



MISSION

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CATALYST

Intelligent comment on faith and culture

THE ROAD TO RECONCILIATION

Was I right?



Global theologies of healing

LOVE AND TUTU

4. René August on what the mischievous bishop can teach today's church leaders

03. ILLUMINATING PATHWAYS TO HOPE
07. WHAT IS TRUTH? 10. LEBANON'S BLACK SATURDAY
14. UNSETTLING THE WORD
16. A TIME I CHANGED MY MIND 18. SHELF AWARENESS
19. WHO IS MY NEIGHBOUR?

Contributors
(in order of appearance)



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Camille Hernandez

is a Black+Filipinx trauma-informed writer, educator, and ethicist pursuing an abolitionist world by dismantling systems of oppression created by settler colonisation. Her debut work of theology *The Hero and The Whore* was published this October by Westminster John Knox Press.



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Explore the *Mission Catalyst* archives.

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ILLUMINATING PATHWAYS TO HOPE

AS THE UK CHURCH ACROSS THE DENOMINATIONS
PREPARES FOR RIFTS, RIPS AND WORSE OVER THE ISSUE
OF HUMAN SEXUALITY, THIS ISSUE LOOKS TO THE
GLOBAL CHURCH FOR THEOLOGIES OF HEALING

As this edition began to take shape in early autumn, I dropped an email to columnist Natalia-Nana. It contained extracts from the messages I had been sending to potential contributors. Then Hamas attacked Israel and Israel attacked Gaza and healing torn communities never felt more necessary nor felt further away. Reading it over, it still serves as good as any introduction could to what follows

“Some thoughts on the next issue... this is the gubbins I’ve been sending to prospective contributors:

‘The reason why...

I’m getting in touch. The wider context is the issue of human sexuality. The specific context is that Baptist churches through their regional associations will be voting next March on whether to make it possible for ministers to be in a legal gay marriage and be accredited; currently any sexual activity outside of heterosexual marriage is deemed gross misconduct.

My hope

As you can imagine, whichever way the vote goes existing rifts will be torn right open. My hope is to pre-empt the tears and offer up theologies of healing from across the edges of the world Christianity map, examples of when and how Christian communities large and small have addressed differences and destabilising events to illuminate pathways of hope.’

So, illuminating pathways to hope is sort of the theme. So far,

I’ve got an Unsettling the Word with a Filipinx theologian Camille Hernandez on reclaiming Biblical stories of sexual exploitation (she’s got a book out later this year, *The Hero and The Whore*, which is pretty mind-blowingly banging). There’s an interview with a Lebanese fellow called Martin Accad, who has a focus on bringing South African-style truth and reconciliation into the context of the Lebanese Civil War.

And Rene’s piece is loaded with all the wisdom [Natalia-Nana introduced me to Rev August last year], she does a bit around the Good Samaritan, a parable I have no doubt you could blow open and use as an entry point to discuss something



around the idea of “I’d rather act in love than in law/righteousness.” OR anything else you’d like to use the Good Samaritan as a jumping off point for.”

I write this last line before knowing quite how Natalia-Nana has blown open the Good Samaritan, but I know I cannot wait to find out.

Matty Fearon
Mission Catalyst editor





"I am because you are"

RENÉ AUGUST,
VETERAN OF THE ANTI-
APARTHEID MOVEMENT
AND ANGLICAN PRIEST, ON THE
IRRESISTIBLE COMPASSION OF CHRIST
AND DISCERNING THE INVITATION TO
THE CHURCH IN THE MESS OF HUMAN SEXUALITY

How can we make reconciliation possible over the issue of human sexuality?

If we are going to give a biblical framing for reconciliation, I would say that there is one commandment that should govern how we have this conversation: 'Love the Lord your God and love your neighbour.' We are never once commanded to be right, not once. In fact, only people who make mistakes and mess up need a saviour. And in the midst of coming to save us, God says, 'I am with you. Love one another.'

There are some who come to the

debate saying, 'Look, we have to respond to this issue now because this is what's happening now.' And others saying, 'Look, we are not dictated to by the waves of change in the world. We must hold to what

the authority of Scripture provides for us and how that must be read.' I would say 'yes' to both of those things. But it isn't just a Christian conversation. It is something that has happened over the last few years and affected literally every major religious group in the world. We don't get to be exempt from that.

Does context count for anything?

We must ask, 'what was it possible for people to understand during that time?' Keeping in mind, for example, Galileo's 17th-century scientific heresy, the biblical justification for the enslavement of peoples in the 18th and 19th centuries, and likewise for women in ministry in the 20th century.

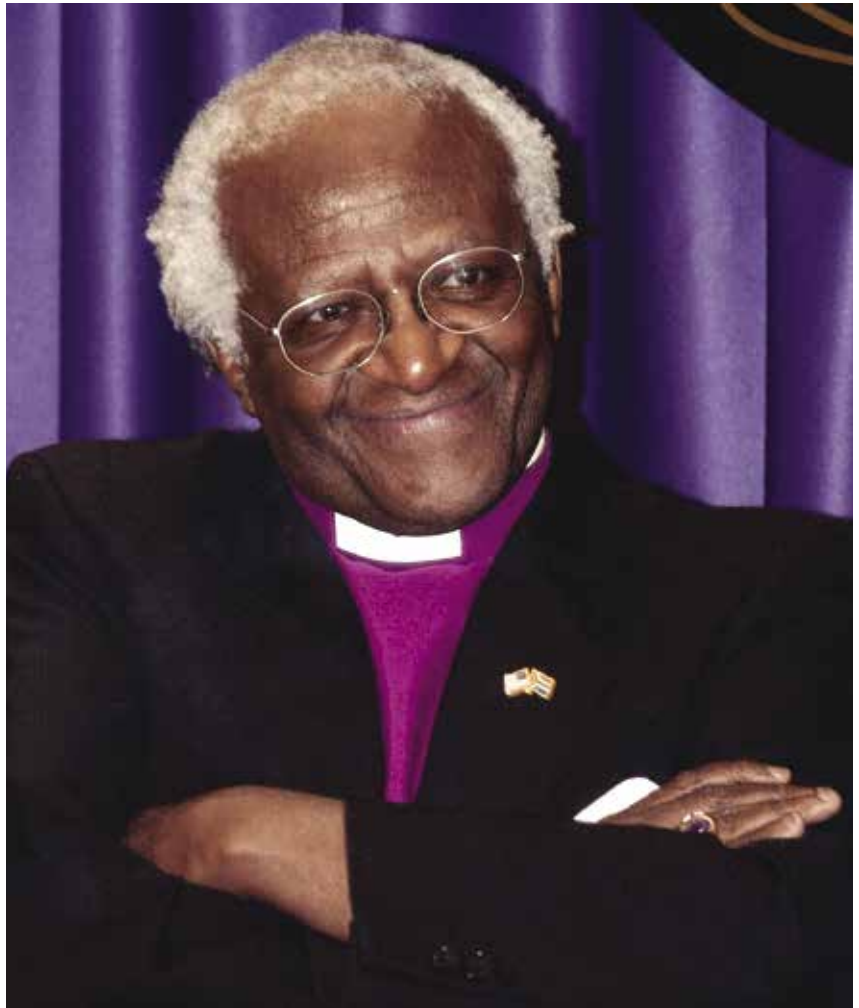
“ we must acknowledge the power we bring to the text, irrespective of our position on the issue ”

“
*once or twice,
after inviting a
woman to administer
communion,
Desmond Tutu
stood up and said,
very mischievously,
“Everyone’s still alive.”*
”

We must be attentive to what the biblical narrative says, but also to the sweep of the narrative - Genesis to Revelation - which remains, ‘I am with you. Love the Lord your God and love your neighbour as yourself.’ We cannot exclude that narrative from what is happening here.

