

# Justpeace

## PAX CHRISTI

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### Role of Religion in an Age of Conflict

By Oliver McTernan.

In the immediate aftermath of 9/11 Western political leaders were anxious to stress that their war was not against Islam, a religion they hailed to be peace loving and tolerant. Muslims leaders were equally anxious to endorse this perception by dissociating themselves from their co-religionists, who had claimed responsibilities for the atrocities. Islam, they claimed had been hijacked by extremists for political purposes. The more liberal minded media endorsed this mood, declaring that grievance, and not creed was the rationalization behind the carnage.

Laudable as these reactions may appear at first, and especially in so far as they undoubtedly helped to curtail mindless revenge attacks on the migrant Muslim communities, none do justice to the complexity of the growing phenomenon of religiously motivated violence. Who can claim to understand fully the minds and motives of those young, educated and obviously talented men, who spent the last few months of their lives meticulously planning the destruction of themselves and thousands of others? Their own testimonies, found in luggage they left behind at Boston's Logan airport, clearly indicate that they believed themselves to be on a sacred mission and that they were acting on God's authority.

Similar claims have been made, and indeed still are, by members of other faith traditions who are currently involved in conflict in different parts of our world today.

The Christian militias who have slaughtered hundreds of Muslim families on the Spice Islands describe themselves as the army of Christ. Yigal Amir, the pious and articulate Jewish student who assassinated Yitzhak Rabin, claimed that he had acted on God's orders. The Hindu mobs that periodically attack and murder their Muslim neighbours are motivated by a desire for national religious purity. The Sri Lankan Buddhists, who oppose a peace settlement in favour of a military solution to the conflict with their Tamil Hindu minority, use religious arguments to justify their position.

The problem one encounters when trying to assess the role of religion in conflict is the lack of data. The consensus among social scientists that religion no long matters in mainstream life has led them to dismiss it as a real cause of conflict. Where religion does appear to be the significant factor they consider it to be nothing more than a front for grievance or greed. Until there is a shift in this mindset and it is recognized that religion can in itself be a major contributing factor, political leaders will continue to underestimate the extent of the threat that religiously motivated conflict and terrorism poses. Northern Ireland, the Middle East and Sri Lanka are good examples of conflicts where the official efforts at peace making have ignored the religious dimensions with disastrous consequences.

A key factor in the formation of the religious mindset that fosters terrorism is the attitude towards revelation. When sacred texts are interpreted in a way to boost claims of exclusivity or spiritual superiority, the risk of prejudice and high boundaries that allow for active discrimination (and worse) is very real. There are numerous episodes in the history of each of the main religious traditions that prove this. It is religion's ambivalent record towards violence, the fact that all major faiths have at sometime in their history sanctioned violence to protect or promote their own sectarian interests, that provides today's faith-inspired terrorists, to whatever the tradition they owe their allegiance, with the religious sanction for their own use of violence.



*Buddhist monks pray and fast for peace*

The current increase in religiously motivated violence calls for a more honest response from the world's religious communities. It is not enough for religious leaders to disown the murderous actions of their own co-religionists and to dismiss them as misguided fringe groups. Neither is it sufficient to call for tolerance.

Tolerance is essentially a negative response to diversity. What is most needed at present is the willingness to acknowledge and to promote more vigorously that right of others to believe and to act differently. To do so requires the kind of adaptive challenge or leap that can call into question some of one's own beliefs and loyalties. It is a process that can cause distress and resentment within each faith community. This is a price worth paying, I believe, if it can help to curtail a further increase in religiously motivated violence.

*Oliver's book *Violence in God's Name*,  
is published by DLT at £10.95 (ISBN 0-232-52494-7)*

#### Inspiration

*A Native American grandfather was talking to his grandson about how he felt about the tragedy on September 11th. He said: "I feel as if I have two wolves fighting in my heart. One wolf is the vengeful, angry, violent one. The other wolf is the loving, compassionate one." The grandson asked him: "Which wolf will win the fight in your heart?" The grandfather answered: "The one I feed."*

**Traditional Cherokee story**

**adapted by Ted Bowman in the light of 9/11**

## Pax Christi International

*Extracts from speech of Pax Christi International President, Michel Sabbah at National Assembly, Pax Christi USA, August 2003*

All the world remembers September 11th 2001. On that day, a terrible crime was committed: in a few brief hours, the lives of thousands of innocent people of many nationalities and ethnic backgrounds were destroyed. From that day on, many people throughout the world have felt a profound sense of personal vulnerability and a fear for the future.

