

National Rally
End the Occupation of Iraq
Trafalgar Square - London
Saturday 27th September 2003

I speak as Chair of Pax Christi UK. Pax Christi is an International, Catholic, Peace organisation represented on every continent and in many countries throughout the world. It was conceived following the horrors of the Second World War. We support this demonstration because, as those who would be called 'Children of God', we must be 'Peacemakers.'

Peace doesn't come cheaply - it has to be worked at and made, and so our faith teaches we must do justice to all without partiality, and do what is morally right - then - and only then, will we have what we most desire - Peace and Security.

As a nation we have not done this. Instead over the last four years we have made war: on the Balkans, Afghanistan and Iraq. Again and again we have been told: 'We have no alternative.' A statement that is morally and spiritually bankrupt. There is always an alternative!

Christianity teaches us not to deal in falsehood and lies - but to speak truth and deal honestly with one another - this is to be the norm for the whole of society.

Sadly we see a British Government lining up with Pontius Pilate who, cynically, asked: 'Truth - what is truth?' To which the answer seems to be: 'Whatever will serve the purposes of the Government of the day!'

The big issue of the war on Iraq is not the shabby actions and crude language used by Government, which we have heard from the Hutton inquiry, but one simple fact: the people of this country have been deliberately deceived!

We've never, at any time, given our consent to be led by George W Bush - come to that, neither have the Americans - judges appointed by his father - appointed him! But Mr. Blair, without our consent, has allowed us to be used to further the nefarious cause of bringing about 'The New American Century.'

We're told that 'The world is better off without Saddam Hussein' - that he had to be removed anyway - but why was he chosen?

- Israel is carrying out a policy of ethnic cleansing with a barbaric ferocity on the Palestinian people.
- China is responsible for gross violations of Human Rights in Tibet.
- Turkey abuses and oppresses the Kurdish people. I have witnessed this at first hand. This week they arrested one of their political leaders and a Rock band leader, both of whom I spent time with at the Kurdish International Festival in Germany two weeks ago. What was their crime? Being present at an event where people had a picture of their imprisoned leader Ocalan on some flags.

We know that Saddam Hussein was not unique in being an abuser of Human Rights -but - he also sat on vast oil reserves and that made him different.

Other issues have been brought into focus too. The disgraceful treatment of people, including children, held at Guantanamo Bay. Christianity teaches that all people are made in, and bear the image of, the Divine. To violate another - is to violate God. We cannot remain silent when faced with the shackled, hooded, prisoners at Guantanamo Bay, caged like wild animals. If we don't raise our voices on their behalf now, when our turn comes, there will be no voices to be raised. Civil liberties world wide are endangered.

TOGETHER - we must confront these issues.

We must not be divided. We must not allow ourselves to be used for other political agendas.

Our diversity of Faith and political beliefs can be a strength if we unite for the COMMON GOOD, working for a World of Justice and Equality where we desire the Good of the other as much as our own.

As Martin Luther King said 'We must learn to live together as Brothers and Sisters - or perish as Fools.'

Stewart Hemsley
Chair of Pax Christi UK