Roots & Wings

The Periodical of the Professional Society of Religious Educators

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Editorial

Welcome to the 3rd edition of Roots & Wings for 2024. Again we present a selection of writings aimed at piquing your curiosity, broadening your experience and encouraging you to grow in knowledge and develop your teaching talents in Religious Education. There is no intentional theme uniting this selection, but we hope there will be something of benefit for each and every reader.

Readers' comments can be sent to the editor at paulf@cie.org.za .

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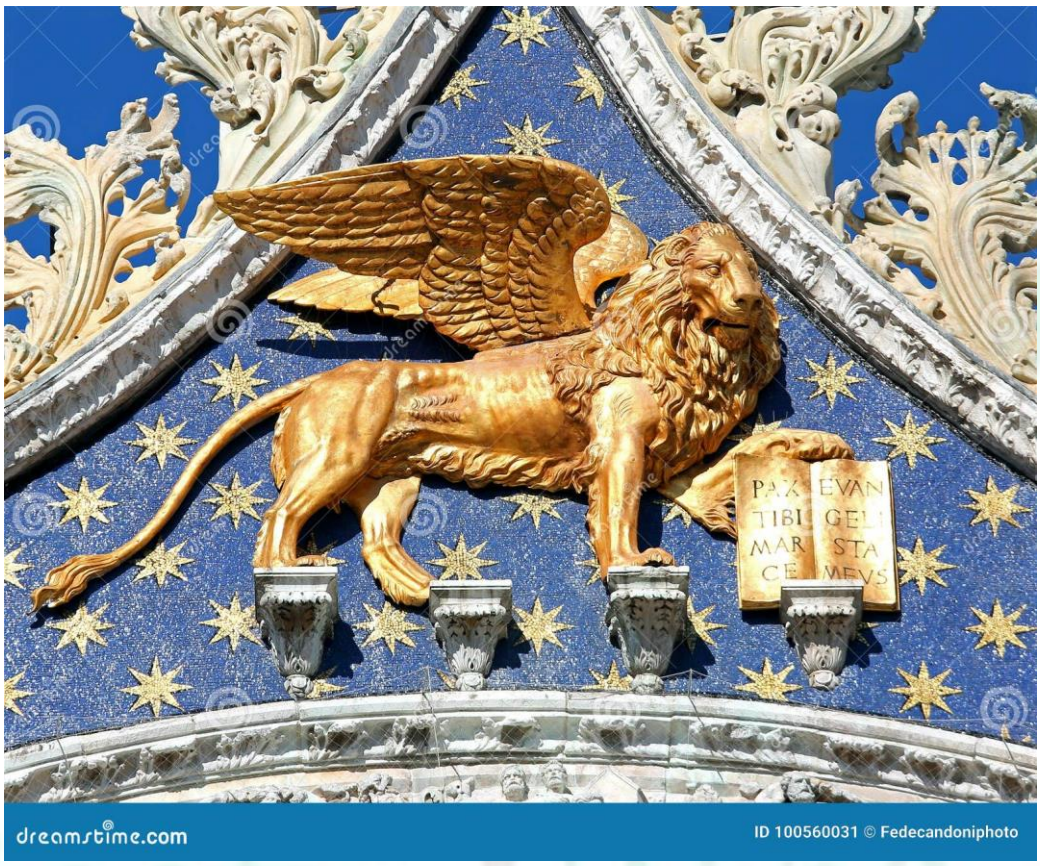
Why is Evangelist Mark symbolised by a lion?

Saint Mark, celebrated on April 25 and symbolized by a lion in art, authored the oldest and shortest Gospel. Little is known about him, though he likely accompanied Saint Peter and Saint Paul.

(Geneviève Pasquier) April 25, 2024



Winged Lion of St. Mark, atop the main entrance on the western facade of St. Mark's Basilica in Venice. (Photo by © Marie-Lan Nguyen / Wikimedia Commons / CC-BY 2.5)

The Gospel according to Saint Mark reveals nothing about its author. Neither an Apostle nor a famous man, Saint Mark remains a mystery. The oldest tradition, dating back to Irenaeus of Lyon who died in 202, asserts that Mark the Evangelist was a disciple and interpreter of the Apostle Peter. He transcribed Peter's preaching and catechesis, particularly aimed at early Christians in Rome. His language, Greek, was the most widespread at the time. His narrative aims to demonstrate the power of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, through the many miracles he performed.

Saint Mark in the Acts of the Apostles

In Chapter 12 of the Acts of the Apostles, there is mention of a "John," also called "Mark" in Jerusalem: "He (Peter) went to the house of Mary, the mother of John also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying." Later in the Acts, we learn that this "John-Mark" becomes a disciple of Paul

(Acts 13:5). "John also known as Mark" accompanies him on his missions to the Gentiles (Acts 15:37). Saint Paul mentions him in his letter to the Colossians (Col 4:10), saying he is close to him in Rome. Saint Peter, in his first letter, refers to him as a close companion: "[The Church] who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you her greetings, and so does my son Mark" (1 Peter 5:13). After Peter's death, Mark's whereabouts become unknown. An ancient tradition claims he evangelized in Egypt and founded the Church of Alexandria.