In the same way the world has lived with the 12 years of embargo imposed upon Iraq and the thousands of dead innocent people, children, women or old people. They were the victims of quarrels among world political leaders. The thousands of victims among Palestinians and Israelis, resulting from the non-application of the United Nations resolutions, and the millions of victims in African or other conflicts in the world are also cases of contempt of human life. In these failures, the international community shows its incapacity to stop such inhumanity.

Terrorism not only commits intolerable crimes, but because it resorts to terror as a political and military means to achieve its end, is itself

a crime against humanity. Terrorism sometimes claims that it derives from religious attitudes. We consider these to be wrong religious attitudes, even more, they are opposite to the essence of any religion. Sometimes it claims to be fighting injustice and oppression imposed upon peoples. Whatever the reason, terrorism is an evil to be condemned and to be opposed.

But at the same time, oppressions and injustices that provoke terrorism or give birth to it have to be fought whatever be the form of injustice and oppression, whether a military occupation or the spirit of domination on others.

As terrorism pretends to have roots in religion, in poverty, in injustice and oppression, this means that we have the need for a new type of human education: in religious life and in political life. The goal of this education is to find new ways to claim peoples' rights and new ways of acting against injustice and oppression ... this new education will prepare people for a serious action in the domain of development. Beyond a "justified war" means also a new spirit and a new way of initiating a new world order based on equality between peoples and respect of persons and

nations. A new education means that in the name of God one cannot kill his brother. In the name of freedom or democracy one cannot kill his brother. To kill one's brother is the biggest evil in the human life of an individual or of a nation; to kill one's brother cannot build peace.

Against this backdrop, Pax Christi testifies to its hope, a hope that is based on the conviction that evil does not have the final word in human affairs. Pax Christi hopes that the great nations of this world have enough goodness to change the present world order that sacrifices so many innocent victims through supposed justified wars. Pax Christi hopes that the present world leaders will succeed in replacing pre-emptive war by preemptive peace. Pax Christi hopes as well that those who recourse to terrorism, for whatever reason and in whatever context, will one day recognize their own humanity and the dignity of others, along with their capacity for goodness which God, their Creator and Redeemer, has put in them.

Full text available from the Pax Christi office or Pax Christi International website [www.paxchristi.net](http://www.paxchristi.net)

## Peacemaking Resources

Resources do not make peace, people do. Interfaith is a relational activity: we need to work at it. Interfaith builds on difference and our capacity to accommodate, even understand and celebrate, such difference. Interfaith is an exercise in dialogue. The Churches have agreed four principles to this dialogue:

- 1) Dialogue begins when people meet each other.
- 2) Dialogue depends on mutual understanding and mutual trust.
- 3) Dialogue makes it possible to share in service to the community.
- 4) Dialogue becomes the medium of authentic witness.

The challenge is to us, to get out of monologue mode and into respectful listening. (Our two ears and one mouth suggest we should listen twice as much as we talk, perhaps?) We need to be proactive in establishing links with people of differing faith. Keep it local.

Your Church should have some names. Or try the telephone directory or library for contacts. Your local education authority will have a SACRE (Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education) with specific representation from the local faith communities. Aim to open doors.

The 'big six' faith traditions in this country, in alphabetical order, are:  
**Buddhism;**  
**Christianity;**  
**Hinduism;**  
**Islam;**  
**Judaism;**  
**Sikhism.**

These, and some fifteen more, feature in **Religions in the U.K. 2001-03** edited by Paul Weller and published by the Multi-Faith Centre at the University of Derby [www.multifaithnet.org](http://www.multifaithnet.org) in association with the Inter Faith Network for the United Kingdom [www.interfaith.org.uk](http://www.interfaith.org.uk). Make sure your local library has a copy for reference.

The guideline sheet from Inter Faith Network, **Building Good Relations with People of Different Faiths and Beliefs** is of tried and tested worth.

The Irish Jesuit site [www.jesuit.ie/prayer/](http://www.jesuit.ie/prayer/) carries a worldwide prayer for peace page.

