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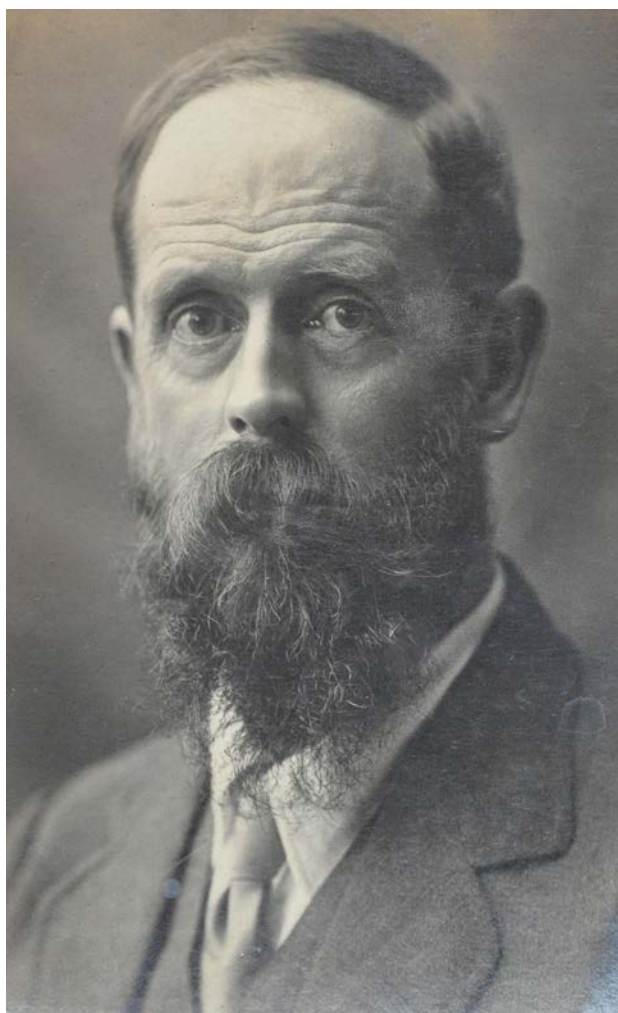
Practicing Faith & Reconciliation Through Friendship: Remembering Charles Freer Andrews (1871-1940)¹

Bernardo A. Michael & Saramma Michael

The stranger who sojourns with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.

[Lev 19:34 RSV] 34

Within your beautiful works I see him, the All-beautiful...He who can remind us of God, he alone is the true friend.
Sarojini Chowdhury to Charles F. Andrews, 5th February 1934²



Charles F. Andrews, 1871-1940

Image Courtesy: *National Archives of India, Delhi.*

Introduction

E.M. Forster once said, “If I had to choose between betraying my country and betraying my friend I hope I should have the guts to betray my country.”³ The idea of friendship projects a range of timeless human emotions and values, some prized and others abhorrent viz. love, trust, compassion, reconciliation, betrayal, and loss. Throughout human experience, and across cultures, this theme of friendship has found expression in historical accounts, literature, poetry, religion, ritual, and performance. The men and women who forged these ties of friendship had to cross differences of culture, ethnicity, caste, class, race, nation, religion, and gender in order to build relationships that were based on dialogue, mutual trust and respect. One could argue that the human capacity to build friendships holds great promise in our troubled and broken world, especially in the twenty-first century.

The subject of friendship has found expression in cultures around the world within a variety of contexts.⁴ In the thirteenth century we hear of the renowned friendship of four of the great Sufi saints in Punjab and Sindh (in present day Pakistan)--Lal Shahbaz (also called Jhulelal), Bahauddin Zakariya Multani, Baba Farid Ganjeshakkar, and Makhdoom Jahanian Surkh Bukhari.⁵ Then there is the case of the intimate friendship between the Sufi poet Jamali (d. 1535)

and his favorite pupil Kamali. There is the instance of the notable collaboration and friendship between mystics such as the Jewish French Mirra Alfassa and the Indian nationalist Sri Aurobindo. Alfassa’s lifelong spiritual collaboration with Sri Aurobindo resulted in their development of a culturally

