival. The new generation of stitchers want to regain understanding of the meaning of authentic symbols, such as the sun, the tree of life, the rooster, and stitches, appropriate to the geographical area - each region has its specific embroidery features. I believe that this interest represents a way of reconnecting with the national identity, preserving the historical continuity of the craft and protecting its authenticity from cultural appropriation. I follow such groups on social media (for ex. Şezătoarea Basarabia, Give Back Credit) and try to attend the online events and talks they host. Their membership is predominantly female, and they are a continuous source of inspiration and motivation to share, even in a small way, in the wonderful work they are doing. It has been my intention to stitch a traditional blouse (called "ie") that I could wear on the International Romanian Blouse Day on the 24th of June, and I'm hoping to do so soon.

It made me feel the need to leave some "signs" of my existence, like a modern-day echo of the ancient handprint on the cave wall.

Textile artist and curator, Clare Hunter, in her book 'Threads of Life: A History of the World Through the Eye of a Needle', speaks of the recent revival of Ukrainian traditional embroidery: "Sewing... re-threads a sense of identity, reclaims a culture, anchors communities adrift from their social history and generates a community spirit, at the same time keeping future generations in touch with their heritage." Moldova is a neighbour of Ukraine, both being post-Soviet countries. We have many similar motifs in our traditional embroidery too, therefore what Claire Hunter says in her book about Ukrainian stitched heritage can equally be said about Moldovan embroidery - wearing an embroidered shirt is a patriotic act of solidarity, restoring the social fabric of national heritage and claiming a distinct identity.

In the digital world we live in, so much of what we do is online. I started wondering what material 'footprints' we are leaving behind, for the future archaeologists. It made me feel the need to leave some "signs" of my existence, like a modern-day echo of the ancient handprint on the cave wall. With this in mind, in the pandemic I made an embroidery that represents my experience of it and signed it on the back.

I have now lived away from Moldova for longer than I actually lived there, and I am feeling more and more the emotional need for a connection with my original cultural tradition. I feel that this connection constitutes a way to preserve my identity as an individual, and embroidery is a significant part of it. I still have, and treasure, the embroidered blouse that my mother made for me all those years ago.



▲ Church Piece, Butterfly Bag and Dragon by Lolita Cornelius
 ► Embroidered Romanian blouses, UNESCO

◀ Keep Calm front, Lolita Cornelius
 ▲ Keep Calm back signature, Lolita Cornelius

C. Hunter, *Threads of Life: A History of the World Through the Eye of a Needle* Pub. Sceptre 2019, p. 68.

Is this, then, faith?

Is this, then, faith?

To see God's face in one small, simple child,
In that old, patient woman, honest, undefiled
With open soul?

Would this be faith

To feel oneself leaping with sheer delight
Beneath the steel-sharp stars that pierce the night
(Black, velvet bowl)?

Does faith lie here:

To trust that in our messy, painful days
God is still present, whispering hope, to raise
Our hearts once more?

Can this be faith:

To give, and share, and start again to love,
Striving to understand, to free the sad, caged dove
And vanquish war?

Is this stark faith:

Receiving no response, to pray withal;
To follow, blindly sure, God's silent call?
Pass through his door!

Sr Katharine Holmstrom