



The Corrymeela Podcast - Season 2

Thanks so much for listening to The Corrymeela Podcast. You might like to discuss the episode and the accompanying questions with friends, family, or a discussion group, or just use them for your own writing and reflection.

If you're part of a group, be mindful and considerate of one another's willingness to engage in the discussion - leave space for people to keep their reflections to themselves if they want to. You might also want to agree on some general principles to stick to, like: everybody's invited to speak once before anyone speaks twice, and: try to assume that everybody is speaking with good intent.

In group discussions at Corrymeela, we seek to locate political and religious points of view within the story of the person speaking. If you're gathering as a group, consider how to create a sense of connectedness among you.

You might like to choose one or two of the Very Short Story questions that we like to put to guests at the end of each episode. Your answers to these can be one sentence long, or a few. Belongings are plural, as are identities and nationalities. So feel free to respond to these story prompts in a way that reflects your own story.

- What's something important that you've changed your mind about?
- Are there books, poems, films, albums, works of art etc that you've turned to again and again?
- Tell us about a time when your national identity felt important to you.
- Tell us about a time when you felt foreign.
- Is there a very short story you can tell us about a time when you said something that surprised you?
- Has anyone ever said that you were disloyal to one of your cultures or identities? Why?



Season 2, Episode 4. Dr. Jude Lal Fernando reflection questions & episode transcript

1. How familiar are you with the story of Sri Lanka's past (and present)? Among the events and the complex dynamics that Jude described, was there anything which particularly stuck out for you?
2. Jude describes a number of very particular moments in his lifetime that served as 'Moses moments' and led him to take specific action in response. Have there been moments in your life (or perhaps events that have taken place on a local, national, or international level) that you would describe in the same way?
3. Jude talks about 'nationalisms' in the plural, saying that some forms should be condemned and opposed, whilst others should be supported and embraced. How do you reflect on that? What might the latter kind look like?
4. Jude talks about the concept of parity of esteem as it applied in both Sri Lankan and British-Irish peace processes. What do you think is the significance of parity of esteem? What are some of its complexities?
5. What did you notice about Jude's reflections on the roles of faith, religion, and secularism, on a personal level, as well as on a political/ global level?

Dr. Jude Lal Fernando is a campaigner and peace activist who coordinated the People's Tribunal of Sri Lanka. He teaches interreligious theology and ethics at the Irish School of Ecumenics in Trinity College Dublin, and directs the Trinity Centre for Post-Conflict Justice. His publications include *Religion, Conflict and Peace in Sri Lanka: The Politics of Interpretation of Nationhoods* (Lit Verlag, 2013), and *Resistance to Empire and Militarization: Reclaiming the Sacred* (Equinox, 2020).

Welcome to The Corrymeela Podcast: exploring stories and ideas about conflict, peace, theology, and art.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

Hello, my name is Pádraig Ó Tuama and you're listening to The Corrymeela Podcast. With me today is Dr. Jude Lal Fernando. He's an activist and campaigner and is director of the Trinity Centre for Post-Conflict Justice at Trinity College, Dublin. He teaches religion, conflict, and peace at the Irish School of Ecumenics there. Jude, thanks very much for joining us.

Jude Lal Fernando:

Thanks, Pádraig. Thanks, thanks.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

As we begin, Jude, I'm curious as to whether there's any experience or friendship in your childhood that you feel prepared you for the work that you're doing now?

Jude Lal Fernando:

Yes, of course, you know, I was born in a hundred percent Roman Catholic village in the western coast of Sri Lanka. It was an island. So my childhood was almost spent in an island. And I remember when I had to enter the secondary school, I had to cross the bridge, which was a scary one- a wooden bridge. And when I went to the city of Negombo, which is closer to the international airport, I saw [a] panorama of others- it's a metaphor really. In my classroom, I found Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, with me, studying together. And in the city, there was the mosque, Hindu temple; of course, full of churches, as it was a Catholic city. And in the fishing island I lived, there were two languages: Sinhala, and Tamil. And my mum took me for mass every Sunday - even though we spoke Sinhala: my mother tongue is Sinhala - every Sunday we went to the Tamil mass. Once a month, we had the Sinhala mass. And none of us at home spoke Tamil, but the language was not alien, but familiar. The pronunciations were not difficult, but quite, quite easy. And so I was living in this crucible of different linguistic groups, at same time, amongst religions, but in an island of a Catholic village.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

That's so interesting, that in a certain sense the island of course had the languages and the identities etc, of broader Sri Lanka, but it does seem like it was separate, as well as being representative at the same time; some particularities that were distinct, as well as some things that were representative of broader Sri Lankan identities and language and religion and, and differences.