Is there something beyond doctrine and theology that we are missing?

In the Church, we cannot forget that our vocation is pastoral. It always has been. And anybody finding themselves questioning their identity, their orientation, their gender, any of those things, is still in need of pastoral response, pastoral care, pastoral community. And my theological position and my pastoral response are not the same things.



“*my theological position and my pastoral response are not the same things*”

Let me tell you about Peter Storey. He was a South African prophet who lived at the same time as Desmond Tutu. What a bummer to be born at the same time as Desmond Tutu! You can be amazing, but you still won't be known.

Anyway, church leaders in South Africa met at the invitation of the government to discuss the legalisation of abortion as a constitutional right. There was deadlock in every direction; literally people had moved to different corners of the room as a way of entrenching their position. Peter stood up and he said, “I wonder if this is a helpful introduction.” And I thought, ‘oh boy, we’re not ready for introductions Peter’. And he stood up and he said, “The Methodist Church of Southern Africa recognises that no woman is born desiring

an abortion. Anyone contemplating abortion is in need of pastoral care, and it is to this that God has called us.”

One by one people stood up and started applauding: ‘That’s it, we can all agree on that.’

So, to make clear what our work is in this, eating from the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is not something God dreamed for us. It is not for us to be judges. We don’t get to decide. God makes that decision. And what do we do in the midst of that? Well, we do what God has called us to do. And that’s the work of love and to walk alongside people as they navigate this, as they make decisions, as they make choices that we don’t agree with, as they make choices that we do agree with, as we celebrate with

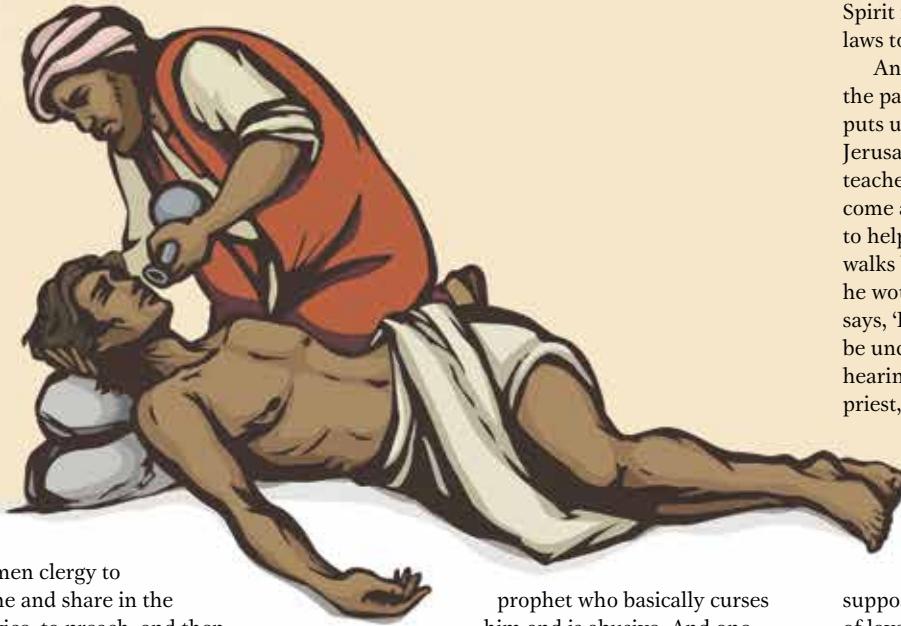
them, as we weep with them.

All those things are possible and necessary. But we don’t get to do it without love. That’s not God’s dream. We have to find a different posture for us to enter into this conversation and hear stories of difference from real people.

Do you think those entrenched positions lead to us not hearing those stories?

The issue is hermeneutical. We must do different hermeneutical work. We must have more than one hermeneutical tool. Because if we don’t, then it doesn’t matter. We’ll just rip each other apart. Then only the enemies of God win. That’s the only thing we can guarantee. We must acknowledge the power we bring to the text, irrespective of our position on the issue.

If I take the issue about women preaching, which I lived through - and still live through. Over and over and over and over and over again, women were not listened to. I remember Desmond Tutu, for very special services, would invite



women clergy to come and share in the service, to preach, and then he'd invite them to come and celebrate the Eucharist with him. There were so many people who had never received communion from a woman before. And just being able to do that, to come to the communion rail, to receive a wafer or a sip of wine and then realise, 'We didn't fall apart', was huge; the consequences of that shifted things. Tutu decided he couldn't just keep avoiding this issue. Instead, he gave people the opportunity to receive communion from women. Some people refused, some didn't. Once or twice, he stood up and said, very mischievously, "Everyone's still alive."

My point is that having an opportunity to receive communion or listen to a sermon from someone who's in a same-sex marriage makes a huge difference. That experience of being in ministry with someone who's gay and feeling God's anointing and blessing because of their ministry, some people were just like, 'I can't say this is wrong anymore.' And this is a critical piece in the conversation: we need to be exposed to people from across the divide.

Can you speak about how the idea of *Ubuntu* can shape our approach to those across the divide?

Ubuntu is an African philosophical dictum that can be distilled to, "I am because you are." So, each person in my life is a gift to me from God. God has a gift to give me through them that I cannot receive any other way. The flip side is I don't get to choose who God uses, thank God for that!

For example, David listens to a false

prophet who basically curses him and is abusive. And one thing David does, this murderous, adulterous, manipulative person, he goes before God and says, 'Is there anything in there that was from you?' He understands that his humanity is connected to the words even of someone who considers himself his enemy.

Ubuntu is a thread that weaves our humanity together, which binds us to one another, and binds our healing and our spirituality and our maturity to one another. The simple idea of *Ubuntu*, I

call anything that I've made unclean.' The Spirit is requiring of Peter to break God's laws to maintain the law of love.

And Jesus applies it beautifully in the parable of the good Samaritan. He puts us on the road between Jericho and Jerusalem, right where the priests and the teachers of the law were. And a priest does come along and he doesn't do anything to help the beaten and battered man. He walks by on the other side. But of course, he would do that because there's a law that says, 'Don't touch a dead body.' He will be unclean. He will defile himself. People hearing that story are like, 'I get it, the priest, he understands the law.'

Then the teacher of the law does the same thing as the priest because they too understand the law. Not just any law, God's law. But then the Samaritan, who is not law-abiding, who is not even supposed to know the laws, applies the law of love through his compassion.

Remember it's a smart-arse lawyer asking Jesus, 'Who is my neighbour?' At the end of the parable Jesus asks him, 'So which one here was a neighbour to the man?' And he doesn't say, 'Oh, the Pharisee.' He says, 'The one who had compassion.' And then Jesus says, 'Now go and do likewise.' And I mean, it could be the good homosexual, the good lesbian, the good transgender person, because God's love can come to us through the most unlikely people. And if it was me

“ if we can't walk away saying, "I have loved," then we should stop following Jesus ”

cannot be without you, requires humility. We cannot meet God without humility.

