

2<sup>nd</sup> July 2023

## Overload

**“I sacrificed to the mania of the age, which is to overload things.”**

Auguste Rodin, from *'Rodin, the man and his art'*, by Judith Cladel and S K Star

I have an App on my phone which helps me identify birdsong. When you open the App, you hold the phone as close as possible to the source of the song, and the clever tech will tell you what you're hearing.

Coming out of Iona Abbey yesterday, I encountered a cacophony of birdsong. To be honest, it was quite overwhelming, an audio overload, not Rodin's "mania of the age", but nature's way of throwing too much at me at the one time. There were so many songs and chirps and calls mixed up together. So I fired up my clever App and waited. And, one by one, the songs of the birds were isolated and identified: a common sparrow; an oystercatcher; a black-headed gull; a Eurasian swallow; even the rare call of a corncrake. From the jumbled mixture of sounds, my App had picked out this song or that, so that I could begin to make sense of it all.

Iona can be a place of sensory overload, not just audio as in birdsong, but in lots of other ways, a mixture of calls and songs competing for your attention: the voice of nature that speaks of beauty and wonder; the song of worship that speaks to the spirit; the call of history that speaks to our desire for knowledge; the chirps of conversation that speak of relationships; the cry of mystery that speaks of spiritual things. It is so much, sometimes, that it's hard to make sense of it all, to hear what you need to hear, to isolate one thing from another.

So we need to stop, and wait, and listen. We don't have an App – here or anywhere else – that will do the job for us. But we have the tools of patience, and time, and awareness, and willingness. So let's use these. Let's fire them up, find some space, and wait. We *can* learn to do with our sensory overload what my App allows me to do with birdsong.

The remarkable thing is that, once I've used my App a few times, I can begin to identify the individual song of a bird – all by myself. Perhaps if we gave ourselves more time and space to identify what's happening in the cacophony of noise that surrounds us in our daily lives, it might become a more normal – and revealing – process, and we might even be able to discern the gentle voice of God in there sometimes too.

### **A prayer for today**

*And in the cacophony, a still, small voice. Oh, yes! There it is! I hear it now! Amen*

*An original reflection © Tom Gordon*

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