Jude Lal Fernando:

Yes, you're right. The island had its own culture, it had its kind of a sectarian feeling; at the same time an openness. On the one hand, it gave you a sense of belonging as a community; on the other hand, you were always moving in between- between the two language groups: Tamil and Sinhala, Sinhala and Tamil. Of course, we had to go to the city, that was inevitable. For all the goods we had to go to the city, to the market.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

In terms of - this is my ignorance here - but what population, what percentage of the population would you say is fluent in both languages?

Jude Lal Fernando:

Barely, you know, a very insignificant percentage. Now, I learned Tamil in- started learning Tamil in 1983, when Tamils were attacked in broad daylight: massacred, raped, their properties were set on fire by the Sinhala racist groups, fully aided by the Sri Lankan state and its security apparatus. And this was a Moses moment for me, as they say; I could hear the divine and the human speaking in my heart, amidst fire. The only question I raised was: why oh, God this bloodshed? So this was my Christian upbringing that I was formed of course, interestingly by Irish Catholic missionary nuns, who taught us catechism. There's something that I inherited from them (you know, despite the conservative approach to sexuality, and women, and all that): examine your conscience everyday in the evenings. So I couldn't bear killing. I couldn't bear men assaulting women. Even- I couldn't bear parents, you know, hitting children. This was part of my Christian conscience. So I started learning Tamil since 1983. It's not a blessing to learn Tamil, because, why do you learn the language of the other who is considered to be racially inferior by your own, own community in a way? The community is in a way formed by the nationalist, racist ideology. I strongly hold on to a position: no community can be racist without political power. So that was how, gradually, the island of Sri Lanka became racist throughout the decades. So I decided- I was helpless, I was a teenager in 1983. I knew no politics, but I knew ethics and what my conscience prompts me to do. So I decided to learn Tamil, the language of the other. But that was a Moses moment for me.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

Yeah, I can hear, yeah. I mean, you're already- I was going to ask yer to bring us into some of the dynamics for people who may not be familiar with Sri Lanka and its history; so you know, you're already mentioning religious differences, linguistic differences, ethnic differences- I wonder would you be able to give a broad brushstrokes sketch just in a couple of sentences for anybody that could just

orient them to the opening sentences really of understanding some of the dynamics of conflict there; you've already been speaking about power, as well.

Jude Lal Fernando:

Yes. As all of you know, Sri Lanka is an island just down south of India. And its numerical majority is Sinhala Buddhist. And then the numerical minority is the Tamil community who are Muslims/Hindus. Christian community represents both the Sinhala language group and the Tamil language group. Christianity came to the island as part of Portuguese, Dutch, and British colonial conquests. And, er, so I am a Sinhala Christian, and the state gradually became Sinhala Buddhists. The numerical majority formed the state, and when you have a kind of democracy which is defined solely by the will of the majority, when the majority is ethnoreligious, it leads to a level of racism. But to put this level of racism in a historical context, I must say that the Sinhalese and the Tamils had been living on the island harmoniously for over two millennia. It was in the 19th century that the British colonial rule amalgamated distinct regions on the island into one unitary political structure. Why? Because it was a strategic location for the British empire to rule India, as well as to confront any other imperial power in the Indian Ocean. The value of the island lies not in its ancient Buddhist and Hindu civilization, nor in its idyllic landscape, but in its strategic significance, particularly for the global powers even now. So, coming to racism, what happened was, the ancient texts were recovered by the colonial officers and they were translated into English from Pāli, before they were translated into local languages Sinhala or Tamil. And these texts were reinterpreted whereby the history of the country was portrayed as a perennial conflict between the Tamils and the Sinhalese, and the Sinhalese were portrayed as a superior race compared with the inferior Tamils. So my subtle, you know, political analysis here is: the truth was, it was the British empire that was occupying the island, but the Tamils were portrayed as invaders who have lived with the Sinhalese over two millennia. So the foundations of the current ethnoreligious, racist conflict, were laid during the colonial period.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

Yeah. And, what I can hear you saying too is that it was kind of rewritten back into ancient sacred texts to kind of imply that the conflict that was being exploited in terms of a divide and conquer strategy by colonialism, that that was written back in as if to say that this conflict was indigenous locally, so as to stir up conflict between two communities, ethnicities, religious/ linguistic groups there, perhaps in order to distract attention from, from what the real conquest and power was.

