

Wide Angle



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Religion: Where is it taking us?

“A Muslim politician and a Jewish leader in Berlin are raising funds to fix a synagogue wrecked by Nazis in 1938.”

“Christian and Muslim neighbours came together in May 2017 to restore a Catholic church in Mosul, Iraq, that was damaged by ISIS”.

“When a mosque in Victoria, Texas, was burned in January 2017, local churches and a synagogue offered space for congregants to pray, and an online campaign raised over \$1 million to build a new mosque”.

The above three sentences, taken from page-8 of the latest issue of TIME magazine (dated 16 April 2018), show us an interesting aspect of human behaviour.

They display a strong value of human connection. They show us that it is possible for people of varied religious backgrounds to come together and to work together.

Over the centuries, we know, many wars have been fought on religious lines. And, of late, we have seen politicians using religion as a manipulating factor, twisting voter-favour, in one way or the other.

And that is why the question of whether religion causes divisions, or whether it actually helps in creating unity, is not an easy one to answer.

Each of our opinions could depend on multiple factors which, over the course of our time on earth, have contributed to our current stance.

Since our childhood, we have been exposed to a wide range of teachings. On our own religion, on others' religions, and on even how religion can benefit or harm humanity.

Some of us might believe, like how the German sociologist Karl Marx felt, that 'Religion is the opium of the masses'. And that being high on passion, people can wreck the lives of others who differ with them.

Some of us might believe, like the French scientist Blaise Pascal did, that 'there is a God shaped vacuum in each one of us which only God can fill'. And that we must all aspire to know Him more and to choose the moral path.

There might yet be some of us who believe, like the British Philosopher Bertrand Russel did, that agnosticism is the path to choose. And that we must all realize that God - if there is one - is not really knowable.

Most theologians and philosophers agree, however, on one fact. That religion has always been the driving force when it came to moral values. Since most religious teachings aim to set the path of man straight, telling him to shun evil and to choose good, the 'fear' of God has contributed to a healthy uplift of humanity.

Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, Shintoists and Zoroastrians, whether they believe in one God or many, whether they believe in an after-life or nirvana, know that all our belief systems, ideologies and worldviews cannot be mutually inclusive.

And that is why it is remarkable that Bahrain has made a pioneering move, to offer us the opportunity to interact and investigate differing worldviews.

The setting up of 'King Hamad Global Centre for Peaceful Co-existence' here is likely to make this one of the world's leading meeting places for Dialogues, Conferences and Events related to religious freedom, interfaith-dialogue and peaceful co-existence.

Only dialogues and discussions can prepare the world to combat terrorism, extremism, violence and hate, and only then can we see mutual respect, love, peace, harmony and unity among all Faiths.

If two people can completely differ with one another on an ideology, and yet remain lifelong friends, then we can say that humans are amazing, and humanity is alive and active.

Peaceful coexistence is definitely possible. And it must be pursued. Always.

(The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the policy or position of this newspaper.)

Saudi cinema public screenings begin

Riyadh

Cinema lovers in the desert kingdom have long had to travel to Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates and beyond to enjoy a night at the movies.

That changed Wednesday, when the country's first new movie theatre in more than 30 years, an AMC Cinema, threw open its doors for a gala screening of the Hollywood blockbuster "Black Panther."

A VIP audience of government officials, movie industry insiders and at least one princess posed for selfies on a red carpet, collected their popcorn and took their seats in front of a 40-foot screen.

"Welcome to the AMC Cinema Riyadh," the company's chief executive, Adam Aron, said to hoots and applause. "This is a historic day for AMC. This is a historic day for your country."

The return of cinemas is part of a broad modernization drive by the kingdom's 32-year-old crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman, who aims to wean the economy from its dependence on oil production.

By developing the country's nascent entertainment industry, authorities hope to create job opportunities and make life more enjoyable. Wednesday's opening was one of the most anticipated events



on a calendar that now includes concerts by American rapper Nelly and Greek-born pianist and composer Yanni, food truck and comic-con festivals, dance performances and monster-truck rallies.

Movie theaters have been barred in Saudi Arabia since the early 1980s, when the kingdom began enforcing an austere version of Islam that frowns on most forms of entertainment and believes any mixing between unrelated men and women will corrupt public morals.

The only public cinema in operation was an Imax theater housed at a science center that shows educational films.

The Saudi authorities lifted the cinema ban in December and aim to have around 2,000

screens built by 2030, which they project will create more than 30,000 jobs.

International cinema owners and studios have been clamoring to get in on a market that industry experts say could generate \$1 billion a year in annual box-office receipts.

"The pent-up demand for going to cinemas I think will be beyond our imagination," Aron said in an interview last week.

The company, which is based in Leewood, Kan., and is the world's largest cinema operator, was awarded the first license to run movie theaters in the kingdom two weeks ago. It plans to have up to 40 theaters in 15 Saudi cities within five years, and up to 100 theaters in 25 cities by 2030.

Vox gets licence

Riyadh

Vox Cinemas, owned by Dubai's Majid Al Futtaim, has received a licence to operate cinemas in Saudi Arabia and will open a four-screen multiplex theatre in Riyadh in the "coming days", the company said yesterday.

Vox is investing 2 billion riyals (\$533 million) to open 600 screens in the next five years in the conservative Muslim kingdom, which lifted a nearly 40-year ban on commercial cinemas last year as part of broad social and economic reforms.

Aron said the biggest challenge was how quickly the Saudis wanted the first cinema to open.

Rather than attempt to build a theater from scratch, AMC converted a vacant concert hall in a partially built financial district of the capital that was under the control of its partner, Saudi Arabia's main sovereign wealth fund, the Public Investment Fund. Leather reclining seats were dispatched by air freight from the United States. The first laser projector arrived at the theater last week. Speakers were installed on Monday. (Reuters)

Missing Pets



CLARA - Female, 3 yrs, spayed, dark brown spot on right side/light brown spot on left side/three small light brown spots on back of neck, not wearing collar or ID tag, Hamad Town (roundabout 7 near Taekwondo), 15/4/18. **36361106**



CALVIN - Male Persian/Angora mix, 4 yrs, grey and white, neutered, microchipped, very shy, not wearing collar or ID tag, possibly STOLEN, Saar Saraya (near St Christopher School/Nakheel Ctr), BD100 REWARD for safe return, 15/12/17. **39180314**



KITTY - Female, 2 yrs, was very pregnant - so probably gave birth, not wearing collar or ID tag, indoor/outdoor cat, Janabiya (near Naya Mart/ Mercado), 25/2/18. **39262116**



KURO - Female, Saluki/Beagle mix (more Saluki), 1 year, all black except for patch on chest, spayed, microchipped, slipped out door, not wearing collar or ID tag as just had bath, Hidd (Road 1204 behind Little Pearl Nursery School), 7/11/17. **34110611**



BABOU - Male Coton de Tulear, 4 yrs, all white, microchipped, escaped after dog walk, likely picked up, wearing white necklace/no ID tag, Sakir Camps/ Dilmon Paradise area, BD200 REWARD for safe return, 1/1/18. **37199478 or 36446893**



ZEUS - Male Bengal, 11 yrs, neutered, microchipped, very picky eater, nervous cat, not wearing collar or ID tag, indoor cat - slipped out, possibly STOLEN, Umm Al Hassam, BD500 REWARD for safe return, 4/3/18. **39608777/35053060/39333377**