Ubuntu provides a grace and love through which we can be saved. And that love always asks us to transcend the law. Think of Rahab, the Canaanite prostitute. There was the law of God, that every Canaanite should be wiped off the face of the earth. But for love there she is, included in the genealogy of Jesus. Ruth, a Moabite woman. She does not belong there. There are laws being broken, God's laws are being broken. But she's included in the story. Think of Cornelius. Peter going to the home of a gentile and eating. The Spirit says very clearly to him, 'Take and eat,' and he's like, 'I will never, never put anything in my mouth that is unclean,' because he's faithfully obeying the laws of the Lord. And the Spirit says, 'Don't

who was lying in the road, I don't know if I'd have wanted a Samaritan touching me, making me unclean. But when we are in a place of desperation, unable to resist, in that place of humility, beaten up by life, we have no power to resist the compassion of others.

And so that for me is the invitation to the Church. That's the invitation. That the compassion of Christ would be so irresistible to us that we would stop and stoop, pay attention to anyone, allow ourselves to be helped, to be taught, to be humbled. I think that's the invitation from this conversation that comes to every single one of us, irrespective of what side of the argument you find yourself on. And if we can't walk away saying, "I have loved," then we should stop following Jesus.



*LEBANESE THEOLOGIAN MARTIN ACCAD TELLS MATTY
FEARON THAT UNCOVERING HOW WE REMEMBER IS KEY TO
RECONCILIATION*

Tell me more about your experience of reconciliation in the context of Lebanon's history...

It has been my life journey. I think my refusal to be a victim is what keeps pushing me to try and find new ways, creative ways, to be part of a solution in a situation of conflict. I have a strong sense of calling to make a difference by following Jesus' model. The Church often simply cannot see beyond itself or cannot believe that it can make a difference outside its

walls. And that's something that has never sat well with me.

But more recently your work has been heading off in a new direction...

I've been 20 years in theological education and particularly in the field of interfaith dialogue. Three years ago, I felt that limiting my work just to faith leaders was not enough anymore. I was being called in a different direction. Now I primarily work on two projects: one

with change-making political activists in Lebanon; the other, taking a longer view on the history of conflict in Lebanon and that's where the multiple-narrative approach to the study of our conflict history comes in (see p. 10 to 13).

In Lebanon, the faith leaders often don't have enough courage to engage in real political change. Which is ironic because our top religious leaders cannot preach a sermon that's not political. And it seems everyone else within religious

institutions is prevented from getting involved in real holistic change. I've been in the office of bishops or of muftis where I've been told, when I've talked about some of our peace-building initiatives, 'Do whatever you want, but don't get involved in politics.'

Was there a spark that ignited your change in direction?

I reached the limit of what can be done. I needed to see where else change was happening. Lebanon in 2019 was going through this 'change movement', or 'uprising', or 'revolution', depending on who you asked. And a colleague and I decided to explore this movement. We used a methodology called 'action research', which is collaborative and expects the transformation of all parties involved in the process. We built a network of change leaders at the forefront of this movement, with the hope of influencing young emerging leaders to enact change at a national level. Lebanon can't move forward so long as it has not dealt with its past. And we're 33 years beyond the end - or formal end - of our civil war, and Lebanon is at its lowest ebb in modern history.

What sustains you through 33 years of disappointment?

I always ask myself the question, 'What would God have me do?' And sometimes I hear myself and I feel, 'Who am I? Who do I think I am?' And I actually know I am nothing, but the model of Jesus as someone who was driven by a sense of transformation and whose ministry on earth was, from all human perspective, a dramatic failure is in many ways a sustaining inspiration.

Quick change is rarely long-term change or is rarely going to have a long-term impact. I'm weary and wary of quick change, and I think this is a little bit of a problem in today's civil society activism. I stopped judging success on measurable results. I now measure success through the concept of faithfulness. Am I acting in a way that is driven by a deep conviction that this is what God would have me do at this time in my life? If the answer is 'yes', then I think this is success from a Jesus' perspective. Jesus says in the Gospel of John, over and over again, 'I'm doing the work of my father.' And then he invites us to be rooted in him as branches in the vineyard.

Could you say more about the multi-narrative approach and its role in reconciliation?

It's extremely important to amplify narratives from those whose voices have been restricted or suppressed. In Lebanon, our biggest problem is the sectarian political system that's reflected at every level of society. We had fifteen years of civil war and because of the multiple participants in this war, there is no clear winner or loser. And so, no history has been written, and visiting our history is one of the most fearsome activities. I have an 11 and a 14-year-old, and when they study Lebanese history, the last event that they study is from 1947. And you ask people or politicians and they'll tell you it's too dangerous, it might flare up conflict again. We've never dealt with it, and I

who was in the right, that's the job of the legal system. Rather, as a historian of ideas and events, I'm interested in excavating the various narratives of various communities. The reason why I'm interested in that narrative is not because I want to tell the world what exactly happened, but it is because I want to be able to have two different communities recognise that the way of telling the story in this way or in that way actually is the way that collective memory is shaped.

And why is that important?

What really matters today is not so much what happened, but how what happened is remembered. Collective memory is shaping the identity of each community and it's also shaping the way a community interacts with another

“ I've been in the office of bishops and of muftis where I've been told, 'Do whatever you want, but don't get involved in politics ’”

think it's clear from many other contexts around the world, like Northern Ireland or South Africa or former Yugoslavia or even the Israel-Palestine situation, that if you don't deal with your past, you can't move forward. We are only now beginning to have this realisation in Lebanon and people are starting to talk about dealing with the past and the importance of doing that.

What does your approach look like in practice?

We take specific events in Lebanon's civil war and perform a form of archeology. We don't simply pay attention to the meta narrative or to the big picture. The meta narrative is often part of the problem in conflict situations, you're able to brush off the details of conflict and simply say, 'This group is the victim and this group were the main perpetrators.' So, we're opposed to this approach, and we're taking specific events and trying to deal with multiple events each separately where different groups or the same group is at one time the victim and at one time the perpetrator.

We excavate the details of that event, not with an interest in discovering what exactly happened and who was at fault and

community. And that is passed on through generations. You sit with a 25-year-old Lebanese today who was born a long time after the beginnings of the civil war. And they have a way of telling the story of a particular event that they have heard from their parents, or they are completely disinterested in going back to that history because they were told that it's a dangerous, slippery slope.

We excavate a dual narrative. We legitimise each narrative through the current leaders of the communities. We're not interested in resolving the tension between different ways the story is told or to find synthesis in it. We want to find a legitimate narrative for each community, use these narratives to facilitate dialogue between those two communities, and we want to give the opportunity to one community to tell their narrative while the other is listening, and then the other to tell its narrative while this one is listening. And then, regardless of whether they agree with the narrative or whether it agrees with their own, to find ways of developing empathy for the story of the other and to practice active listening.