Jude Lal Fernando:

Exactly, that's exactly what happened, which has happened in other parts of the world as well, here in the island of Ireland also. So what you can see here is erm...neither the Sinhalese nor the Tamils were aware what was happening. And there was a social engineering project that was unfolding. And my

Sinhala education, particularly its historical- its lessons on history, lessons on literature, were filled with Sinhala racist, nationalist rhetorics. And as a child, I was brought up believing that the entire island belongs to my community. And it was in 1983 when I saw racist attacks against the Tamils, my worldview was challenged.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

Was 1983 a particular beginning to something, or was it the latest outbreak of some community tension and violence? 'Cause you mention it particularly as this 'Moses moment', you called it earlier on. What was it nationally, and why was it in that particular instance that it seemed to arrest your imagination and attention, and your moral action as well, Jude?

Jude Lal Fernando:

1983 was the largest anti-Tamil pogrom in the entire history. Prior to that, there were many other pogroms. In fact, Sri Lanka gained independence in 1948. Even before 1948, the British colonial government sponsored Sinhala settlements in the Tamil areas in the north and east of the country. And at that time, Sri Lanka had a state assembly where you found a Sinhala Buddhist elite as ministers under the colonial government. And then you could see the British colonial government was sponsoring regeneration of ancient Buddhist sites and presenting these sites as Sinhala Buddhist sites, whereas in the pre-colonial period, particularly prior to the medieval period, Buddhism didn't have a specific language affinity. There were Tamil Buddhists, there were Sinhala Buddhists; so much so, Tamil Buddhist monks have contributed immensely to the procreation of Buddhist thought and propagation of Buddhism. So, you could see, the history is rewritten with the regeneration of ancient Buddhist sites as Sinhala Buddhist sites.

And once independence was declared, the first thing that the newly independent state did was to disenfranchise hundreds of thousands of Tamil-speaking plantation labourers who work in the tea plantations (you get Ceylon tea here in Europe). And of course, these labourers were brought from South India during the British period; they worked in the plantations, and later on, these plantations were extended, and the Sinhala elite were also invited to join the plantations. And, so this is the first anti-Tamil discriminatory act as far back as 1948 and 49. And in 1956, Sinhala - that's my mother tongue - was declared as the only official language of the entire island, depriving most of the north and east Tamils of their state and public sector employment. And the Tamils were influenced by Gandhi's non-violent satyagraha model, and they followed Gandhi and protested non-violently; since the 1950s up until the 70s, all these protests were brutally crushed, where so many Tamils were killed. And you see, it was in the late 70s that this non-violent movement transformed itself into an armed mode, which was led by the Tamil Tigers. So it was at this period where there was this massive anti-Tamil pogrom in 1983, and that became again a turning point in the relationship between the Tamils and the Sinhalese;

at the same time [a] turning point in the Tamil search for justice, where thousands of Tamils who were affected by the racial attacks joined the Tamil Tigers. So that, that was why 83 is quite important.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

My name is Pádraig Ó Tuama, and you're listening to The Corrymeela Podcast. With me today is writer and activist and academic Jude Lal Fernando. Jude, I'm interested in asking you another question about you. Because, after completing your degree, you worked on a project where you shared scholarly work with fishermen and fisherwomen and workers and teachers. You know, you hold in yourself this particular joint interest in academia as well as activism, and these aren't opposing forces in you: the each feeds the other. I'm interested in how it is that you got motivated into that and how it is that you hold those things together and continue in that work.