For information about religious festivals, The Shap Working Party on World Religions in Education produces an excellent calendar chart each year, with a most helpful booklet of explanatory notes. (Contact: [mike.berry@natsoc.c-of-e.org.uk](mailto:mike.berry@natsoc.c-of-e.org.uk)) The Shap hardy annual, **World Religions in Education**, is also a rich resource for busy agents for change.

For a personal guide in interfaith, I look to Brother Daniel Faivre, S.G. His collections of texts from many traditions enrich prayer and worship. **Transcendence** (1994), **Resources for Multifaith Celebrations** (1997), **Prayer of Hope of an Interfaith Roman Catholic Christian** (1998), **Celebrating Jesus - a multifaith appreciation** (1999), **Glimpses of a Holy City - a pilgrim guide to Southall at worship** (2001), **Approaching the Other Shore - death and eternal life** (2002) are just some of them. Contact details [BrotherDaniel@faivre.freeserve.co.uk](mailto:BrotherDaniel@faivre.freeserve.co.uk)

**Tony McCaffry**



## Celebrating Peacemaking - Gertrud Luckner: curiosity, compassion and courage

"What would you have done in 1939?" is a question which haunts our age. Would our peacemaking ideals survive in a world where ordinary acts of friendship demand extraordinary courage? I recently came across the story of a woman who provides a model for Christian peacemakers precisely because she carried on doing those ordinary things in such circumstances.

Born in Liverpool in 1900, Gertrud Luckner was six when her family moved back to Germany. In the 1920s she returned to study at Woodbrooke, the Quaker college in Birmingham, worked in the slums as a hospital almoner, and was impressed by the self-help clubs run by the unemployed in South Wales. Settling in Freiburg in 1931, she was horrified to see the influence of Nazi propaganda. In response she informed high school principals that she was organising a discussion group where pupils could practise English. She supplied pro-and anti-Nazi tracts for parliamentary-style debates, encouraging students to think critically about political issues.

Internationally-minded, she was a member of the German Catholic Peace Movement before it was banned. Her network of personal friends abroad became a route to emigration for Jewish families. For Gertrud, religion was

about compassion, reaching out ecumenically and internationally, "from person to person". She was deeply concerned about what was affecting other people's daily lives. Each week she collected foreign newspapers discarded by the university library. "I wanted to know," she said later, "others did not".

Gertrud learned that Jews were only allowed to go shopping between four and six in the afternoon. This excluded factory workers from buying food, so she organised women friends to shop for these Jewish families. After Kristallnacht, she cycled round, visiting Jewish neighbours in friendship and solidarity. Two elderly ladies, on their own in a large house, were terrified of being deported by the Gestapo. Gertrud simply stayed with them every night for three weeks to reassure and protect them. They escaped because Gertrud sought out very precise information from sympathetic officials about what was going on. If old people were about to be transported, she got some Freiburg doctors to have elderly Jews admitted to hospital, so they could not be moved. If a labour transport was rumoured, she persuaded a local industrialist to say he could not spare any of his Jewish work-force, and even to take on more men.

In Freiburg Gertrud worked with the Catholic bishops' Caritas organisation and was put in charge of its Bureau for War Aid. This enabled her to travel all over Germany and Austria, collecting information about the situation of Jews in other cities, warning those in danger, distributing Caritas funds, and finding ingenious ways of helping. The simplicity of her direct and practical approach makes her so exceptional. In 1941, when baptised Jews were required to wear the Star of David, Gertrud asked the clergy what they were going to do. "I will dispense them from coming to church" said one pastor. Gertrud's solution was different: those without stars would pick them up from their homes and accompany them to services. All Sunday long she walked with the baptised Jews to Protestant and Catholic churches. Other parishioners came up to greet them so they were not isolated and treated any differently.

Despite her prudence, Gertrud was arrested in 1943 and survived nine weeks of interrogation in Ravensbrück. After the war, she founded a journal dedicated to improving Jewish-Christian relations. She received many decorations, has a place in the Avenue of the Righteous in Jerusalem, and died, aged 94, in Freiburg.