When did the tradition of associating symbols with the Evangelists begin?

The Church Fathers linked the Evangelists to the four winged creatures from the vision of the prophet Ezekiel: a human face, a lion's face, an ox's face, and an eagle's face (Ezekiel 1:1-14) and to the "four living creatures" of Revelation (Revelation 4:7-8). Irenaeus of Lyon (circa 180) is the first known author to connect the "living creatures" of Revelation with the Evangelists—Mark with the lion, and John with the eagle, in his work "Against Heresies" (III, 11,8).

This symbolic association became established in tradition by the 4th century and it was Saint Jerome who, in his Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, linked the "living creatures" to the Evangelists: the winged man to Matthew, the lion to Mark, the ox to Luke, and the eagle to John. He justified his interpretation based on the opening verses of each gospel: "The first face, that of a man, denotes Matthew, who seems to write the history of a man" (Matthew 1:1-16); "the face of the lion denotes Mark, who echoes the voice of the roaring lion in the desert" (Mark 1:3); "the third face, that of a young ox, prefigures the Evangelist Luke, who begins his narrative with the priest Zechariah" (Luke 1:1-25); and "the fourth, that of John the Evangelist, who, like eagles, soars even higher to discuss the Word of God" (John 1:1-14).

Saint Mark

It is believed that the Evangelist Mark died between 68 and 72 AD, and his followers buried him in a cave. He had been tortured by the people in Alexandria who opposed his efforts to move them away from the worship of their traditional gods. In the 5th century, his relics were moved to a church. According to a legend from 828, two Venetian merchants transported them to Venice, where they were placed in the basilica dedicated to him. Some of his relics are also preserved in Cairo, Egypt, in the Cathedral of Saint Mark, the seat of the Coptic Orthodox Patriarch.

In 1071, the Venice Basilica was placed under the patronage of Saint Mark, and he is the principal patron of the city. His symbol, the winged lion, clutches a book inscribed with: "Pax tibi Marce Evangelista meus," the emblem of the City. It is replicated in several places around the city and erected everywhere the Republic of Venice exerted its economic dominance.

Why is Evangelist Mark symbolized by a lion? - Catholic news – La Croix International (la-croix.com)

Are children really a threat to the environment?

Some young couples say they are opting not to have children in order to reduce their carbon footprint.

(Isabelle de Gaulmyn) January 17, 2024

Is having fewer children the key to saving the planet? As fertility rates continue to decline in France and other parts of the industrialized West, it's a question that shouldn't be dismissed too hastily. While countries like China and India face different environmental costs due to their large populations, there's a direct correlation between the global population level and pollution production. Climate issues are not the same with a planet of 2.6 billion people, as they were in the 1950s, or compared to a population of 9.5 billion that is projected by the end of the 21st century.

This environmental anxiety is particularly prevalent among younger generations. A study published by The Lancet in 2022 revealed that four out of ten young people in the Western world believe that the most effective means of reducing their environmental impact was to have fewer children.

This trend likely stems from the depoliticization of climate issues. By constantly emphasizing individual "small actions" for the climate, the responsibility for the planet's future is shifted onto individuals, when it should primarily rest with political institutions. Rather than young couples abstaining from having children, society as a whole should accept constraints to reduce overall fossil fuel consumption.

Furthermore, this perspective overlooks the value that a birth brings. It's not just about potential financial support for retirement but also about securing a better future. The birth of a child prompts a positive reconsideration of the future. Children inspire adults to become educators and stewards once again. They represent a promise of life.

Do we desire a planet devoid of any human impact? The question isn't about refraining from having children in order to preserve the planet, but rather ensuring that our planet remains inhabitable for future generations.

https://international.la-croix.com/news/editorials/are-children-really-a-threat-to-the-environment/19020

Consider Curriculum: Part 3

Written and compiled by Paul Faller for the Catholic Institute of Education

We began this series considering the nature of Religious Education. We then turned in Part 2 to the question of rationale: why do we insist on it when the State effectively has pushed it to the sidelines? In this third part we consider who is involved, namely the student and the teacher.

This series of reflections is intended to refresh our understanding of the subject and the contexts within which it takes place and to promote discussion among religious educators about the theory and practice of what we might regard as the living spring at the heart of curriculum.

Here is an overview of the series.