collaborative “spiritualist” critique of imperialism and the founding of a devotional ashram (community) in Pondicherry, South India.⁶ The theme of friendship has formed the subject of romantic accounts such as the stories of Shirin and Farhad of the Persian Empire, Laila and Majnu of the Arabian Desert, Heer Ranjha of the Punjab, or even Romeo and Juliet of Shakespearean fame. Even today, men and women from communities along the Himalayan belt in Asia celebrate life-long formal friendships called *Mit*.⁷

The Bible records the longstanding friendship of David and Jonathan comes to mind, albeit the suspicions of the latter’s father, Or consider Christ’s ultimate sacrifice in order to make more complete God’s friendship with human beings. The early Church itself struggled to come to terms with questions of diversity and inclusion particularly those concerning the question of friendship between Jews and Gentiles. In the twelfth century, a Cistercian monk, Aelred of Rievaulx, wrote a popular text on *Spiritual Friendship* that exists between God and human beings. Within the Christian tradition, the theme of friendship is a recurring one.

In the United States despite deep racial divisions, instances of biracial friendships exist. Take for instance, the case of white entrepreneurs like Gerrit Smith and John Brown who established longstanding biracial friendships with the famous black abolitionists like Frederick Douglass and James McCune Smith. These men shared a millennial vision of a new world in which all humans were free and equal. They established model interracial communities, formed a new political party, and even embraced violence in the pursuit of their goals. Their friendships generated one of the largest extant biracial correspondences in the Civil War era.⁸ Melba Patillo Beals, one of the group of Little Rock Nine students who desegregated schools in Arkansas, mentions one Dr. George McCabe, his wife Carol, and 4 children whose unstinting mentoring and support helped her to navigate the difficulties of her childhood.⁹ Or perhaps consider the tragic case of Viola Liuzzo who in 1965 left her family in Michigan to help civil rights activists to travel to Alabama and participate in the civil rights movement. Liuzzo’s expression of solidarity with the cause of African-Americans in the south resulted in her death at the hands of 4 Klansmen that year.

Practicing Friendship

No one valued and pursued the idea of friendship more than Charles Freer Andrews (1871-1940), an Anglican priest, educator, and activist who spent much of his time in India working shoulder to shoulder with Indian nationalists in their struggle for independence from British rule. A close friend of the great M.K. Gandhi, he travelled and wrote extensively on a variety of subjects ranging from reflections on his faith to the study of labor, and important personalities like Gandhi and Sadhu Sundar Singh. Andrews’ remarkable life of friendships allowed him to establish deep and abiding friendships with diverse people drawn from a variety of racial, ethnic, gender, and religious backgrounds.