I believe the teaching of history should be used to develop particular values in our children: active listening and empathy,



Place des Martyrs in Beirut showing gross damage during the civil war in Lebanon, 1975

the ability to hear, to forgive, to confess. Perhaps these elements can eventually lead to a level of reconciliation without necessarily agreeing with any other narrative, but with the possibility of recognising that there is another narrative.

What gives you hope in your work in Lebanon?

A sense that God calls us to be instruments in the process of change rather than just spectators. There are times I look around and I feel completely helpless, but I don't feel hopeless. It's a multi-generational process. I'm pretty sure I'm not going to see this come to fruition before I die, but that doesn't really matter.

My work alongside current activists for sociopolitical change also gives me hope. When we are doing this work, we practice the habits that we can learn from Jesus; communicating this different way of being a leader and a different way of looking at power dynamics.

Power plays seem to be constantly at work in Lebanon...

It's a lot about power. We need to understand that the solution for violence is not violence and that the dynamics of

“ collective memory is shaping the identity of each community and it's also shaping the way a community interacts with another community ”

power are not necessarily about becoming the biggest and the strongest. Jesus's parables of the kingdom, they're all about mustard seeds and salt and small light and leaven and dough. All tiny metaphors, and this is actually what Jesus is calling us to be. That completely and radically redefines dynamics of power and our understanding of what actually brings change and how as insignificant individuals we can actually contribute to bigger change. And I think that's incredibly encouraging and hopeful, and that's the way that Jesus taught us to think about these matters.

Do you think your multi-narrative approach has anything to teach the Church in the UK on issues of human sexuality?

Unfortunately, there's still too much desire to suppress the other on each side

by presenting ourselves as the victims, victims of secularisation and victims of a male-dominated society. So long as we are stuck in those two positions, there's no real dialogue that would lead to reconciliation and some mature way of approaching the situation. It's just too easy for each side to say, 'That's what the Bible said.' The multi-narrative methodology provides for the ability to recognise that, even though it is not wrong to be very convinced of one's perspective, it is mature to recognise that others are also convinced of their own. So, what are we going to do about this? And can we still fellowship? Can we still live together and allow love and kindness to direct our relationships amid disagreement? It's very, very complicated and we need to learn how to reframe the conversation if there is to be hope for reconciliation.



BLACK SATURDAY

MARTIN ACCAD'S MULTI-NARRATIVE APPROACH EXPLORES DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES ON PIVOTAL EVENTS IN THE LEBANESE CIVIL WAR TO ENCOURAGE REFLECTIONS ON COMPETING TRUTHS ABOUT THE PAST

How to read this article

Below, we explore two different narratives concerning the events of Friday 5 and Saturday 6 December 1975, known as the events of Black Saturday. One narrative describes the perspective of the National Movement, a coalition of left-wing and Muslim groups, the other describes the perspective of the Lebanese Front, a coalition of mainly Christian groups. Both perspectives are based on archival sources and interviews with key actors and victims of the time, and validated by current representatives of the relevant parties. The narratives thus represent the dominant perspective on each side.

Background

Since 1948, there had been a significant presence of hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. They resided in camps like Tal Al-Zaatar, Jisr El-Basha, Karantina, and Dbaye, and many were involved in an armed struggle against Israel to regain their former lands. With the Cairo Agreement of November 1969, the Lebanese Armed Forces ceded control over the Palestinian camps to the Palestinian Armed Struggle Command. This drove already mounting tensions to a breaking point, as some Christian groups responded politically and militarily to what they considered an infringement

on Lebanese sovereignty, while many leftist and Muslim groups supported the Palestinian cause in their allegiance to a broader Arab nationalist ideal. Thus, an armed struggle began.

April 1975 is often identified as the beginning of the Lebanese Civil War, associated with the infamous incident of the Ain Al-Rummaneh bus. Over the subsequent months, the conflict developed to involve a confrontation between mainly right-wing Christian groups of the Lebanese Front and its allies, and leftist and Muslim groups of the National Movement and its allies. Black Saturday proved to be a major escalation and sectarianisation of this conflict.

Killings on the Fanar Road

The National Movement Narrative

On the evening of December 5, 1975, five Palestinian militia members were patrolling the area around the Tal Al-Zaatar camp, armed with Kalashnikovs and handguns. They were near the road running down from Ain Saadeh to Fanar, which was used during the night by Palestinian armed groups to transport food and weapons to the camp. It was therefore paramount to keep it secured. When crossing this road at 11.30pm, the five men saw a car approaching; startled, three of the men remained standing in the middle of the road, while the other two were still behind in the woods.

When the car stopped, the leader of the Palestinian group inquired in a Lebanese accent about the passengers' identity. The passengers responded they were with the Kataeb, assuming the others were as well. When the Palestinian continued asking questions, however, one of the passengers started cursing angrily. This made the Palestinians pull the men out of the car and make them lay on the ground. One of the Kataeb men then shouted "if you are Kataeb as we are, why are you treating us in this way?" The Palestinian leader responded: "We are not Kataeb, and the Kataeb need a beating."

One of the other Palestinians then urged the leader to stop wasting time and urged him: "tokho!" meaning "kill him" in Palestinian Arabic. They shot the Kataeb men, although one was able to run away, and then continued on their way to Tal Al-Zaatar camp, which was three kilometres away. Nothing of the encounter had been noticed in the camp, as no gunshots had been heard.

The Lebanese Front Narrative

Late afternoon on Friday December 5, 1975, Eddy Awkar, a member of the Kataeb militia, passed by the party's headquarters in Beirut. He invited his brother David and three friends, all members of the Kataeb, to watch a movie at the Printania Cinema in Broumana in the Metn mountains.

Later that night, after the movie ended at 11pm, the five men returned to Beirut on the road leading down to Fanar through Ain Saadeh, which was generally considered safe as it lay deep within Christian lands. There, they were ambushed by Palestinians based on some intel provided by one of the men's female friends. The Palestinians were aware that the Kataeb were seeking to strengthen their position by improving relations with Syria, and that Pierre Gemayel, leader of the Kataeb, was set to visit Syrian president Hafez al-Assad the next day. Hence, the Palestinians sought to push back by ambushing Kataeb men.

In the ambush, the five men's car was stopped by 15-20 Palestinians, who asked them about their identity in Lebanese Arabic. When the men said they were with the Kataeb, the Palestinians ordered them to step out of the car. The Kataeb men became nervous, however, when they heard the Palestinians pronounce "Kataeb" in their distinct dialect, and when David Awkar was twice hit on his head with an axe, the Kataeb men responded by struggling severely against their captors, who then butchered the remaining four men with axes and riddled them with bullets. David Awkar survived, however, as the extreme cold stopped his bleeding. He was found by Emil Aoun, known as "Zapata," on his newspaper delivery round, and later brought to St. Joseph hospital in Beirut.



5 Palestinians on patrol encounter a car with members of the Kataeb



15-20 Palestinians ambush a car with members of the Kataeb

The Palestinians shoot the 5 Kataeb men



The Palestinians butcher the 5 Kataeb men with axes

Members of the Kataeb Retaliate in Beirut

The National Movement Narrative

The next morning, Bashir Gemayel, son of the Kataeb's leader Pierre Gemayel, ordered his men to kidnap, torture and kill Muslims in revenge for the death of the four militia members killed on the Fanar road the night before.