*Valerie Flessati*

### Diary

#### 8 October (Wed) London

'Iraq and its people' - speakers include William Taylor and Aziz Nour. 7.30 pm St John's Church, Notting Hill. Details: Christians Aware 0116 254 0770 email: barbarabutler@christiansaware.co.uk

#### 11 October (Saturday) Oxford

Dominican Peace Action study day with speaker Chris Rowland. 10.00 am - 3.00pm at Blackfriars, Oxford. Details 07775 508900

#### 12-19 October (Sun-Sun)

Week of Prayer for World Peace - leaflets available from Pax Christi office at 50p each

#### 13 October (Mon) Bangor

'Israel and Palestine - Conflict and Struggle: where is prophetic theology in the 21st century?' Lecture by Professor Marc H. Ellis. 5.30 pm in Lecture Room 3, University of Wales, Bangor. Arranged by Anglican Chaplaincy and Friends of Sabeel UK. All welcome. Details: www.bangor.ac.uk/chaplaincy

#### 18 October (Sat) London

Inauguration of Chris Cole as Director of the Fellowship of Reconciliation. Service at St Pancras Church, Euston at 3.30 pm. Preacher: Canon Paul Oestreicher.

#### 19-26 October

One World Week on theme 'Moving Stories'. Details: 0118 939 4933 email: enquiries@oneworldweek.org

#### 20 October (Mon) London

'Roadmaps to Democracy: how grassroots activism can influence the democratic process.' Seminar 10.00-16.30 at Centre for Reconciliation and Peace, St Ethelburga's, 78 Bishopsgate. £10 includes lunch. Tickets from Rebecca Swenson, CIIR, Unit 3, Canonbury Yard, 190a New North Road, London N1 7BJ Tel: 0207 288 8601 email: rebecca@ciir.org

#### 25 October (Saturday) London

Concert for Peace 7.30 pm - with the MANA Chamber Orchestra; Soloist Steven Isserlis, cello. Guest speaker: Tony Benn. St James's Church, 197 Piccadilly, W1. Contact: Musicians Against Nuclear Arms, 0208 455 1030, 71 Greenfield Gardens, London NW2 1HU.

#### 1 November (Saturday) London

Movement for the Abolition of War AGM 10.30-16.30 All welcome. Contact: MAW: 0208 347 6162 www.abolishwar.org.uk

#### 1 November (Saturday) Bristol

Peace and Disarmament regional gathering for those involved in action/campaigning for peace. A chance to be inspired, learn from others in the region. Organised by CAAT, Pax Christi, FORE, Quaker Peace & Social Witness and UNA. Venue Central Friends Meeting House. Booking essential via Pax Christi.

#### 1 November (Saturday) London

Christian Ecology Link conference 'Sowing the Seed' with keynote speaker Rt Rev James Jones, Bishop of Liverpool; workshops include 'The environmental implications of armed conflict'. 11-17.30 at Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church, 235 Shaftesbury Avenue WC2 Bookings: CEL, 3 Bond Street, Lancaster LA1 3ER email: info@christian-ecology.org.uk

#### 3-9 November (Mon-Sun)

Landmine Action Week with the Clear Up Campaign petition to support a new international law to deal with cluster bombs and other explosive remnants of war. Campaign pack from: 0207 820 0222 email: info@landmineaction.org

#### 9 November (Sunday) London

Remembrance Day lecture at the Imperial War Museum with Mairead Corrigan Maguire, organised by Movement for the Abolition of War. Contact: MAW: 020 8347 6162. www.abolishwar.org.uk

#### 10-14 November (Mon-Fri) N. Yorks

'Worldwide' - songs prayers and visual imagery from the Church worldwide. Led by Geoff Weaver. Cost £165. Contact: the Bookings Secretary, Scargill House, Kettlewell, Skipton, N Yorks. Tel: 01756 760234 email: bookings@scargillhouse.co.uk

#### 3 December (Wednesday)

World Migration Day. An opportunity to focus on refugee and asylum issues. Liturgy material produced by Jesuit Refugee Service Tel 0208 8473555 or uk@jrs.net

#### 6 December (Saturday) Hawkinge, Kent

Advent Service of Prayer for Peace at 5.30 pm. St Luke's Parish, Hawkinge. Details 01303 892369

Copydate for the next newsletter is 20th October

## Reflection - Peace between Religions before Peace between Nations (Hans Kung)

In his message on: World Migration Day last year John Paul II had this to say:

"It is important for Christians to acknowledge the freedom of religion and of conscience as proclaimed by Vatican II (Dignitatis Humanae) and to show the way of dialogue and mutual tolerance, so that a relationship of openness and dialogue with the followers of other religions can evolve. There is no need for great schemes, but everyday gestures done with simplicity and constancy, that are capable of producing authentic change in interpersonal relationships. This is the only way to nourish the hope of warding off the dreaded spectre of those wars of religion which have so often blooded human history and which have forced many people to leave their own countries."