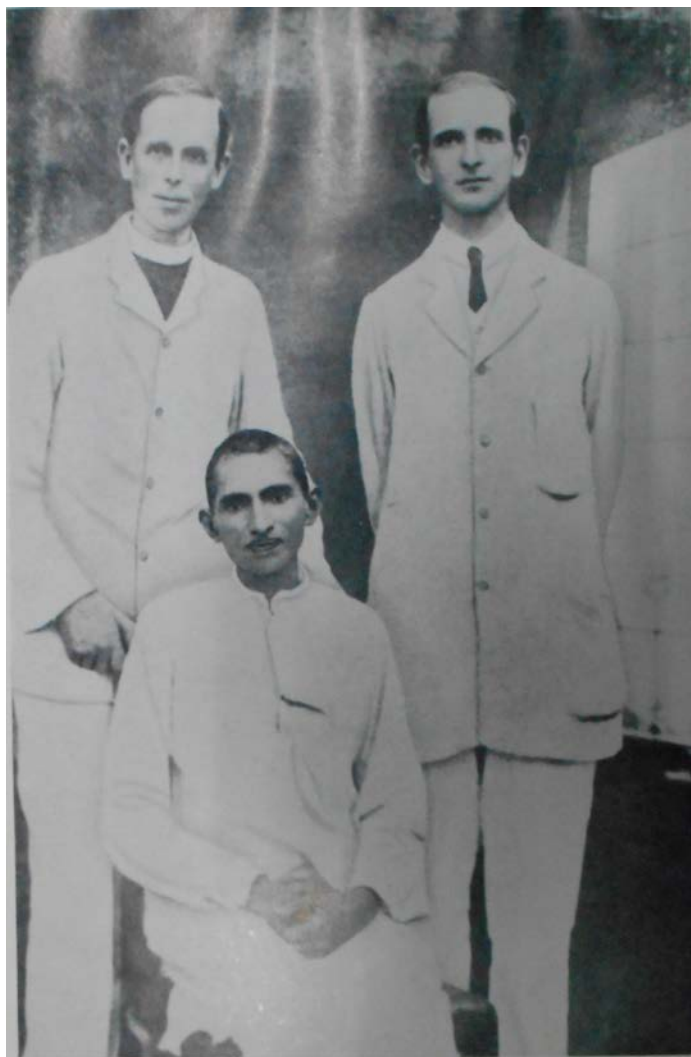
While Andrews’ seems to have possessed this unique knack of being all things to everyone...he never hesitated to display his Christian faith through quiet acts of compassion, courage, and service. His contemporaries admired him and close friends like Gandhi would use his initials (CFA) to generously claim that it stood for “Christ’s Faithful Apostle.” A tireless worker his remarkable life began with a deep, personal, and passionate commitment to Christianity that allowed him to question the privileges of his largely middle class upbringing and reach out to those who were less fortunate or just different with humility, compassion and generosity. In characteristic fashion he revealed this when he noted: “I have been blessed with wonderful friendships. They have sprung out of the love in my heart for Christ, the friend of friends. Among the dearest of all are Muslims and Hindus. Their love has been spontaneous and generous-hearted that it has brought with it a wider perspective surmounting all conventional barriers of race or religion. I have found myself learner at the feet of saints whose life-surrender to the will of God was far more wholehearted than my own.”¹⁰ His Christian faith inspired him to seek forgiveness without hesitation and embarrassment. When hundreds of innocent protesters were killed by British troops in the North Indian city of Amritsar in April 1919.¹¹ Andrews was deeply troubled and visited the city on a reconciliation mission to perform *prayaschitta* (repentance) on behalf on his countrymen. He came across a young Sikh village headman who had been wrongly flogged in public. Andrews impulsively stooped down and touched man’s feet asking forgiveness for the British who had committed this wrong. Shocked

by Andrews' behavior and moved to tears, the embittered man embraced Andrews. Andrews believed that "it was truly the constraining love of Christ that carried me forward. His too was the divine power to heal and to bless. A thousand, thousand times Christ's own love had forgiven me, a sinner; He had thus made me to understand what forgiveness means to the spirit of a fellowman."¹² Andrews' friends, irrespective of their political, religious or social backgrounds, admired and remembered him for his Christian faith, even though Andrews had a long standing distrust of the zealous activism of many western missionaries. Andrews preached through his life.

Andrews' humility allowed him to value his diverse friendships and learn much from them. From his dear friend and the Vice-Principal of St. Stephen's College, Susil Kumar Rudra, Andrews was able to learn much about India and his own biases as a white Englishman.¹³ About Rudra he would say this: "At such a time of rapid change and new experience this pure, whole hearted love of one so good and noble as Susil was a gift for which I thanked God every day. He was the humblest man I had ever known. At the same time he carried the quiet dignity of a true greatness into every little act he performed. No one spoke lightly in his presence, yet none ever felt embarrassed or afraid. His tenderness of heart became proverbial. If Newman is right in his definition of a gentleman as who seeks never to inflict pain, then Susil came up to his ideal. Right onward to the day of his death, through a period of over of twenty years, his love for me remained unchanged and unchangeable."¹⁴