Jude Lal Fernando:

To be honest I had never dreamt of becoming an academic. That was not my - as we say in a Christian language - calling. I was a campaigner, a peacemaker, a human rights activist. But it was always accompanied by an analysis, because I believe very strongly that our praxis should be enlightened by a critical reflection, and our critical reflection should lead us to practical action. But there has to be this symbiotic relationship between critical reflection and our commitment to justice and peace. And what really er, you know, affected me mostly was that I am Sinhalese. And the Sinhala oppressed social classes also had their own grievances, for example in terms of poverty, in terms of unemployment, in terms of restrictions for social mobility. The colonial economy did not change. It was maintained by the post-independent ruling classes. For example, those who were English-educated could access better jobs, whereas those who were vernacular-educated were highly unemployed. And Sri Lanka had one of the highest literacy rates, and many joined the universities. And what was so paradoxical in the history of the Sinhala communities: yes Sinhala was declared as the only official language in 1956, and many could enter the universities; and then there was a huge, huge level of unemployment among the Sinhalese. And I see, those peers of mine who entered into the university like me, ended up jobless. And I, because of [being] a Catholic, a Christian, having right connections with the institutions, could learn English, and had a different pathway, but always my conscience was troubling me. I'm a privileged Christian here. On the one hand, I am a privileged Sinhalese, and the Tamils are attacked. On the other hand, I'm a privileged Christian among the Sinhalese where I can get a better job compared with those who are vernacular-educated, who happened to be my peers in secondary school. So, this experience led me to - and my colleagues who are like-minded - to some kind of an analysis of the economic structure, political structure, and how it affected ethnic religious relationships, and how this kind of economic political structure is maintained by the international system of states and the global powers. For economic reasons, and mainly in the case of Sri Lanka, as I said, for political reasons.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

There are so many ways within which, you know, one conflict zone around the world is compared to another, and sometimes that can be enlightening and sometimes that can be a burden, or it can be distracting or unhelpful. You've lived and worked in Ireland now for a number of years. I am curious about what the conversation, as you think about the overlaps of questions to do with colonialism and language and religion in Ireland, and how the conversation between that and Sri Lanka have got anything to say to each other; any pieces of wisdom, any warnings, any, any kind of erm serious fault lines in terms of any comparison... I'm curious for you to bring us into the conversation about that in terms of your analysis as both an activist as well as an academic.

Jude Lal Fernando:

Thank you, Pádraig, you know, in Sri Lanka, there was a peace process, which was started in 2002. And that was the most historic moment in the entire history of the country because, for the first time, both parties were treated with parity of esteem. As you know, this word, this term is quite important to the Good Friday Agreement.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

Totally. And just for anybody who isn't familiar, parity of esteem is the idea that, in the context of Ireland, those people who wish to see the continued existence of two jurisdictions - Northern Ireland as part of the UK, and the Republic of Ireland as an independent country - those people who wish to see that continuing the way it is, and those people who wish to see reunification, that each is given equal political weight and dignity and imagination in the voting process and in the population and citizenship experience. And so that phrase has also been used in the Sri Lankan peace process.

Jude Lal Fernando:

Yes, and our struggle was in Sri Lanka to maintain this parity of esteem. The global powers, which wholeheartedly backed the Irish peace process - the USA, of course Britain, being part of it, and most importantly, the European Union - to maintain the parity of esteem acted differently in the case of Sri Lanka, particularly the UK and the USA. There's something very important, Pádraig, we should mention here, talk about here. The Sri Lankan peace process was heavily backed by the European Union. But heavily opposed, even though they have a ritualistic appreciation of both parties coming together, made by the UK and the USA governments they were in practice preparing the Sri Lankan government for the future execution of the war. And in 2003, we organised - I and my colleagues: a Christian group of activists and campaigners, and a secular group of poets, artists, lawyers, human rights activists, student leaders, peasant leaders, trade union leaders - we organised a quite massive peace meeting. Where around three hundred Tamil people, and three hundred Sinhala people - who were they? Artists, again, dramatists, singers, poets, academics, faith leaders - they gathered for three days in the heart of the

capital city to explore commonalities between the historical struggles of the two groups. Tamils had their historic national grievances, and the Sinhala social classes also had their historical grievances. The Muslims had, then the plantation Tamils had- all of them are present. And this was the beauty of the peace process. You get my point?

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

I do, totally.

