



So long as I can see your face

Apparently the French invented it and the French have decided to call time on it. The all-over tan I mean, acquired by lounging on the beach with nothing between you and the sun but factor 2 sun oil. Now it is the thing to have a healthy glow, to show that you have been out and about, not just lazing on the sand. Yet there were still quite a few exposed bodies when I visited a Mediterranean beach recently. This despite the increase in skin cancers caused by over-exposure to the sun. It is perhaps time for a bit of covering up.

But not too much. After all, we need the kind of vitamin D which the sun helps us metabolise. Here again the French are in the lead. They do not want women to cover their faces. Specifically, Muslim women with burkas. I have to confess some sympathy with that policy. The burka, whatever its proponents may argue, is a symbol of the deliberate repression of women. If it were not, then why do Muslim men not wear it? My understanding is that it is not part of Islam, but has become a cultural tradition in some Islamic countries. But why? It is perfectly reasonable to argue that women – and men – should be less provocatively dressed than some are in the West. If a woman chooses to swathe her whole body in garments that cover her, I have no problem with that. But not the face. I need to see the face of the person I am talking to just as they can see mine. Communication is not merely by the words spoken and heard but by the facial features and expression.

But difficulty of communication is only one aspect of this debate. The fundamental issue is that human beings – male and female, black and white – are all alike created in the image of God. They should be proud of that fact. That is why we stand upright. That is why we look one another in the eye. Asking for some human beings to veil their

faces in the presence of the opposite sex in my opinion destroys that equality of human beings before God and before each other.

Now, I am comfortable with living in a liberal Western society and would count myself, generally speaking, a liberal. That does not mean that all cultures are of equal moral value. We hear of some who are so liberal that they think other cultures cannot be challenged, even if they differ radically from their own. This is misguided. “Honour” killings, female genital mutilation, the death penalty – these are sometimes presented as mere cultural differences; but they are morally repugnant. The wearing of the burka is a moral issue which must be challenged. It has no place in the modern world.

Should Britain go down the French route? Speakers on BBC1’s Question Time tend to say that they think wearing the burka is not a good idea, but it would not be right to ban it, “because you can’t have the government telling people what they can wear”. What a slippery argument! Banning the burka is not telling people what they may wear. It is saying; you can wear whatsoever you like, provided that we can see your face. The problem would be with policing it. But there are a number of cases where parliament passed laws which laid down a marker for a new moral standard, even though policing would be difficult, and the culture has changed; for example, the use of racist or homophobic language, drinking and driving.

As always, it will be interesting to see what happens in France.

Michael Kingston

// The fundamental issue is that human beings – male and female, black and white – are all alike created in the image of God. They should be proud of that fact. //

Rev’d Michael Kingston



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The death of a waiter: a killing too commonplace to make a fuss

by Peter Evans

His full name, which not many people knew, was Hamoud Ben Saad. When I heard it on the BBC news, I didn't make the connection to the man I knew. And a television news bulletin was the last place I – or anyone else who knew him – would have expected to hear his name.

To me he was simply Hambi, a waiter at Locale, my local Italian restaurant in East Dulwich.

'I am haunting you, sir,' he told me the first time I lunched there. 'Like a ghost, sir.'

He saw my look of puzzlement. I have trouble with faces.

'It's me, Hambi, sir,' he jogged my memory. 'I serve you at our Locale restaurant in Blackheath, sir. Many times. Now I am here. It is promotion for me. One day I will be manager, I think. No, one day I will be manager, I hope. You see I am learning to speak like a real Englishman ... never to be boasting.'

His eyes were playful, schoolboy's eyes, although there was something much older and maybe far wiser behind them.

A hard-working Tunisian immigrant, determined to get ahead, I'd known him for a couple of years, not well, but well enough to know a little about his interest in sport, especially English football. He was a Chelsea supporter. 'You do not get more English than that, sir,' he smiled.

He loved telling silly, childish jokes: 'What is the highest building in New York City? The Public Library. It has the most stories.'

He'd been married five years, to an English girl called Lorna. 'Like Lorna Doone,' he once told me, proudly explaining that she was the heroine of an English novel he'd been reading. 'The story happens in Exmoor, that's in Devon. I will go there one day. It sounds like an interesting place to visit,' he said, adding that he had many interesting places he wanted to visit in England. 'I have made a list,' he said, promising to show it to me the next time I came in. 'Southwark Cathedral is on it. I hear it is a beautiful place.'

I invited him to come with me to St. Bartholomew's one Sunday. He said he would like that, but like so many other things on his list he simply ran out of time.

He was a tall, good-looking man who, although not naturally gregarious, was instinctively friendly and trusting. He faced the problem of assimilation at an age when most young men are settling down, buying their first homes, starting families. But he was proud of the roots he was putting down in England, the friends he was making, and his steady progress in the restaurant business. His enjoyment of his steadily growing status, the trust his bosses had in him, was palpable.

But the other evening, when I phoned Locale to book a table for dinner, I was told that Hambi was dead.

He was the man whose full name meant nothing to me when I heard it on the 10 o'clock news:

'Hamoud Ben Saad, 34, was found by police officers last night with stab wounds to his upper body in London's Old Kent Road. Mr. Ben Saad, originally from Tunisia, was pronounced dead at the scene.'

According to the police it was a case of mistaken identity, or perhaps he was a victim of a random knife attack. A man in the wrong place at the wrong time.

His death did not stay in the headlines, or sustain the public protests, as have other recent fatal stabbings – the French students, Laurent Bonomo and Gabriel Ferez, or the sixteen-year-old schoolboy Ben Kinsella, brother of the former *EastEnders* actress Brooke Kinsella.