His friendship towards Indians allowed him to be free of the patronizing attitudes often displayed by white officials and missionaries. In some instances, his behavior simply shocked his white contemporaries as for instance, when he publicly stooped low to touch the feet of Gandhi when he first met him in South Africa in 1915 or when he championed Susil Rudra's candidature for the coveted post of Principal at St. Stephen's despite the fact of him being an Indian. Again Andrews had to this to say about Rudra: "Susil was in this respect the greatest help of all, and he gradually weaned me from these racial and imperial ideas whenever he saw them appear above the surface. He knew me so well, and loved me so deeply, that he never became impatient with me when some hidden racial or religious arrogance showed itself in what I said. He had lived with Englishmen long, and understood them."¹⁵ Andrews could only conclude that the "barriers were now being broken one by one which separated me from others, and I was led on from one act to another."¹⁶

Andrews was also an active opponent of the racism he saw all around him especially in the elements of European rule and especially the "disgrace of a color-ridden Christianity" In South Africa it was glaringly evident. He wrote, "From the first day when we landed in Durban the racial prejudice was glaringly apparent.....It is an evil which is like a poisonous infection, spreading over an otherwise healthy body.....The Christian Church, in some of its branches, was itself infected."¹⁷ When his friend Gandhi was denied admission into a church Andrews lamented that it felt like that Christ himself had been rejected. His admiration for Gandhi was immense and he said: "In Mahatma Gandhi himself, whom I thus met in South Africa for the first time, this sovereign power of winning victories through suffering was apparent in every aspect of his hard life of pain. Our hearts met from the first moment we saw one another, and they have remained united by the strongest ties of love ever since. To be with him was an inspiration which awakened all that was best in me, and gave me the high courage, enkindled and enlightened by his own. His tenderness towards every slightest thing that suffered pain was only a part of his tireless search for truth, whose other name was God."¹⁸



C.F. Andrews (standing left) with M.K. [mahatma] Gandhi (seated) in South Africa in 1914. Standing to the right is Andrews' friend W.W. Pearson (1881-1923), an English teacher who worked in India.

Image Courtesy: National Gandhi Museum & Library, Delhi.

Andrews opposed all forms of exclusivism based on caste, class, religion, ethnicity, and gender. "Also I must recognize, without any reserve whatever, the Spirit of Christ present in those who did not call themselves Christians. I had to stand on their side and not with those who were keeping alive the spirit of racial and religious exclusion. There must be not a single vestige of the caste spirit left in my own heart. I must be wholly on the side of God, who is no respecter of persons."¹⁹ This attitude would push him to reach out to the poor and even his enemies. "It was in Fiji in 1917 that he was first called Deenabandhu, friend and brother of the humble."²⁰ Day after day he visited the plantations, taking notes and collecting evidences, studying official records and statistics and listening to the people." For the next twenty years the Brother of the Humble was to be found everywhere. He travelled India and the world, in his worn and shabby clothes, often with scarcely the price of a meal in his

pocket, but driven by his compassion for those whom Tagore had called "the poorest, the lowliest and the lost."...he lived among railwaymen who were on strike because of unbearable conditions; among Oriya villagers left homeless by floods; among the frightened people in a cholera camp in East Bengal; among the millworkers of Madras and the untouchables of Kerala."²¹ Always he pleaded their cause and reported faithfully what he saw. "He carried his life in his hands-on one night journey in East Africa he was dragged out of the train by angry "whites" and almost murdered. He refused to report their names to the police, refused to retaliate."²² Again, he never forgot the face of one of the Indian workers in Natal, South Africa, who had come to seek for help and protection from Gandhi in his Phoenix Ashram because he had been beaten while working in the plantation. He had suddenly shrunk back in fear when he saw Andrews even though he tried to reassure him. That look of fear on the poor man's face haunted Andrews for a long time and he wrote his feelings down later in a poem, *The Indentured Coolie* when he was in Simla, in July, 1915.