Part 1 Religious Education – What is its nature? (Vol 10 No 1)
Part 2 The Rationale – Why do we have it? (Vol 10 No 2)
Part 3 the Student and the Teacher – Who is involved? (Vol 10 No 3)
Part 4 Contexts and Perspectives – Where does it happen? (Vol 10 No 4)
Part 5 Scope and Sequence – What does it contain? (Vol 11 No 1)
Part 6 Methodology – How do we do it? (Vol 11 No 2)
Part 7 Assessment – How do we rate it? (Vol 11 No 3)

The Student and the Teacher

Who is it for? Who is involved?

Spirituality of Youth

Given contemporary culture and the place of religion within it, what is the experience of young people today? How do they relate to the world of religion, and how can Religious Education be a source of life for them in an often difficult world? For Religious Education to be relevant today it must take into account the spirituality of contemporary youth.

More and more people today describe themselves as spiritual but not religious and we need to appreciate the implications of this distinction. Graham Rossiter[1] explains.

The spiritual is the natural dimension to life that includes thinking and feelings about transcendence; ideas about a creator or creative force in the cosmos; human values; sense of meaning and purpose to life; love and care for self and others; sense of stewardship for the earth and its flora and fauna; the aesthetic.

On the other hand

Being religious means being spiritual in a particular way as informed by the beliefs, practices and traditions of a religious group. It usually includes a sense of personal relationship with God, belief in an afterlife and identification with, and participation in a local religious community. The religious is usually informed by a theology; and it participates in a ritual life and prayer, as well as relating to religious symbols, art and music.

Why is it that there is among youth an increasing interest and involvement in the spiritual dimension of life while at the same time a withdrawal from practice associated with a traditional religious community? For better or for worse, the process of secularisation has led contemporary society to this position. Because culture can be "an unrecognized presence, 'a highly selective screen' between us and our world which decides 'what we pay attention to and what we ignore'"[2], it is no surprise that younger generations will assume – in most instances uncritically – the prevailing cultural worldview.

Graham Rossiter[3] provides a summary of the chief characteristics of youth spirituality today. This is, of course, not true for all young people: some tend "to withdraw into highly structured fortresses of resistance to the chaos that they perceive"[4]. A common form of contemporary spirituality Rossiter says is

- *individualistic* rather than communal,
- *eclectic* in the way it pieces together various elements from different sources,
- *subjective* in that it is private and personal without much communal identification,
- *secular* in that it has little or no overlay of religious cultural meanings, and
- *constructed* personally or *selected* from a range of readily available options.

Furthermore, and perhaps most tellingly, authority resides no longer in the institution. The individual rather than the community has become the ultimate *touchstone* for authenticity in beliefs and values. Religious teachings that do

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[1] Rossiter, Graham. 2013. Key Issues for a Relevant Religious Education Curriculum in *The Well*, Vol 6 No 3. Johannesburg: Catholic Institute of Education, p. 10.

[2] Gallagher, Michael Paul. 1997. *Clashing Symbols: An Introduction to Faith and Culture*. London: Darton, Longman & Todd, p. 7.

[3] Rossiter, Graham. 2012. Some perspectives on Contemporary Youth Spirituality; A 'need to know' for Church School Religious Education. *The Well*, 5 (1), 8-12. Johannesburg: Catholic Institute of Education, p. 9.

[4] Gallagher, op. cit. p. 30.

not seem to be relevant, having no perceived connection with life, may simply be ignored, or discarded as an unnecessary burden.[5]

It is not that young people have summarily dismiss religion. They may have no first-hand experience upon which to make a judgement, or they may start from the position that religion may well be of interest and even important for them. Whatever the case, Crawford and Rossiter argue that "they need to be educated in relation to issues in meaning, identity and spirituality that bring them to the *beginning point* of seeing that religion does have something valuable to contribute, and that it warrants study... getting to the spiritual starting point is the task of the compulsory school religion curriculum."[6]

Spirituality of the Teacher

While we may readily acknowledge the importance of being in touch with the spirituality of the student, it is equally necessary for the teacher to cultivate – in Parker Palmer's terms – 'the inner landscape of the self.'[7] After all, 'It is 'who the teacher is that teaches' – to quote a well-known truism.

The Inner Landscape of the Self

In order to explore 'the inner landscape of the self', Palmer describes three important paths that must be taken – intellectual, emotional, and spiritual, and he explains why each is necessary.[8]

> *Reduce teaching to intellect, and it becomes a cold abstraction; reduce it to emotions, and it becomes narcissistic; reduce it to the spiritual, and it loses its anchor to the world. Intellect, emotion, and spirit depend on one another for wholeness. They are interwoven in the human self and in education at its best.*

He goes on to explain the nature of each of these paths.