Around 6.45am, gun shots were heard near the port of Beirut, and by 7am, Kataeb militia were inside the freight building, separating Christians from Muslims working there, killing those who showed resistance. Then, in coordination with two other Christian militias, the Ahrar and Hurras al-Arz (the Guardians of the Cedars), they forced groups of Lebanese, Syrian and Kurdish Muslims to stand facing a wall and executed them. After shooting one group and throwing the dead aside, the next group of Muslims was forced to walk over the dead bodies and was executed in the same way. Many of these bodies were subsequently thrown into the sea.

Bashir Gemayel then further escalated the situation as he commanded his men to descend on Beirut, shooting and setting up many checkpoints, the first one in front of the Kataeb headquarters. At these checkpoints, his men checked ID-cards and kidnapped or straightaway shot any Muslims. In all, more than 150 Muslims died in these events.

In response, members of Lebanese Muslim and Palestinian factions set up checkpoints in West Beirut to kill Christians, and raided Christian homes, although these reactions were not formally ordered by the groups' leadership.

Kataeb leadership orders checkpoints to be set up where passing Muslims, identified as such by their ID-cards, should be killed

The father of one of the dead men leads renegade Kataeb members to set up checkpoints and kill Muslims based on their ID-cards

In total, more than 150 Muslims are killed

150+



60

In total, about 60 Muslims are killed

The Lebanese Front Narrative

At 7am the next morning, Joseph Saadeh, father of one of the five, discovered that his son had not come home. After calling Pano's father to make sure his son didn't stay the night at his friends', he assumed the boys had been kidnapped and went immediately down to the Kataeb headquarters. There he ran straight to Pierre Gemayel, who was preparing to leave for Syria. Having already lost one son a few months before in the Bekaa, Saadeh shouted: "Sheikh Pierre, if my second son Roland is not back, I will commit a massacre, do you hear? A massacre."

As a busy Pierre dismissed him and no one else appeared to care much, Saadeh went to the nearby headquarters of the BGIN, a division of the Kataeb named after Pierre Gemayel and entrusted with protection of the Kataeb headquarters. There, Saadeh was more likely to receive a hearing. He announced that the five men had been kidnapped on the Fanar road by militia from the Tal Al-Zaatar camp. The mention of Tal Al-Zaatar roused the sleeping militia members and an enraged Saadeh led them to an intersection on the Damascus road to install a checkpoint with the purpose of kidnapping people to bargain for the five guys.

A bus full of Shia from Baalbeck was stopped at the checkpoint, and all passengers were kidnapped and taken to a basement in the BGIN headquarters, along with every other Muslim who happened to pass by. The number of kidnapped Muslims totaled 150. When, at 8am, the news arrived that four of the five guys were dead, and at 9:20 that Saadeh's son was among them, the man left the headquarters dizzy from the news. He lifted the bloodstained shirt of his son over his head, performed a primitive death dance, then took his weapon and descended into the BGIN basement. There, together with other militia members, he started massacring the prisoners.

After this, the BGIN, joined by other militias, stormed the neighborhood of the Kataeb headquarters by the Beirut port, setting up checkpoints, stopping cars, and killing all with Muslim identity papers. It did not take long for the majority Muslim West Beirut to respond in kind by capturing and killing Christians in the same way. Meanwhile, the Kataeb leadership and Bashir Gemayel attempted to stop the massacre, and were able to save many Muslims. In total, the killings resulted in the death of about 60 Muslims.



Jan 13, 1976; Beirut, Lebanon; Syria enters Lebanon with the blessing of the Arab League

Questions for reflection

- Is there a narrative you identify more with? If so, which one, and why? If not, why not?
- If you identify more with one narrative, how does the other make you feel?
- If you could have advised Joseph Saadeh on the morning of Black Saturday when he discovered his son had been murdered (see Lebanese Front narrative), what would you have said to him?
- What sort of feelings is Black Saturday manifesting, and which of these still need to be addressed today?
- During Black Saturday, some Christian militia members are known to have saved Muslims from being massacred, and vice-versa. How does that make you change your opinion about these events?

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See full references at truthandreconciliationlebanon.org/en/black_saturday/
www.truthandreconciliationlebanon.org*



UNSETTLING THE WORD

Genesis 16: 1-6. Hagar and Ishmael

IN THE LATEST OF OUR SERIES OF EXPERIMENTS READING THE BIBLE THROUGH THE EYES OF ANOTHER, CAMILLE HERNANDEZ RECLAIMS A PATRIARCHY-TAINTED WOMAN USING TRAUMA-INFORMED THERAPY

Hagar changed the most for me. In the researching, the thinking, the talking about and in the writing of my book, *The Hero and the Whore: Reclaiming Healing and Liberation through the Stories of Sexual Exploitation in the Bible*, my entire approach to Hagar had shifted by the time I sat down to write her chapter.

What changed was me and my perspective, which was significantly shaped by time spent learning about the business of human trafficking and pimping. If you reimagine Hagar's story and her connection to Sarai through the lens of the trafficker-victim dynamic, the story is blown apart.

It is a dynamic I describe at the start of Hagar's chapter and it roots the narrative in an entirely new way. Let's look: "In the world of human trafficking, the trafficker will compel a victim to abuse, torture, and manipulate other victims until she is psychologically dependent on the person in power. This first victim eventually understands the trafficker's violence as affection and adopts the trafficker's goal. The violence the first victim receives from the trafficker is passed down to a second victim; thus, the same cycle of abuse is emulated in this new relationship. The trafficker does not have to put much effort in abusing the second victim because the first victim is emulating the trafficker's action. In the business of American pimping, this dynamic is known as "having

“ binaries are for people who want to pick a team and cheer in the bleachers; they are not for theological insight ”

a bottom bitch.”

Sarai is Abram's bottom bitch. Since the story of her and Abram was told, it has been used to propagate Christian patriarchy. Abram's faithfulness is contrasted to Sarai's doubt. There is such destruction contained within such binary thinking. In the book, I write that binary thinking, "does not take into account the nuance, the trauma, and the trail of suffering it leaves behind. Binaries are for people who want to pick a team and cheer in the bleachers; they are not for theological insight. We get caught in the binary when we focus on these stale interpretations of Abram and Sarai; patriarchal violence is justified in Abram's actions, and the model of femininity is the one-dimensional pursuit to have offspring. Focusing on two competing forces will not carve the way toward a liberation that heals and uplifts. We need nuance to better understand the story and God's path toward an equitable future that looks more like the kingdom of God and less like the raggedy unjust dynamics we currently have in place.”

Hagar is that nuance. Not at first though. She is faceless when we meet her in Genesis. Then we get Sarai's "bottom bitch" move: she suggests Abram gets Hagar pregnant. Look more closely through the lens of human trafficking. Abram is the trafficker, Sarai has been married to him, her trafficker, for decades, marked by barren shame. I can't say it clearer than I do in the book: Sarai trafficking Hagar is reenacting her own abuse because Sarai internalized the violence that Abram allowed to happen to her. Once violence is internalized, it becomes the template for how to engage in other relationships. Sarai, a victim of Abram's actions, is repeating the same abuse of power that her husband had in Egypt twenty years earlier.”