*There he crouched,
Back and arms scarred, like a hunted thing
Terror-stricken.
All within me surged towards him,
While the tears rushed.
Then, a change.
Through his eyes I saw Thy glorious face-*

*Ah, the wonder!
Calm, unveiled in deathless beauty,
Lord of sorrow.*²³

Conclusion

Charles Freer Andrews died on April 5, 1940 after a period of illness. It is reputed that Andrews on his deathbed uttered the following last words, “God has given me in my life the greatest of all gifts, namely; the gift of loving friends. I would acknowledge again what I have acknowledged in my books; this supreme gift of friendship both in India and in other parts of the world.”²⁴ Many would recall the unique quality of friendship that Andrews had possessed. On the day of his burial, the great poet and Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore (whom Andrews respectfully referred to as *Gurudev* or teacher) spoke of their friendship in terms of a divine provision that came to him and the people of India from God. “...One day as if from nowhere....there was poured upon me this generous gift of friendship....So far I have spoken of the affection of Andrews towards myself, but the most unusual thing about him was his devoted love for India. The people of our country have accepted his love, but have they realized fully the *cost* of it to him?...He came to live with us in our joys and sorrows, our triumphs and misfortunes, identifying himself with a defeated and humiliated people....In this I realized his rare gift of spontaneous, universal friendship” (emphasis mine)²⁵ On the day he died in 1940, Gandhi recalled, “...not only England, not only India, but humanity had lost a true son and servant...I have not known a better man or a better Christian than C. F. Andrews. India bestowed on him the title of Deenabandhu. He deserved it.”²⁶ He later issued a powerful statement rich in reconciliation language which is now known as the *Andrews’ Legacy*:

Nobody, probably, knew Charlie Andrews as well as I did...When we met in South Africa, we simply met as brothers, and remained as such to the end. There was no distance between us...It was an unbreakable bond between two seekers and servants...I want Englishmen and Indians, whilst the memory of this servant of England and Indians, whilst the memory of this servant of England and India still fresh, to give a thought to the legacy he has left for us both...He said on his bed, from which he was never to rise, ‘Mohan, swaraj [self-rule for India] is coming’. Both Englishmen and Indians can make it come, if they will...At the present moment I do not wish to think of English misdeeds. They will be forgotten, but not one of the heroic deeds of Andrews will be forgotten so long as England and India live. If we really love Andrews’ memory we may not have hate in us for Englishmen, of whom Andrews was among the best and the noblest. It is possible, quite possible, for the best Englishmen and the best Indians to meet together and never to separate till they have evolved a formula acceptable to both. The legacy left by Andrews is worth the effort.²⁷

Gandhi would reiterate this point in his speech on the Quit India Resolution at a meeting of the All India Congress Committee on 8 August 1942, “It is true he was a friend of Gurudev, but he looked upon Gurudev with awe. Not that Gurudev wanted it...But with me he became the closest friend.”²⁸

Andrews bore a heavy cost to live the life he did which was nothing short of an “ordeal of love” (the title of Hugh Tinkers book on Andrews). He had rejected high positions and careers (in the fields of religious service and education) both in England and in India. He donated his meager possessions to the Indian National Congress so that he could live a life of frugality, subject to unceasing travel, and burdened by long hours of work that were punctuated by bouts of illness. Andrews’ life and work have left behind a rich legacy for us to pursue in the twenty first century. Perhaps we can agree that the pursuit of diverse, inclusive and enduring friendships holds the most promise for the promotion of justice, peace, and reconciliation in our troubled world. We certainly need to consider ways of pursuing this in church and society while redressing past inequities, if we are ever going to build the “beloved community” that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. talked about.²⁹ But we might need to engage diverse others who live not just at the center of our lives but also at the margins—practice a kind of radical openness of the kind that Charlie Andrews practiced so well. But it will take considerable courage and imagination to seek friendships as one of the vehicles for human renewal, engagement, liberation, and ethical living in our world today.

Questions:

Who do I call my friends?

How inclusive are my friendships/

How hard do I work towards making friendships with people who are different from me?

How has the history (national, regional, community, family) facilitated or prevented my participation in circles of friendships that are integrated?