> *By intellectual I mean the way we think about teaching and learning – the form and content of our concepts of how people know and learn, of the nature of our students and our subjects. By emotional I mean the way we and our students feel as we teach and learn – feelings that can either enlarge or diminish the exchange between us. By spiritual I mean the diverse ways we answer the heart's longing to be connected with the largeness of life – a longing that animates love and work, especially the work called teaching.*

The Longing of the Human Spirit

There is a fundamental restlessness in the human spirit and we try various ways to silence it – sometimes with unhealthy consequences. There is always something nagging, something we long for. But the human person, made in the image of God, has infinite capacity. There is only one way, according to the African saint, Augustine, to satisfy the restless longing of the human heart. In

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[5] Crawford, Marisa, & Rossiter, Graham 2006. *Reasons for Living: Education and young people's search for meaning, identity and spirituality*. Camberwell, Vic: ACER Press, p. 406-7.

[6] Ibid. p. 386.

[7] Palmer, Parker. 2007. *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life*, 10th anniversary edition. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, p. 5.

[8] Ibid. p. 5.

his *Confessions* he writes: "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you."[9] (*Confessions*: Book 1 Chapter1). Blaise Pascal (1623-62), the French philosopher, put it another way when he wrote: "There is a God-shaped hollow in the human heart that nothing else can fill."

Another way of describing our restlessness and our need to find contentment is through the image of journeying. Very often we may feel that we are not 'at home' – with ourselves, with others, or with God. We may even experience a sense of nostalgia, which literally means 'a painful longing for home'. We could therefore say that in order to satisfy our hunger, our longing, we need to undertake a journey home – home to ourselves, home to God, home to reality. The way we undertake this journey is our particular spirituality.

The Contemplative Teacher

Jesus says, "Blessed are the pure of heart, for they will see God" (Matthew 5:8). For Jesus, awareness of God is attached to a certain state of mind and heart, namely purity of heart. Many spiritual writers, in turn, identify this state with contemplation, or full awareness of reality. When our ordinary awareness is reduced or distorted, when it is not contemplative, God dies in our awareness. But when we are fully awake to ordinary experience, "there will be present in it, alongside everything else that makes up experience, a sense of the infinite, the sacred, God."[10]

The Religious Educator

The spirituality of the teacher determines to a significant extent his or her way of teaching. Recall the words of Jesus: "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matthew 12:34). Jerry Larsen offers the following description of the ideal: "A religious educator is the one who delivers and draws out the memories, urges, information and experiences that serve to reconnect a person with what is at the heart of creation, with ultimacy."[11]

In this process, Bert Roebben suggests that the religious educator has a threefold role corresponding to the three broad aims outlined above. In teaching ABOUT religion, the educator provides information as an *expert*. Teaching FROM religion calls on the educator to manage the communication as a *moderator*. In teaching FOR religion, the educator confronts students with lived religion as a *witness,* and here is where the teacher's spirituality comes to the fore.[12]

[9] Book 1 Chapter 1

[10] Rolheiser, Ron. 2001. *The Shattered Lantern: Rediscovering a Felt Presence of God*. New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, p. 23.

[11] Larsen, Jerry. 2000. *Religious Education and the Brain: A Practical Resource for Understanding How We Learn about God*. New York: Paulist Press, p. 115.

[12] Roebben, Bert. 2009. *Seeking Sense in the City: European Perspectives on Religious Education*. Berlin: Lit-Verlag, p.148.

From Palestinian fighter to nonviolence activist

After discovering the power of nonviolent resistance in prison, Ali Abu Awwad has become one of the most iconic Palestinian activists.

(Cécile Lemoine, July 15th, 2024

Ali Abu Awwad (Photo by Claude TRUONG-NGOC / CC BY-SA 3.0)

This is his headquarters. A few shacks, an orchard, some animals... Ali Abu Awwad built the Karama ("Dignity" in Arabic) centre in 2016 with his own hands on a small family plot nestled at the entrance of Gush Etzion, a bloc of 22 settlements that fragment the Palestinian territory between Bethlehem and Hebron and the heart of the Israeli colonial reactor. Dedicated to nonviolence, the centre stands defiantly in its surroundings: 300 meters away lies the most lethal roundabout in the occupied West Bank, the site of dozens of attacks against settlers, invariably ending in the death of their Palestinian perpetrators.

With the build of a rugby player and a resemblance to actor Vincent Cassel, 51-year-old Awwad is one of the most prominent figures of Palestinian nonviolent resistance. Founder of the organization Roots in 2014, which facilitates dialogue between Palestinians and settlers, and then of Taghyeer, the Palestinian national nonviolence movement, he was awarded the Gandhi

Peace Prize in November 2023 for his efforts to bring people together. This recognition honours a journey that did not start peacefully.

Heir to a committed refugee family

Born in 1972, he grew up in a politically active refugee family. His mother, a close associate of Yasser Arafat, is a prominent figure in the Palestine Liberation Organization and heads Fatah in the Hebron district. At 18, Awwad was sentenced to ten years in prison for his involvement in the first Intifada – he served only four years thanks to the Oslo Accords in 1994. It was in prison that the young Awwad became a student of nonviolence. With his mother incarcerated in another facility, they secured a visitation permit after 17 days of hunger strike and three years of negotiations. Awwad puffs on his cigarette: "In prison, we got everything through the strength of our empty stomachs. It's a powerful form of resistance."