Gradually the message of dialogue and mutual tolerance from Vatican II is reaching our parishes and the word Interfaith is becoming familiar to Christians throughout Britain. Yet Interfaith Dialogue seems fraught with risks for many people of all religions who think it may mean a watering down of their own religious beliefs. We are warned by people of experience that there is need of a good grasp of one's own faith before launching into dialogue with people of other faiths and there is also need for openness on both sides in a common search for truth. Is not this common search for truth at the heart of Christianity and indeed at the heart of all the World Religions? Many people have found that such dialogue not only results: in close friendships but also in a strengthening of their own beliefs; and that insights from another faith can enrich and clarify our own.

These results do not come easily or quickly. It is part of an ongoing search for peace. Since 9/11 a thirst for peace and dialogue has shown itself among peoples worldwide to the extent that many individuals are willing to risk their lives to witness to it in nonviolent ways.

In parts of our country, opportunities for dialogue have multiplied in the last two years with the dispersal of asylum seekers, many of whom come from the Middle East. In my own town of Middlesbrough it is possible for members of at least six faiths to come together and pray for peace, to meet and talk about our beliefs and to share a meal or festival.

I found the following personal background of Mehri Nikam an encouraging story with which she prefaced her talk to the al-Khoei Foundation international conference on Jewish and Muslim Interfaith Relations: "I was born in Iran and grew up in its south western province of Khuzestan - just across the river Tigris in southern Iraq .... My nationality was and remains Iranian. My mother tongue, and by extension, the language of my emotions, is still Persian; I fall in love in Persian! Hebrew may be the language of my scripture and religious ritual, but my spirituality is anchored in the Islamic mystical tradition and I am very proud to remain a fully acculturated Iranian Jew who is an Islamophile. I always say that I have a Muslim heart and a Jewish head."

If we wish to become a truly peaceful, multifaith society we need to be willing to make great efforts to bring this about in our own locality as a way to making peace between nations.

*Trudie Thompson*

## Reports from the Office

**Prepare now to celebrate Peace Sunday 18th January 2004.**  
See enclosed flyer including "Checklist for action". Resources ordered now will be despatched in November.

**Warm congratulations to Chris Cole** who has been appointed Director of the Fellowship of Reconciliation England. Chris left CAAT in August to take up this post. We wish Chris and his family well and look forward to renewed cooperation with ForE.

**Franz Jaegerstaetter Pilgrimage.** Twenty-five members of Pax Christi from England and Ireland took part in the 60th anniversary commemoration of the execution of Franz in Austria this August. They had the opportunity to meet his widow, Fransiska who is ninety years old. They heard that the cause for canonisation is being taken forward. Pax Christi will now explore ways of supporting this and give more promotion to the life and witness of Franz. Look at our website [www.paxchristi.org.uk](http://www.paxchristi.org.uk) for more information - go to Press Releases and Children as Peacemakers.

**Support for imprisoned Dominican Sisters.** In July, Sr Ardeth Platter, Carol Gilbert and Jackie Hudson, were sentenced to between 33 and 41 months in prison. They broke into a Minuteman III missile silo on October 2002 to perform symbolic acts of disarmament. They were found guilty of interfering with the nation's defence. More information available from the office. Letters of support can be sent to the Sisters c/o Motherhouse of Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters, 2025 East Fulton Street, Grand Rapids, MI 49503 3895



*Fransiska Jaegerstaetter with Cardinal Schonborn, the Bishop of Linz and Bishop Betazzi of Italy at the grave of Franz, 9th August 2003*

## Keep peace alive. Remember Pax Christi when making or up-dating your will

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Return to Pax Christi, St Joseph's, Watford Way, Hendon, London, NW4 4TY  
Tel: 020 8203 4884 email: [paxchristi@gn.apc.org](mailto:paxchristi@gn.apc.org) [www.paxchristi.org.uk](http://www.paxchristi.org.uk)

## Pax Christi - Our Values

Pax Christi members live by the biblically inspired values of **Peace, Reconciliation, Nonviolence.**

These values are supported by the witness of peacemakers down the ages and the experience of the Pax Christi community.

Pax Christi is rooted in Catholic Christianity but is open to all who are in sympathy with its values and work.

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