Jude Lal Fernando:

Because when the political leaders decide to talk - of course, even before they decided to talk, we were acting - but then there was a moment where real political power dynamics change, they decided to speak peace, of course. And then the spiritual society got very vibrant. And then in 2003, Washington decided to have a crucial meeting of the peace process in Washington. What happened? One part is excluded. That's the Tamil Tigers, and that destroyed the parity of esteem. Up to then, six rounds of peace talks were held - in Berlin, in Oslo, in Japan and Ireland - and the peace process crash landed, but the ceasefire agreement went ahead. And then again Hawaii-based 26 US high profile naval officers came to this strategic harbour in Trincomalee, in the Tamil areas, to carry out a security assessment study. And that study was handed over to the Sri Lankan ministry for defence. Which was leaked, part of the report was leaked to the mainstream English newspaper, which outlined the recommendations that the Hawaii-based US security officials gave to the Sri Lankan defence ministry. One was to upgrade the Sri Lankan military, to modernise the weaponry, and then to capture some of the parts that the Tamil Tigers were controlling closer to the harbour. And all these three were implemented by 2007. And as the result of upgrading and modernising the Sri Lankan security apparatus, [a] thousand Okinawa-based US marines were brought to Sri Lanka in 2007. So then the gates of hell were opened. You could see European Union consistently backed up until 2006. But under immense US and UK pressure, European Union banned the Tamil Tigers. So you could see, sidelining one party really emboldens another party, and the human cost was inexplicable. And by 2009 May, according to UN reports, at least 70,000 Tamils were massacred.

So my move to Ireland took place for one main reason. That was to in a way see what I and my other colleagues who loved peace in the country of my birth could do within the European Union. Because when the British and the American governments were adopting a militaristic option in Sri Lankan context, European Union, based on its principles of shared sovereignty, which was applied to the Northern Ireland peace process, how we could really, you know, mobilise different political leaders in Europe in the European Union, to protect the Sri Lankan peace process. So that was, that was, you know- when the space was getting more and more narrowed in Sri Lanka, I was exploring what we could do in Ireland, what we could do in Europe. So, as a result, I and my Irish colleagues here in Dublin

founded the Irish Forum for Peace in Sri Lanka, in 2007. So that is how I connect my activism and arrival to Ireland, and then scholarship, and particularly, I must mention the Irish School of Ecumenics, which is a fruit of the Irish peace process from an ecumenical perspective. It expanded itself to interreligious and international peace perspectives. And I chose Ireland - I could have gone to another European country - but I chose Ireland, because, however imperfect it may be, it is on a journey.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

You're listening to The Corrymeela Podcast. I'm Pádraig Ó Tuama, and with me today is Dr. Jude Lal Fernando. Jude, I'm really interested to talk to you about nationalism. And I wonder if you could bring us into a few of the avenues of your own thought about that word and how it manifests itself and what it is that you think can be behind public ideas of nationalism and the nation state.

Jude Lal Fernando:

There are two great scholars I love to read and I always, you know, quote in my classes and writings. One is Aijaz Ahmad from India, a political analyst and a historian; the other one is, you know, British origin Terry Eagleton. And both of them say one thing about states and nation states and nationalisms. I would like to use the word nationalisms in plural. Of course, the word nationalism rings alarming bells to many Europeans, because of its use in the case of National Socialism in Germany and similar other far-right, you know, movements. But both Aijaz Ahmad and Terry Eagleton say one thing: we do not judge nationalism or a nation state because it is nationalism or because it is a nation state. We judge nationalism and nation state based on its gender formations, class formations, social formations; its national character, whether it is a pluralist or it is propagating a homogenised culture, and its geopolitical align[ment]. So, this tells me that certain forms of nationalism should be really, condemned, and opposed- in the biblical language: denounced. They become idols. But other forms of nationalisms have to be, in a way, supported, embraced. I still hold onto - maybe this would sound quite, quite an old-fashioned position - I still hold on to the position that there are oppressed nations and the oppressor nations. And there is high potential in the oppressed nations to dismantle absolute sovereignty. It is absolute sovereignty which really really creates an idol like the golden calf in the bible, and promotes a security agenda at the expense of all the other human concerns. So oppressed nations today do have a potential; I don't mean to say they are saints/they are angels. But oppressed nations do have a potential. They do have the potential to not only resist their oppression, but also to understand the oppressed social classes of the other nations, maybe even within the oppressed nations.

This is what Martin Luther King was trying to do. He, coming from an African American background, deeply understood his people's oppression. And it is that realisation at one moment led him to extend full solidarity with the Vietnamese. And so was Malcolm X. I always, whenever I talk about King, I always talk about Malcolm X also because there is a select view, select view memory of history in the

civic rights movement: they glorify Dr. King, and then they vilify Brother Malcolm, and it feeds into Islamophobia also, in an indirect way. So my assessment of nationalism goes in that direction, Pádraig.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

We're going to be moving to a close but I am curious about the ways within which you refer to religion in terms of a geopolitical frame of referencing. You know, you speak about biblical language in terms of denouncing something and other ways that you, you reference other aspects about how religion and politics overlap each other. It seems like your experience as, as a Catholic from such an interreligious country has given you a fluency in terms of the political power of religion and religious affiliation in geopolitical dynamics. Um, do you think that many people continue to recognise that; does it seem like religion is something that should just be ignored, 'cause you continue to bring it into your conversations as a frame of reference. Is it valued, the kind of, the fluency in religious narrative and the capacity to look at religions just as a demonstration of political power?