Upon his release, he joined the Palestinian Authority as a security officer. The death of his brother Youssef, shot at point-blank range by a soldier in 2002, spurred his activism. "A group of Israelis from the 'Bereaved Families Forum' met with us to offer their condolences. We all cried together. I was shocked. For the first time, I felt equal with the Israelis, at least in shared grief," recalls Awwad. "It helped me break out of the victim's prison I was trapped in and see that reconciliation is possible."

A pacifist fighter

His entire family then embraced the path of peaceful resistance. "I am still a fighter, but now I no longer resist the occupation: I fight to end it," the pacifist asserted, who wants to make nonviolence a part of Palestinian identity: "It's the only strategy to counteract the fear cultivated among Israelis for decades."

The challenge is immense in a society where fighters who die as "martyrs" are elevated to the status of icons, lacking other role models and perspectives, and where any dialogue with the Israeli occupier is synonymous with treason. This reality has only been further cemented since October 7. "We must think about 'sustainability' in our approach," Awwad said. "That's why we envisioned 'nonviolence laboratories' integrated into schools, with a resource centre and trained teachers. We want to include this model in the curriculum."

Awwad acknowledged that he was fighting a heavy and solitary battle. "Nonviolence is the most painful approach. In a violent approach, you fight an enemy. In a nonviolent approach, your greatest enemy is yourself. My life was simpler before," he said with a smile. Does he think about entering politics? "Yes, but through my movement. It must first grow and have an impact. People need to rally around nonviolence." The road is still long, but Awwad believes in it.

I want people to wake up': Nemonte Nenquimo on growing up in the rainforest and her fight to save it

The Indigenous campaigner won a historic legal victory to protect Waorani land in the Amazon rainforest. Now she has written a groundbreaking memoir.

(Alex Clark) 25 May 2024

When Nemonte Nenquimo was a young girl, experience began to reinforce what she had come to know intuitively: that her life, and those of the Waorani people of Ecuador's Amazon rainforest, were on a collision course with forces it would take all their strength and determination to resist. "Deep down, I understood there were two worlds," she remembers in *We Will Not Be Saved*, the book she has written with her husband and partner in activism Mitch Anderson. "One where there was our smoky, firelit *oko*, where my mouth turned manioc into honey, the parrots echoed 'Mengatowe', and my family called me Nemonte – my true name, meaning 'many stars'. And another world, where the white people watched us from the sky, the devil's heart was black, there was something named an 'oil company', and the evangelicals called me Inés."

In 2015, Nenquimo, now 39, co-founded the Ceibo Alliance, a non-profit organisation in which she united with members of the A'i Cofán, Siekopai and Siona peoples of Ecuador, Peru and Colombia to fight for rights over their territories. Since then, she has won numerous awards for her activism, including the prestigious Goldman environmental prize; she was featured in Time Magazine's 100 most influential people in the world in 2020, and has been named a United Nations Champion of the Earth.

Even more significantly, she has played a leading role in key political victories: in 2019 she took the Ecuadorian government to court to prevent it from auctioning half a million acres of land to the oil industry, and won; and just last year, she campaigned in a successful referendum to protect the country's Yasuní national park from drilling. Although women have long been decision-makers in her community, she is the first to be chosen to lead the Waorani people of the Pastaza province. Her commitment and her triumphs have also attracted attention from actors such as Leonardo DiCaprio, now a friend, and Emma Thompson, who provides an endorsement for her book.

Nenquimo, centre, protesting with Indigenous peoples from nations whose lives and lands are threatened by oil drilling. Photograph: Mateo Barriga Salazar/Amazon Frontlines

We talk on Zoom, with Anderson translating from the Spanish that Nenquimo learned as a second language when she left the settlement of Nemompare at 14 to live in a religious mission upriver in Quito. Her relocation to Ecuador's capital was a brutal wrenching that is brought vividly and horrifically to life in the book; "Not another pregnant jungle girl," says one of the mission's staff – a woman – when she arrives. Nenquimo was not, in fact, pregnant, and she speaks of being subjected to repeated sexual abuse while she was at the mission.

How does she feel now about those religious zealots, not least Rachel Saint, the American missionary who lived in Nemompare throughout Nenquimo's childhood, distributing sweets, dolls, bouncing balls and dresses in return for attendance at church services? The first thing she tries to understand, she replies, is that these women came from very different cultures, "and they saw my people as people that weren't wearing clothes, that didn't write, didn't read, that didn't know about the God who died on the cross. And deep down, Rachel Saint surely was convinced that she was on God's path, and that her mission was to steer us away from the devil and the devil's ways. What Rachel Saint didn't understand and didn't care to understand was us: who we are, our identity, our history, our culture, our relationship to the earth. She othered us immediately and thought she could save us and protect us. And in doing so she weakened us and damaged us and hurt us profoundly."