Sarai is in fact travelling a journey common in stories of violence and exploitation, especially where sex is the element being violently exploited. Sarai was used to fulfill Pharaoh's sexual desire, and Hagar was used to fulfill Abram's goal of having an heir. Sarai, so often characterised as the symbol of doubt, is

a victim who, without knowing a better way, chooses the same tactics her trafficker does to obtain his goal. Sarai's desperation prevents her from finding a new way and so she is destined to work within the same system of power that oppressed them.

But I'm also here to talk about hope, about illuminating pathways to hope. The good news? The good news is that while the women of the Bible can't change their course of action, knowing their stories helps us to change ours. As I write in my introduction, I was driven to write this book when, on March 16, 2021, my hope in Christianity fell apart. "Eight people, including six Asian women, were murdered by a Christian terrorist emboldened by the abusive teachings of purity culture. We were already steeped in the escalated levels of anti-Asian hate as we watched our Asian elders brutalised in public. It was devastating. What made it more exhausting was experiencing Christians center the victims' sex work over their lives and how we in the Asian American community were so desperate to humanise the victims. Though it felt like continuous punches in the gut, it somehow made sense to me. Christianity celebrates converting the biblical prostitutes, not protecting them. The theologies that we embrace become our lived realities.

There will always be danger in the spaces where silence and ignorance are favoured. I was trying to get people to see the injustice done to the bodies of Black and non-Black people of color. But the theology limited any hopes of safety or liberation because the theology centered cisgendered men. I realized that I existed to theologise and minister myself into silence. I was a pawn for a Christianity that did not want to see me in anything other than a supporting role. Being Black and Asian made me important enough to be invited to sit at their wobbly tables, but being a woman meant that listening to my opinion was a last resort. I was stuck in the intersection of gender and race; my presence was requested but my voice was not necessary.

When I embraced the divinity of Jesus, I had this belief that holiness meant conformity to whiteness and patriarchy. It took years for me to uproot that lie. As I deconstructed my internalised oppression, I found my voice and the desire to use it unapologetically. I stopped shrinking to assimilate to people, places, and dynamics that harmed me.



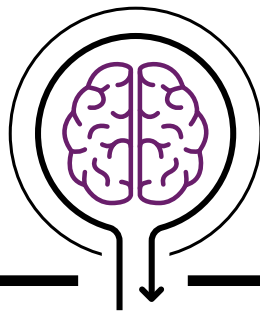
Sarah Leading Hagar to Abraham by Caspar Netscher (1673)

“ while the women of the Bible can't change their course of action, knowing their stories helps us to change ours ”

When I stopped shrinking, I began to connect with Hagar. She witnessed the violence Abram did to Sarai, and her body bore the swollen belly and the painful scars of Sarai's abuse. Sarai shrunk to fit into Abram's world, transferring the violence she received from her abuser onto someone she had power over. Hagar was a victim of this dynamic, but she did not submit to it. Most preaching I've heard on Hagar's story has told me that her shift occurs when she meets God at the well and names the deity El-roi, "the God who

sees" (Genesis 16: 13). I disagree. I think the shift happens earlier, when she flees Abram's dysfunctional household. Before she could know God as the one who sees her, Hagar had to be able to see herself as worthy enough to leave.

When Hagar did the radical act of naming God as El-roi, she not only did it for herself but to proclaim it so that other victims of violence would know it deep within their bones and create revolutionary communities of healing for people who are seen and known by God."



A TIME I CHANGED MY MIND

WHY DID THE BAPTIST, CALVINIST AND ANGLO-CATHOLIC CROSS THE ROAD?

IN OUR AGE WHERE OPINIONS MASQUERADE AS TRUTHS, THIS COLUMN CHERISHES THE HUMILITY REQUIRED TO BE OPEN TO CHANGE. IN THIS ISSUE, KATY HAYWARD FINDS GOLDEN FLECKS - NOT FLAWS - IN OTHER DENOMINATIONS

When I wrote the first version of this article, I was conscious it was a Wednesday night. It was also 2019. Wednesday nights in 2019 meant tomorrow was the non-denominational-but-multi-denominational lunchtime fellowship group at work.

It was a unique group. They were (and hopefully still are) a crazy bunch of individuals and, even by the Christian norms I'd been raised with, not one you would expect to see sat down together discussing the Bible. The group was led by an Anglo-Catholic and a Calvinist. Not exactly two theologies you expect to see together. Yet, while studying our way through Acts, it provided a great balance for our discussion.

Trust me, we needed that balance. Within the group there were mature Christians from charismatic, evangelical, and catholic backgrounds; those who were only at the start of their journey with Christ; and people who were still

“ Those who hadn't grown up as Christians asked the questions the rest of us would never have thought (or dared) to ask ”

deciding whether they could believe in this guy called Jesus. This presented a lot of challenges but also opportunities.

It forced me to ask whether I overcomplicated things and whether I based my arguments on the Bible or on experiences. There was truly no such thing as a stupid question. Those who hadn't grown up as Christians didn't come with the assumptions that us “cradle Christians” brought along; they asked the questions the rest of us would never have thought – or dared – to ask. The result? We were all forced to think through our assumptions, going back to Scripture over and over again.

Denominations and me

I joined this group in May 2018 but my feelings about denominations have changed throughout my whole life. I was raised with a mindset of “I'm just a Christian” as opposed to being Anglican (I was raised in the Church of England). However, it was a mindset sat within the conservative evangelical strand of the Church of England. It's not a surprise that I still had a lot of assumptions as a teenager.

The most prevalent of these assumptions was that if you were a Catholic, then you weren't a proper Christian. I remember talking with my

mum about this while watching *The Royal* because of a Catholic storyline. She told me stories about some of the Christians she had met in Europe. They belonged to the Roman Catholic Church but the way they lived out their faith proved that

which used a lot more liturgy than the low Anglican churches I attended in my late teens and twenties. The use of liturgy often came up as a topic when she was joined by Haley Stewart, a Catholic convert, and eventually they did a

discussions, groupthink becomes a reality while introducing new ideas becomes harder. This applies to how we study the Bible too. Having that one person who looks at a text differently should encourage everyone else to look at it in a different way. This is not a bad thing in Bible study so long as you are always asking “what does the Bible say?”, not “what do my traditions and assumptions say it says?”.

“when everyone in a group thinks the same way, it puts how we study the Bible in danger”

they were Christians; that Jesus came first for them. In the same way, I been part of CofE churches run by wonderful people but nothing in how they lived spoke of a relationship with Jesus. While I cannot know where they were with Jesus, it was a real wake-up call about how attendance at a particular church does not make you a Christian.

In 2013, I switched denominations. Not intentionally. It was more because the Baptist church in town was the only church that had a style of worship I liked and that my parents didn't attend. It was the whole “moving back home after university but not wanting to be a kid again” thing and leaving the church I grew up in was part of that. So, I went from Anglican to Baptist. Not a lot changed, I did struggle with communion at first (when do you have the bread or wine if you're not queuing for it?).

For four years after that, I put any questions about denominations behind me unless I was discussing them with a friend who was in training for Anglican ministry. He'd been raised as an Evangelical Anglican, but his church was more towards the High Anglican/Anglo-Catholic end of the spectrum, so we'd discuss how he was finding his line in the sand. It showed me how even within the same denomination, theology and tradition played a massive role in how we practice our faith.