'Hambi's killing was too commonplace to cause a fuss, I suppose. Just another stabbing in a London street, what's that? He was a quiet man, a private man, a fantastic person. There are no vigils for him. No one's demonstrating in the street, no one's protesting at his senseless death. Hambi wouldn't have wanted a lot of attention but I'd like people to know what a special man he was,' his widow Lorna told me.

'We are all going to miss him terribly, and in a flitting, footloose business like ours, that is about the highest tribute a man can be paid,' said a waiter who had worked with Hambi for nearly three years. 'He only saw the good in people.'

It is always shocking when we hear of yet another random death of a young person on our streets, but only when you discover that you knew the victim, even as casually as I knew Hambi, does the wastefulness and sheer futility of the death strike home.

Continued on page 7

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THIS MONTH

New Sydenham Life staff

This month we welcome our new editorial team to Sydenham Life. Dan O'Callaghan is a member of our congregation who has worked in journalism. Gill Daly has done sterling service for Sydenham Life before and we welcome her back. This month we have a contribution from distinguished journalist Peter Evans, and we look forward to more from him. Also joining the team is Archana Dhakal, who takes over the advertising management.

Pet Service

Sunday September 19th 5pm

There was a very good response to our first Pet Service last September, so we are doing another this year. We were delighted by how well the pets behaved during the service, in some cases better than the way some humans behave in church! There were dogs, cats, guinea pigs etc, not to mention the various small mammals and insects who regard the church as their permanent home anyway! We choose this time of year because it is near the feast of St Francis (October 4th), who did so much to foster respect for the whole created world. We see animals and humans as working together to enhance each other's lives. In particular, we celebrate our relationship with our pets.

So you and your pet(s) are most welcome on September 19th at 5 pm. Each pet is invited to receive a blessing as we remember what a blessing they are to us.

Harvest Thanksgiving

Sunday Oct 3rd All-Age Eucharist 10.00 am

All are welcome to our annual celebration of the gifts of creation, and of how human beings work with God to supply our communal need for food, clothing and power. Donations are invited for Christian Aid, which works with those in developing countries to improve their farming techniques and yields. Donations of tinned and packaged foods are also welcomed on the day. This will be taken to the Voluntary Care Centre and used for the benefit of those in need in the Sydenham and Forest Hill area.

Service times for St Bartholomew's

Sundays:

8am: Eucharist 10am: The Parish Eucharist
6pm: Evening Service or Sunday@Six
(Note: 6pm service is monthly, check for details)

Weekdays:

Morning Prayer: Monday – Friday 9am, Saturday 9.30am
Evening Prayer: Monday – Saturday 5.30pm
The Eucharist: Wednesday 9.30am, Thursday 12.45pm

Floodlighting

Sept 1st - Sydenham Society

Sept 15th - In loving memory of Peter Stewart, loving son and brother. Mum and James.

Sept 20th - In loving memory of Colin, sadly missed. Love Mum.

Sydenham Life would like to apologise for not including any floodlighting in the Summer issue.

Do you have an anniversary, birthday or special event you wish to light?

Maybe there is someone you want to remember?

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A member of staff is available for consultation about weddings, baptisms etc on Saturday (10am-11am) in the church.
Vicar's day off: Monday.

Editor:

If you have a comment or contribution to make, please send it to

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Continued from page 3

Too old to be remembered among the toll of those stabbed to death in their teens – but yet not old enough to be judged what sort of man he might have become – he died in the arms of a nearby shopkeeper, also a Muslim. ‘They said their prayer for the rite of passage together. Hambi was not a practicing Muslim but he would have taken comfort in that final prayer,’ said Lorna, who is a Christian. ‘I do,’ she added quietly.

When I told her that Hambi had once told me he was haunting me, she smiled in understanding and sadness. ‘He could really do that,’ she said. ‘He had these little rituals, at home, working in the restaurant - the way he would place your plate on the table, or refill your glass, or move a chair out for you to sit down. They were very special Hambi habits. When he was alive, you hardly noticed them. Now he’s gone, I realise that they were part of him, like the childhood prayer he still said before eating, the little habits that made up his life.’

Hambi was a decent, ambitious, hardworking young man with his whole life before him. ‘I am just waiting to see what gifts the future will bring me,’ he told me when I once asked about his ambitions.

In normal events, I might have forgotten his face as easily as I had the first time I walked into Locale in East Dulwich.

Now he will haunt me, like a ghost.

Peter Evans

From the Parish Registers

Baptisms

July 18th **Alice Hales**

July 25th **Thalia Jinadu**

August 15th **Dennicia Dunkley**

We welcome them into the fellowship of faith

Weddings

July 3rd **Ayoola Olaadoyinbo and Odiriverere Obukohwo**

July 23rd **Abdelmadjid Djennad and Michelle Lwin**

Those whom God has joined together, let no one put asunder

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Michael and Charlotte Kingston celebrate their Silver anniversary on St Bartholomew’s Day

In one of life’s strange coincidences Michael and Charlotte Kingston celebrated 25 years of marriage on St Bartholomew’s Day - Aug 24th.

The couple were married before Michael became vicar of St Barts so it is purely coincidence, but the congregation all enjoyed some wine and cake at the end of the service and reflected on what is known about St Bart’s life - not a lot, as Michael’s sermon had informed us.

I had hoped to include a picture in this issue but technology and time restraints have gotten in the way so I will try and include one in October’s issue.

I’m sure many will join me in wishing them a happy anniversary and many more years together.

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