Our people notice the small changes before the big weather events that create headlines for people in cities

Much of Nenquimo's life, she explains, has been a process of grappling with that deception – not merely that of one "evangelical", but of all those "cowori" (outsiders) who arrived on small planes and in helicopters and referred to her people as "aucas", or savages. Frequently, the God the missionaries sought to impose on the Waorani was invoked as supportive of the oil industry, and those who disagreed were "communists", including Amo, a young Waorani man warning that the contamination of the rivers would lead to the death of their fish, a primary source of food. "What will happen when all the fish are gone?" asks the child Nemonte. "Then we will become like the cowori," he answers. "We will only eat chicken and rice. And we won't be funny – we'll never make jokes again!"

Not long after that, Amo is found shot dead; in an intensely moving scene, Nenquimo describes his parents refusing to allow him to be buried near the church, and his father throwing money into his grave. "This is why you're dead, my son. Money. Take it with you."

This is the first book of its kind written by a member of the Waorani people, and it was vital to Nenquimo that – contrary to the experience of being seen through the lens of intrusive missionaries, company executives or anthropologists – her community are allowed to speak on their own terms. Before writing it, she asked for permission and advice from her parents and other elders. She reproduces her father's words in the introduction – "Walk down the trail, then veer off into forest, leaving no tracks" – which she took as an injunction to remember that the world outside is often not to be trusted.

The life of hunting and gathering that has sustained the Waorani people is captured in minute and impressive detail – the making of poison-tipped blow darts for catching fish, the tracking of wild peccary pigs, and the cultivation of fruits and vegetables in her mother Manuela's extensive gardens. The rainforest is seen throughout as a source of sustenance and as a complex ecosystem that must be respected and safeguarded. I ask Nenquimo what, given the encroachment of the outside world among all the Amazonian Indigenous nations, their freedom would look like now.

I want investors and financial institutions and the ones making decisions about where money flows to read this book

She replies that it continues to mean her people "living in a vast and healthy forest and being in connection with that forest. So it means knowing how to go to the river and fish and bring food home for your family; it means going out as a family and making gardens, and knowing you're going to be harvesting several moons down the line. It means knowing how to identify the sources of sickness and then find medicinal plants in the forest, roots, resins, vines, barks, to cure ourselves. It means being self-sufficient in the forest, and in our villages, and being able to make decisions as a people to continue to live happy and healthy existences in our land."

That freedom has for many decades been in severe jeopardy, as Nenquimo points out: “We’re surrounded by oil companies, miners, evangelicals, and an entire global economy that promotes consumerism, promotes accumulation of things and products.” She sees her campaigning work – of which this book is an extension – as a call to action: “That’s why I want the oil company executives and the chiefs of industry to read this book, to read my story, because one of the things that our elders say is that the less you know about something, the more easy it is to destroy it. And that’s also what’s happening in the world, with oil companies and mining companies: they don’t truly and deeply understand the land, the forest, the ecosystem, and how it is providing life to all of us, and how interconnected all of us are across the globe. I want investors and financial institutions and the ones that are making decisions about where money flows, I want them to read the book and this story. I want to talk with them.”

If they do, they will discover an account that is both rich in powerful personal detail and scathing about the oil industry’s indifference to the lives and lands it regards as ripe for exploitation and profit. *We Will Not Be Saved* is presented in two halves. The first recounts Nenquimo’s childhood and her removal to the mission. The second, after she had left the evangelical community and become a teacher, shows her growing awareness and engagement in resistance, which encompasses providing and conserving clean water supplies, mapping territories and educational programmes that centre on women and young people. (“When women have a seat at the table representing their communities and their peoples, everything’s different,” she says.) It was during this time that she met Anderson, who had been living in the rainforest since 2011 and had become increasingly involved in environmental protest. When I ask them to talk a little about how their relationship developed, our language gap is no barrier to me understanding their laughter.

Nenquimo and Anderson with their daughter Daime beside a toxic waste pit of crude oil. Photograph: Amazon Frontlines

Anderson takes up the story: “When she told her father and her mother that she had met me and that we were in love, and that we were building an alliance together to unite the communities and the peoples against the oil industry, her father was very curious to meet me. He asked questions like, ‘But how is a white man going to be able to walk in the forest? Will he complain all the time? Will he ever learn how to hunt animals? If you’re going to have kids, how are they going to learn? How are they going to get fed?’”

Nenquimo’s mother, who specialises in making medicines, worried that he would arrive and promptly get bitten by a snake. Luckily, Anderson’s first trip to meet his future family allayed their fears: “My father said he’s very strong, and that he’s going to be able to first carry all the wild meat back to the house before he learns how to hunt. He can pack a lot of the boar on his back, so that’s good. He’s got strong legs.” Anderson chips in: “And they liked that I laughed a lot and I liked telling stories. And I didn’t complain about anything in the forest. That’s really important for the Waorani.”