Ears to hear

During this time, I got massively into podcasts. I started with some evangelical ones but slowly branched off to listen to as many voices as possible. I also sought out ones on simple living. This led me to Simple, hosted by Tsh Oxenreider and various co-hosts. At the time, Tsh was attending an Anglican church in Texas,

whole series on liturgy and the liturgical calendar.

Though I had grown up with liturgy (how else does a 12-year-old accidentally quote *The Greatest Commandment* in a Religious Studies essay but not know you need the Bible reference?), I had never felt any desire to be connected to it. Haley and Tsh's discussions ignited in me two things: (i) a curiosity over the liturgy of the tradition I was raised in, namely Anglicanism, and (ii) what did Catholics actually practice as opposed to what I assumed they practiced. I started to listen to Haley's podcast, *Fountains of Carrots*, and brought myself a copy of *The Book of Common Prayer*.

Though I took a break from both podcasts (I needed to seriously de-Americanise my influences), they instilled in me a curiosity about how Christians from different denominations practiced their faith.

Attending an Evangelical church

By 2018, I was attending an independent evangelical church. Being part of a church with fantastic Bible teaching, a strong community, and a mix of ages including those in their twenties was amazing. I loved my church and if I had to miss a Sunday it left a whole in my life. However, my biggest lesson from that church was that even amongst Evangelicals there is a huge spectrum. Did I agree with everything that was taught? No. Is that okay? As far as I know, yes... so long as there are open discussions when disagreements happen. More importantly, being part of that church taught me the dangers of staying within one part of the Church and never being in discussion with those who interpret Scripture or practice faith differently. Without those

Where it all began

“One holy catholic and apostolic church”

The Nicene Creed dates to the fourth century. It isn't about the Roman Catholic Church. Rather, this line sums up the idea I've come to believe. The word 'catholic' (from the Greek adjective καθολικός (katholikos)) translates to 'on the whole' or 'universal'. In other words, you could read it as “We/I believe in the one holy, whole, apostolic church”.

From where I'm standing, one of the fundamental creeds that has been used across denominations, theologies, and traditions for over a THOUSAND years refers to the WHOLE Church. Not just the people who agree with us 90% of the time. It comes down to this core message:

If you believe that Jesus Christ died for your (and the world's) sins, died on the cross, was buried, and then raised from the dead after three days, you are part of the same Church as me.

I'm not going to say that issues around women in leadership, same-sex relationships, creation care, and evolution don't matter. What we believe matters and following Jesus to the best of our understanding is important. Unfortunately, we're fallen human beings, get things wrong, and hurt each other - denominations are just one consequence of those actions.

What I do believe is that our disagreements should not keep us separated from each other. God did not intend for his Church, his bride, to be divided, arguing to the extent that we can't see the plank of wood in our own (denomination's) eye. Yes, there are differences between the denominations; some of them need to be discussed because they are about the Gospel. But there are very few that are worth the break-up of God's Church.

Maybe, just maybe, if we stopped looking for the flaws in each other's denominations, theologies, and traditions, we would start to see the flecks of gold in them.



SHELF AWARENESS

The books that formed us

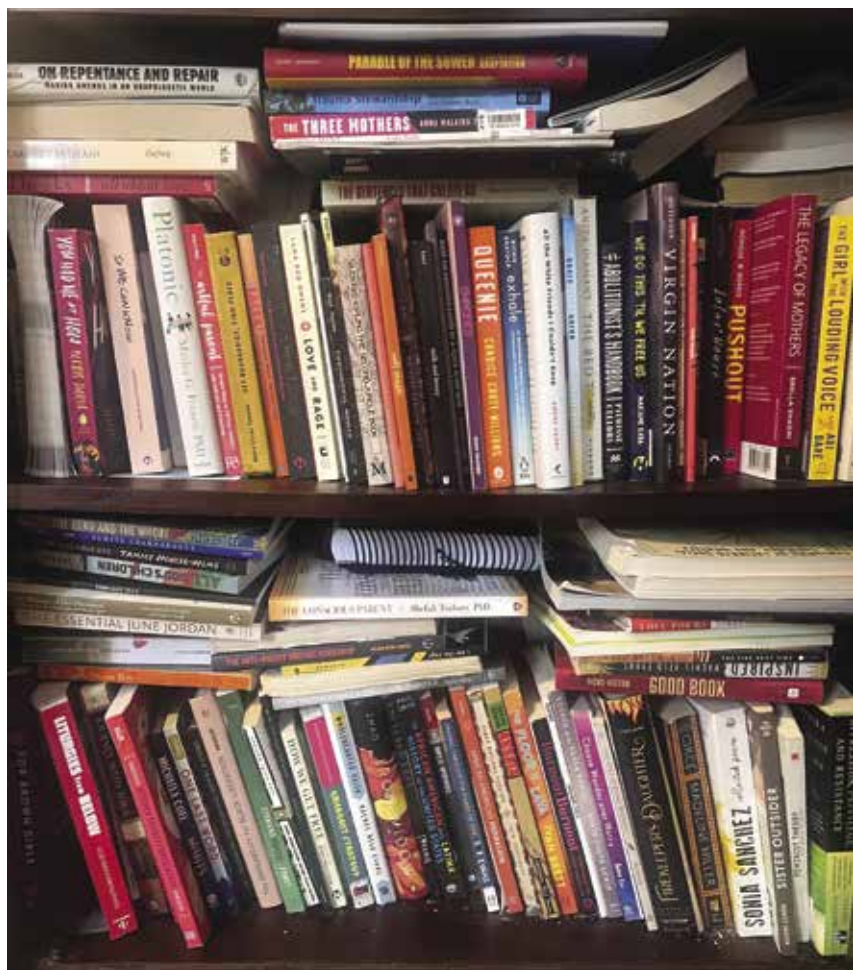
CAMILLE HERNANDEZ TAKES US THROUGH THE KEYHOLE OF HER STUDY DOOR TO PEAK AT THE WRITERS WHO SHAPED HER FAITH AND CRAFT

I want to start with Octavia Butler's science fiction classic, *Parable of the Sower*, published in the nineties and looking ahead to a community struggling to survive the social, economic and political collapse of 21st-century America due to poor environmental stewardship, corporate greed, and growing wealth and health. Butler mines the past and the present to shine a light on the future. It feels like no one was paying any attention.

Toni Morrison "obviously" has to feature and I'm going to choose *Beloved* and *The Bluest Eye*, her first novel about a black girl named Pecola whose longing for blue eyes - the ultimate indicator for her of "whiteness" - is driven by the degrading racist abuse she suffers. It won't surprise you to know that numerous attempts have been made to ban the book from schools.

And then there's Jeanette Winterson's *Written on the Body*. I could talk about Jeanette and I can talk about that book forever, a true genius of queer writing. bell hooks' *All About Love* also needs to be added to the shelf. I think that's four. And I have just read this amazing poetry collection called *Lineage of Rain*, in which every poem I read I was guffawing, I was making a very guttural noise. It's by a Salvadorian American poet who lives in Los Angeles called Janel Pineda, and it was incredible.