Jude Lal Fernando:

The most predominant - particularly in the western hemisphere, which is also becoming somewhat predominant in the urban centres in other parts of the world - the most predominant understanding of religion is Eurocentric. There's a simplistic debate: does religion cause violence, or does it bring peace? And, if you go further after 9/11, religion was seen as the cause- mainly Islam. And so, we could see, the portrayal of the so-called category of religion, understanding of religion has been quite Eurocentric, hegemonic. And at this moment, it serves mostly against the Muslim world. Islam is seen as, not amongst- not as one of the major religious traditions in the world, but as the most religious of all religious traditions. That's a quite a western caricature of Islam, I would say. So that's my first point with regard to your question. The second one is: for the most oppressed people, majority of them on Earth, faith is a power. I'll put it this way: to believe in God above everyone is to challenge the empire and whoever controls/dehumanises human beings and destroys the Earth. So I see faith in God as a life force that really energises, imbues hope [to] the poorest of the poor, the oppressed on Earth. To see it as oh, superstition, blind faith, see it as radical is quite a colonial, Eurocentric, imperialist, you know, I would say, device.

In Europe, it is true that our age is becoming very secular. But what is secular at the end of the day? What is religious at the end of the day? Raimon Panikkar - one of the pioneers of interreligious dialogue, whose father was an Indian Hindu, mother was a Catalan Catholic, who lived in India for many decades - says: we have to use secular and religious interchangeably. There's a sacred secularity and a secular sacredness. What the modern secular consciousness gifted us was an appreciation of this world, which conservative versions of religions discourage: this world is passing, this world is sinful, this body is sinful, women's bodies are more sinful. So- but the modern, secular consciousness made us aware: no,

this world is not going to go anywhere. It is real. It's beautiful. The body is beautiful. And then there's a new appreciation that little by little emerged from the religions themselves to resist secularist ideologies which reads human bodies as tools of exploitation; men for exploitation, women for super-exploitation. And then the Earth as a piece of land, a tree as something that can be priced, a river that can be converted into a dam. So you could see within faith traditions, there's a new way to counter these secularist instrumentalisation of the human body and the Earth. So I would say, we need to overcome this artificial dichotomy.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

Dr. Jude Lal Fernando, thank you so much for coming on The Corrymeela Podcast.

Jude Lal Fernando:

Thank you, Pádraig. Thank you. Thank you so much for your time. And the questions.

The Corrymeela Podcast is created in partnership between Corrymeela and FanFán. It's produced by Emily Rawling, with mixing, editing, and theme music by Fra Sands at Safeplace Studios, and presented by me, Pádraig Ó Tuama. The podcast is generously funded by the Henry Luce Foundation, and the Community Relations Council Northern Ireland, and the Irish government's Reconciliation Fund. Thanks to them, and thanks to Corrymeela's friends and supporters, and thanks to you for listening.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

So Jude, what's something important that you've changed your mind about?

Jude Lal Fernando:

Yeah, I was, I was a narrow nationalist in the country of my birth. I always thought the west is bad, and we are good. And when I realised that my own community is becoming racist against the other community, I came to an awareness that we are not the best. And then there were journalists who came from Europe to help us and I remember the Quakers sent their peace activists to our centres, to be witnesses in times of abduction. And I realised there's humanity across the borders, whether they are white, or black, whether they are Protestants or Catholics, whether they are Muslims or Hindus, whether they are, you know, from east or west.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

And in a sentence, are there any works of art that you've turned to throughout your life that have been a sustaining force for you?

Jude Lal Fernando:

I'm a great fan of books, I would say, if you want to consider, and poetry. Amongst the poems, I love Pedro Casaldáliga's poetry very much. And also, Eduardo Galeano's *Open Veins of Latin America*. And then poetry of Dorothee Sölle, the most eminent feminist theologian from Germany.