Nenquimo is highly attuned to the existential threats to those living in the rainforest, and is quick to point out they are visible far beyond the high-impact weather events that make big news stories. “For my elders and for Indigenous peoples across the Amazon, we don’t need huge devastating storms, biblical floods, years-long droughts to notice changes. Our people see and observe small changes before the big weather events that cause headlines and grab attention for people in the cities around the world.

“For instance, just the other day speaking with my dad, he told me there’s a specific fruit tree that should be fruiting right now in the forest and it isn’t. That tree is what provides food for the squirrel monkeys, for the turkeys and curassows and for a lot of different animals in the forest. So now the monkeys are arriving and all they’re seeing are the leaves of the tree and they aren’t happy and they’re going into our gardens to eat fruits that are not for them – papayas and plantains. My father also told me he’s noticing that the river turtles are not laying eggs on the beaches as they should right now.” Recently, intense river flooding has destroyed crops of yucca and plantain, wiping out sources of carbohydrates for at least the next nine months.

Nenquimo and Anderson, who have two children – their daughter Daime’s birth is chronicled in the book, and a son, Sol, followed – have a vast task ahead of them, and appropriately ambitious plans to match. Over the next few years, their attention is focused on continuing their 13-year fight on the frontlines of the Amazon, building clean water and solar energy projects, installing high-frequency radio communications systems, and expanding a network of monitoring programmes. They are also focused on the movement to return land to those who have lived on it and cared for it for generations – territory that extends to 10m acres that are beset by ceaseless threats from governments and corporations.

Waorani community members gather to send a message to the world: "Our Land Is Not for Sale". Photograph: Amazon Frontlines

"Across the Amazon, Indigenous peoples are the customary owners," says Anderson. "Maybe they don't have land titles, but they're the traditional owners of about half the Amazon rainforest." If the forest is forsaken, he believes, there is no prospect of averting climate catastrophe, and to protect it, allies are needed: "Indigenous folks can't do this alone. They've been swimming upstream against an unrelenting tide of conquest and threats for hundreds of years. And now, there is this amazing alignment of urgency and interest in energy where the climate crisis is real, threats are growing every day, and there's more and more recognition around the world of Indigenous people's leadership on climate, their stewardship, the importance of Indigenous people's protection of their lands and of biodiversity."

Nenquimo is equally clear: "If we continue on this path of little by little destroying forests, destroying rivers, destroying air, the consequences are going to be awful for humans and cultures around the world, for all forms of life. And I want people to wake up."

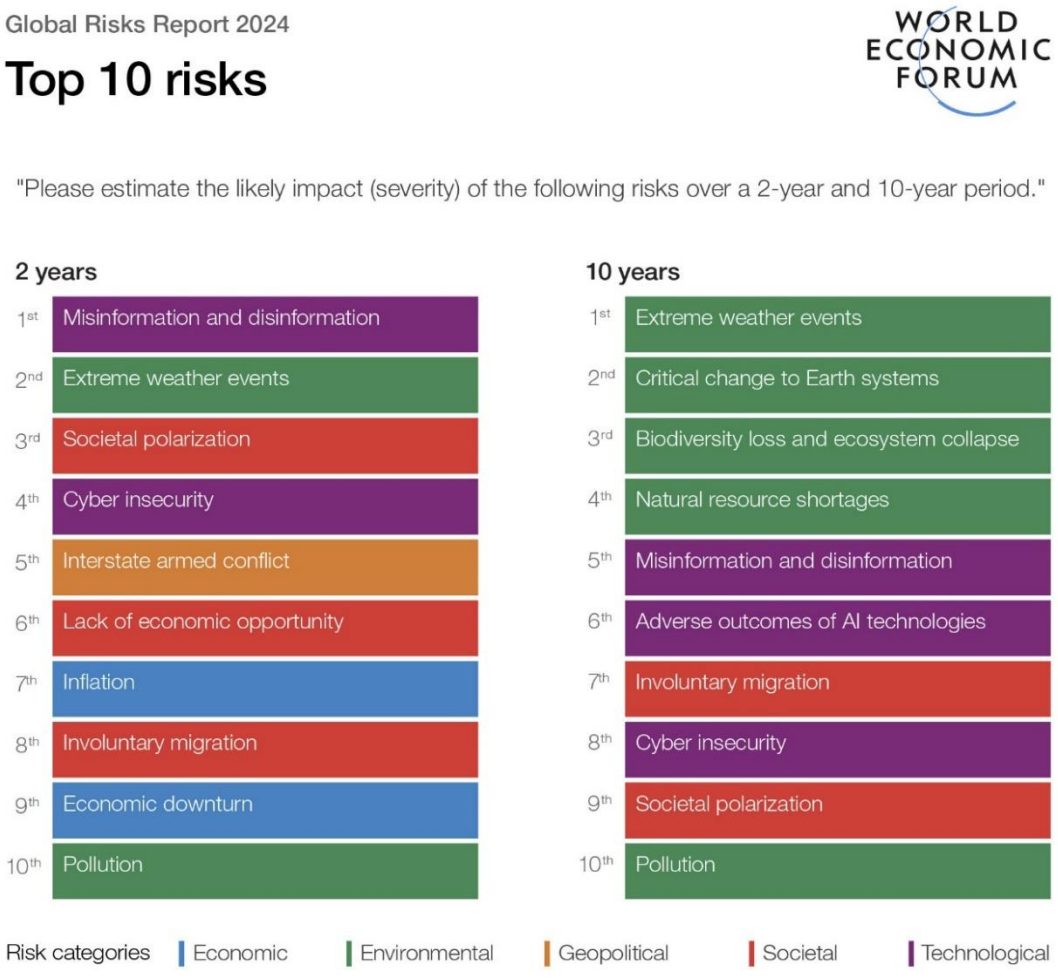
'I want people to wake up': Nemonte Nenquimo on growing up in the rainforest and her fight to save it | Autobiography and memoir | The Guardian

