

Bahram: a holy sacrifice.

Born 1955, martyred 1980, age 24.

A life given for Christ

Saint Paul prays in Ephesians: ***“I pray that you, being rooted and established in love may have power, together with all the saints to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love in you with all the saints.”***

To know love demands a community. To be a disciple of Jesus, for most of us, is a serious calling to wholehearted pursuit of love. It carries the wonderful possibility that we can grasp the love of God, deep and high. You can't do this on your own, it is something that happens among 'all the saints'. We need all our different experiences of faith in God, to make the whole. Love is shown to us not through individuality, but in community, in solidarity.

Bahram was born in Iran and grew up as an Anglican Christian – his dad was Iranian born, baptised aged 18, and became the Anglican Bishop in Iran and presiding Bishop of the Province of Jerusalem and the Middle East. His mum was the daughter of Christian missionaries and was herself born and raised in Iran. Bahram was raised in an environment of questioning and open-hearted pursuit of truth within the frame of Christian faith. He was an extraordinarily talented young man, and his education in the UK from the age of 13 helped him to develop his talents in music, in drama and in intellectual pursuit. His zest for life, his humour, his mimicry were balanced by his love for service, freedom and his passion for Persian history, language and culture.

He read PPE at Oxford and took a Master's degree in the USA. Returning to Iran to meet his obligations in national service in 1979 his talents were put to use in the University of Tehran.

He knew that he faced danger because of his faith, his family and his loyalty to the Persian church, but he did not want to flee. After the Iranian revolution of 1979 the small Anglican church in Iran was the object of hostility: some saw its Iranian members as criminal deserters from the religion of their birth. Anglican schools and hospitals were seized or closed by revolutionary fundamentalists. One of the clergy was murdered in his study and there was an assassination attempt on Bahram's father's life. There was widespread anarchy and chaos. Bahram was murdered in May 1980, a scapegoat, a sacrifice, a ransom, for his family and his Christian community. No one was ever arrested or charged with his murder.

Reflecting on Bahram's death, his father spoke of going through Good Friday like Jesus' mother Mary. He said: ***‘we are not particularly interested in the earth which is over the grave, but in what may grow out of it. The fruits of the Spirit. I wonder how much we will witness the effects of his sacrifice.’***

Bahram died when his sister, Guli Francis-Dehqani, 11 years younger, was just 13. Later, she served as Bishop of Loughborough, 2017-2021, moving on to be the Bishop of Chelmsford. Of her brother, she says: ***‘I think he wanted to live with integrity and loyalty to his Persian identity but also the way in which he was shaped by his education in the west.***

In Christ we have transformation. Not denying our past or belittling its influence, we can acknowledge the complexity and make peace with the past and all that has shaped us. Bahram was creative, joy filled, honest. I am moved still by the contact we keep with his Oxford friends, who are now turning 70. They remember how much he had to give, and his desire to live life to the full. Bahram is remembered as a modern day martyr of the church in Iran. Somehow, Christianity continues to be present in Iran and the Anglican Church has survived against all odds. That, for me, is a miracle. They and we continue to tell Bahram's story.’

In Loughborough today, many Iranian Christians have become a part of All Saints Church. From dire circumstances in Iran and as migrants to the UK, these members of the All Saints community have found new hope.

Inspiration flows from Bahram's life and death. Most disciples of Christ are never tested in the ways he was and can only admire the courage and faith he found.

In what way is Bahram himself like Christ? Jesus said 'the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.' Matthew 20:28

Is it possible that in his tragic death, even there, the depth and breadth of the love of God in Christ can be seen? Surely, yes. Does his sacrifice express a vision of hope even today? Surely, yes. Could anyone find some inspiration from his story, his life, his death? Surely, yes.

Lat Blaylock, May 2025