Let's see, I can do two more, maybe three. How big is the shelf allowed to be? One is called *Lola's House*, by M. Evelina Galang, an American writer of Filipina descent. It's the heartbreaking story of former comfort women from the Philippines, who were kidnapped by the Imperial Japanese Army and forced in to sex camps. It's a book of testimony, but also a book of witness, of survival, and of



the female body.

Chaneka Walker-Barnes, an amazing womanist theologian just came out with a devotional called *Sacred Self-Care*, and it's been so very essential in my life. Henri Nouwen's *Return of The Prodigal*, which is probably the only other theology book on my list. But actually, theology is in everything we say, do, make, and create, it

has to be, and therein lies the beauty of it. For me, books are a tangible conversation with ancestors. I want to know their stories and hold their stories. There's this big connection between censorship and silencing ancestral knowledge. If you silence the histories, then you don't get to see, know or understand what existed beforehand.

WHO IS YOUR SAMARITAN?



THE ESCALATION OF VIOLENCE AND DEATH IN GAZA AND, CLOSER TO HOME, DEBATE ABOUT LGBTQIA+ IN/ EXCLUSION SEES COLUMNIST NATALIA-NANA LESTER-BUSH ASK SOME UNSETTLING QUESTIONS

I am so familiar with the parable of ‘The Good Samaritan’, as I expect are you, that I often unintentionally disengage and mentally skip to the end. Reading it again, in the current context of LGBTQIA+ in/exclusion in our faith and the escalating violence and death in Gaza, I am sitting with new observations and questions. I am critically self-reflecting on who my neighbour is and cautiously, nervously but honestly, interrogating myself with the Spirit’s guidance to see whether my behaviours and words match my beliefs.

An unnamed, presumably Jewish man, described only by gender and location, is attacked and then ignored, rejected and avoided by leaders within his own religious and ethnic group. That’s all we know; the Samaritan doesn’t check anything about his identity or character before helping him generously and self-sacrificially. The story cuts through theology and cultural norms. Samaritans and Jews generally felt mutual antipathy, believing the other to be deeply, theologically wrong, and sinful. Jews regarded Samaritans as unclean and took efforts to avoid their spaces and their company. Could you be brave enough to ask yourself, ‘Who is your Samaritan? Who do you lean away from or, even actively avoid? Who do you think is theologically wrong or even sinful?’

I wonder how the man from Samaria felt when he first saw the Jewish man; I wonder about his personal theology towards Jews and whether he thought ‘they’ were wrong or sinful or had other negative beliefs about them as people. It is highly likely he held

these views given the prevalent teachings and tensions of both groups at the time. I wonder whether his theology about Jews was cast aside immediately or whether he paused and considered issues of sin and cleanliness, or whether the man deserved his lot before setting his theology aside to act instead on his theology of compassion. It makes me question the gap between my macro-theological and political beliefs and how these play out in the micro-, interpersonal, day-to-day space; where the theories in my heart and mind meet actual ensouled bodies impacted by mine and others’ theories.

I wonder how Christians debating homosexuality and queerness and gender expressions and gender roles affects actual gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender humans made in God’s image. I wonder whether they view Christians as the righteous rejectors who passed by the man in need or the generous, kind Samaritan. I exhale shakily as I open myself up to a Spirit-informed, honest answer. I consider whether theology has been deified over compassion and love; and I fear I know the answer.

A few years ago, I arranged to meet two former students one Sunday; I told them I’d meet after visiting a prominent church in London in the morning (not the church of which I’m a member but one whose teachings and music I have long connected with). We would then spend the afternoon together. Having stayed in touch after I left teaching, I had become a pseudo-Godparent or ‘Aunt’ to them both. They know undoubtedly that I deeply love

them and that I devotedly love and follow Jesus. All these years later I still remember my hurt and shock when, upon hearing the name of the church I was visiting, one of them responded, ‘How can you go there? They hate me’.

Where I see heart-stirring worship, they see Christians who hate who they are, malign their existence and character, in a similar way to how white-majority churches treated Black people with hatred, excluding them from worship spaces years ago under the guise of theology. Thinking of this makes me curious about how the parable may be updated for a modern context. What if the injured, abandoned, hurt human had been attacked because they were trans and looked different (recorded hate crimes against transgender people in England and Wales rose 11% to 4,732 offences in the last year, according to Home Office figures)? Or because they were Muslim? Of course, in the face of physical assault I hope we would all respond with compassion and help, but what of the violence that is invisible but even more damaging than a one-off physical assault? What about the legislation and social exclusion LGBTQIA+ people face in our country, world, and - sadly - our churches? How are we being Samaritans in these no-less important situations and areas of life, regardless of our views on whose genitalia should be allowed to join in sexual union, or whose lives and assets join in marriage?

How are we to challenge ourselves to be good neighbours to people with sexualities or theologies or gender-beliefs we disagree with? How can we transcend our theologies or politics about Israel-Palestine and be good neighbours to Gazans who now have no hospitals to be taken to? Instead of asking ourselves, ‘Who is my neighbour?’, I challenge and invite us to ask ‘Who is my Samaritan?’ - and to intentionally choose to walk nearer to them and offer inconvenient and sacrificial compassion.

ILLUMINATING PATHWAYS TO HOPE

If the voices in this issue have lit a flame within you and you wish to journey further along the path signposted healing and reconciliation, I hope the resources below can be your compass and your guide.



READ

TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION IN SOUTH AFRICA: *Miracle or Model?*

Lyn S Graybill

Graybill's work is indispensable and full of insight, particularly in exploring the Christian roots feeding South Africa's particular formulation of processes for reconciliation. Her account of the TRC's shaping by Christian theology and analysis of Desmond Tutu's profound personal impact on the work, are compelling.

ON COSMOPOLITANISM AND FORGIVENESS

Jacques Derrida

The possibility of reconciliation is unattainable without forgiveness.

So posits Derrida in his seminal work. Although a philosopher not theologian, it is near impossible to engage with reconciliation or forgiveness without time spent in the French-Algerian's company. "...there is the unforgivable. Is this not, in truth, the only thing to forgive?"

THE HERO AND THE WHORE

Camille Hernandez

The subtitle of Hernandez's first book-length work (see p14) tells its own tale: 'Reclaiming healing and liberation through the stories of sexual exploitation in the Bible'. Not for the faint-hearted, nor for those unprepared to have perceived wisdom destabilised, this book doesn't just reclaim, more powerfully, it reveals.

RESOURCE

TRUTH & RECONCILIATION LEBANON PROJECT

www.truthandreconciliationlebanon.org

The brainchild of Martin Accad (see p7) and still in its infancy, this website is home to resources (with many more to come) addressing obstacles within fractured communities that hinder the cultivation of trust and empathy. In the long term, the project's aim is to foster reconciliation and a vision for the common good.

MUSALAHA

www.musalaha.org

Musalaha - Arabic for reconciliation - is a faith-based organisation that teaches, trains

and facilitates reconciliation mainly between Israelis and Palestinians from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds, and also international groups, based on biblical principles of reconciliation. Sign up for their newsletter at this vital time.

WATCH

THE MISSION

"God gave us the burden of freedom. You chose your crime. Do you have the courage to choose your penance?" Roland Joffe's 1986 classic starring Robert De Niro and Jeremy Irons captures the challenge of conscience that confronts us all in a world convulsed by power, greed, and violence like never before.

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