These are the biggest global risks we face in 2024 and beyond

Jan 10, 2024

The cascading shocks that have beset the world in recent years are proving intractable. War and conflict, polarized politics, a continuing cost-of-living crisis and the ever-increasing impacts of a changing climate are destabilizing the global order.

The key findings of the World Economic Forum's Global Risks Report 2024 reflect these most pressing challenges faced by people in every region of the world.



Source: World Economic Forum Global Risks Perception Survey 2023-2024.

These are the biggest global risks we face in 2024 and beyond | World Economic Forum (weforum.org)

Music, a path to the Absolute

Yann Vagneux, a priest of the Paris Foreign Missions living in India, recounts how the lengthy recitation of the Vedas evokes a beyond-time filled with the glory of the Eternal revered by Hindus

November 30, 2023

(Photo by YANN VAGNEUX)

Most religions offer themselves as a unique musical experience that immediately allows one to grasp the spiritual path they propose. This is evident in Christianity, seemingly encapsulated in the melismas[13] of Gregorian chant, providing a taste of surpassing peace. Similarly, the transcendence of the God of Islam is powerfully manifested in the adhan, the call to prayer from the mosque five times a day. And what about the long recitation of the Vedas, evoking a beyond-time filled with the glory of the Eternal revered in Hinduism?

Musical interpretation as a spiritual asceticism

Among the four major liturgical collections of the Vedas (meaning "knowledge" they are the oldest texts of Hinduism), the Samaveda had a remarkable fortune. As its etymology indicates, it is the "Veda of melodies" whose chanting requires a particular ornamentation of verses in Sanskrit. This process, where one pauses on a syllable to vocalize it lengthily, is emblematic of Indian music.

Whether in the Carnatic tradition of South India or the Hindustani tradition in the North, classical Indian music finds its source in the ancient chants of the Brahmins. This profoundly religious foundation also reminds us that in India, music is sadhana, a path to the Absolute. For the performer, it is not only about

[13] Groups of notes sung to one syllable of text

mastering a technique in all its complexity but also of progressing in a spiritual asceticism leading to a greater union with the Divine. Hence, the duty to be initiated by an elder musician who is also a guru, a master in matters of the Spirit.

"I discovered religious India through its music"

For the audience, sadhana consists of being internally in tune with the performer—a pure gift of divine grace that makes each person a sahridaya (good hearted, kind, compassionate), where, in a heart-to-heart (hridaya), all can commune in the same aesthetic ecstasy. This is the ultimate experience of art, as suggested by the Vijnana Bhairava, a sacred tantric treatise teaching the paths of Awakening. "By attentively following the sustained sounds of musical instruments, strings or others, if the mind is not interested in anything else, at the end of each sound, one will identify with the marvellous form of the supreme firmament."

Over time, I discovered religious India through its music, and, in turn, music taught me the silence of the Ultimate. How could I forget so many starry hours in the company of sitar players or humble devotees singing in pure devotion to their Lord? Indelible is the memory of a concert on the Ganges in February 2019. With my friends, we glided on the sacred river as two musicians seated at the bow of the boat performed the Raga Bhairava melody suited for the first light of day. In the winter mist, Varanasi appeared and disappeared like an unreal vision while, on the other bank, the sun rose gloriously, escorted by the flight of migratory birds. In the cosmic splendour, we had become a single internal jubilation, carried away by a wonder already tasting of the eternity of which Boethius wrote, "the total and simultaneous possession of a life that has no end."

https://international.la-croix.com/news/religion/music-a-path-to-the-absolute/18782

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You will set the whole world ablaze.
(Catherine of Siena)

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