How does one confront the truth of this history and respond to it, as people committed to a religious faith?

What might be the cost of pursuing diverse and inclusive friendships with people who are different?

Notes

¹ We are grateful to Dr. James LaGrand for asking us to write this brief account of Andrews for the CCC class. Saramma Michael commenced the initial research on Andrews in 2012. Alum Christina Thomas' research on the subject of Faith and Friendship, in the context of her work on Messiah University's first international students (of Armenian descent from Ottoman Turkey) helped us formulate the title. The usual caveats apply.

² Cited in Benarsidas Chaturvedi & Marjorie Sykes, *Charles Freer Andrews: A Narrative* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1949), p. xiii.

³ E.M. Forster, *Two Cheers for Democracy* (London: Edward Arnold, 1951), p. 66.

⁴ For a work that explores this in terms of the relationships between anthropologists and their informants see Bruce Grindal & Frank Salamone, eds., *Bridges to Friendship: Narratives on Fieldwork and Friendship* (Long Grove, IL.: Waveland Press, 2006).

⁵ Motilal V. Jotwani, *Sufis of Sindh* (Delhi: Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, Government of India Publication, 1986).

⁶ See Peter Heehs, *Sri Aurobindo: A Brief Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁷ For more on *Mit* friendships see Donald Messerschmidt, "Miteri in Nepal: Fictive Kin Ties that Bind", *Kailash* 9, no. 1 (1982): 5-43. For a historical account of the same see Bernardo A. Michael, "When Soldiers and Statesmen Meet: 'Ethnographic Moments' on the Frontiers of Empire." In Stewart Gordon, ed., *Robes of Honour: Khil'at in Pre-Colonial and Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 80-94.

⁸ See John Stauffer, *The Black Hearts of Men: Radical Abolitionists and the Transformation of Race* (Harvard University Press, 2002).

⁹ Melba Pattillo Beals, *Warriors Don't Cry* (New York: Simon Pulse, 2007; originally pub 1994), pp. 219-220.

¹⁰ Marjorie Sykes, *C. F. Andrews: Representative Writings* (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1973), p. 36.

¹¹ The incident, known as the Jalliwallas Bagh massacre, took place when British troops under one General Dyer fired into a crowd of about 20,000 peaceful protesters who had gathered at an enclosed garden resulting in the death of hundreds and wounding thousands.

¹² Taken from David McI. Gracie, *Gandhi and Charlie: The story of a Friendship* (Cambridge: MA., 1989), pp.68-69. See also C.F. Andrews, *Christ in Silence* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1933), p. 96; *What I Owe to Christ* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1932), p. 20; Hugh Tinker, *The Ordeal of Love: C. F. Andrews and India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 159.

¹³ Established in 1881, and sometimes referred to as the "Harvard of India," St. Stephen's College is one of India's best known colleges and has for long been a source of India's intellectual productivity.

¹⁴ Tinker, *Ordeal of Love*, p. 160.

¹⁵ C. F. Andrews, *What I owe to Christ*, p. 167.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 239.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 246.

¹⁹ Hugh Tinker, *Ordeal of Love*, p. 258.

²⁰ Marjorie Sykes, *C. F. Andrews: Representative Writings*, p. 15.

²¹ Marjorie Sykes, *C. F. Andrews: Representative Writings*, p. 15.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 53. Also cited in Tinker, *Ordeal of Love*, p. 109.

²⁴ R.N. Bose, "Two Friends, Gandhi and Andrews," Deenbandhu Memorial Papers, St. Stephen's College Library, Delhi. Cited in Gandhi, *Affective Communities: Anticolonial Thought, Fin-de-Siècle Radicalism, and the Politics of Friendship* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), p. 16.

²⁵ Hugh Tinker, *Ordeal of Love*, p. 311.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 309.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ R.N. Bose, "Two Friends," cited in Gandhi, *Affective Communities*, p. 16.

²⁹ See Martin Luther King Jr., *Where do we go from here: Chaos or Community* (New York: Beacon Press, 1967).