

DISARMING Pax Christi TIMES

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THE UNSTOPPABLE POWER OF HOPE

Bishop Rowan Williams

Rowan Williams is a former Archbishop of Canterbury and master of Magdalene College Cambridge. This is a sermon preached on 18 May 2025 at Great St Mary's Church, Cambridge on the 80th anniversary of Christian Aid, the Ecumenical overseas aid agency of the UK & Ireland

A few days ago we were assured on very high authority that the New Normal for international aid would be 0.3% of gross national product. How often have we heard the terms *the New Norm* and *the New Normal* in the last twenty years. We are told again and again after such and such a crisis, such and such a tragedy, we cannot go back to what we assumed was normal. In case you've forgotten there was a financial crisis in 2008. In case you've forgotten there was a pandemic in 2020. After each of these we were told that things would never be the same again, that there was a *New Normal*. A cynic might say that the *New Normal* was *talking about the New Normal*.

What do we mean when we talk like this? What do we mean when we speak of a *New Normal*? At the very least, at the most trivial and ordinary level, to talk about the *New Normal* is to say: We can't expect or take for granted what once we did. What seemed obvious is no longer obvious. We have to adjust our expectations and our hopes.



But *Normal* is a weasel word. It can mean what's usual, what we have learned to expect as a matter of course. Or it can mean something Norm in the sense of something by which we judge what happens. It could mean a standard. And if we're saying that the New Norm for our international life, in the sense of a new standard, is a new level of anxiety and penny pinching withdrawal of our concern for the rest of the world, we have a problem. As Christians we believe that the norm by which we live, yesterday, today and forever, is the wisdom of God, that wisdom which holds all things in balance and mutuality, *the wisdom in which our life is real only when it is shared*. The wisdom incarnate in Jesus Christ is the pattern of life in which the giving of life is fundamental. And to live by such a norm is not a

lifestyle choice but a *life choice*. Not for nothing in Hebrew Scripture does Moses say to the people *in the name of God, today I set before your life and death*. So when we hear about a New Normal, we better listen carefully and with discrimination. And we better ask ourselves and our society: *What indeed do we take as normative?* What is the standard, what is it by which we choose to live, not simply as a matter of lifestyle but as a matter of life?

Eighty years ago, Christian Aid was founded in a period when many people were determined to challenge what seemed to be Normal, to challenge expectations, the expectations of mutual defensiveness and hostility, the expectations of discrimination and disadvantage. It was an age when people put together not only Christian Aid but the institutions by which the post war order would live, the institutions of jus-

Contents

The unstoppable power of hope.	P 1
Fighting for a Dying World.....	p 3
Christianity: the antithesis of Zionism	p 7
A new Cold War is Sweeping Across Europe.....	p 8
Building Respectful Relationships	p 10
The Night that Never Breaks Into Dawn.....	p 11
Sure Hope, Sure Foundations of Peace.....	p 12
Is Democracy for Sale.....	p 12

DISARMING TIMES

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justice and participation, the idea that there was something to which people could appeal in protest against violence and injustice. That was indeed a New Norm to be discovered, a new standard by which the lives of individuals and national communities might be judged, a Norm which was not just a matter of what we might expect on the basis of the recent past, a past of bloodshed and injustice. But a standard rooted in a deeper and more lasting vision in which we might have hope because it could depend on our realising it all the time, what was there, guiding and nourishing day by day and year by year.

And when we speak of the weakening, of the ending of the post war consensus and the emergence of a New Normal, we need to be concerned. I need to ask those very fundamental questions: *By what do we live? By what do we ask to be judged?* If normality in the sense of the standard by which we live, the source from which we draw our inspiration, if normality is to be defined in terms of what prevails in the world and nothing more, we are to paraphrase Paul, *of all people, the most to be pitied.*

We are trapped because this is the New Norm. We have replaced on focal idea with another: the focal idea *that I am only safe of my neighbour is safe* with the New Normality of *I am only safe if my neighbour is frightened.* It's that latter point that casts light on so much of the world we're in. The constantly unfolding tragedy in Gaza rests on the idea that I am safe only if my neighbour is frightened. The panic that can be whipped up so readily against minorities in so many countries rests on the same things: *I am safe if my neighbour is frightened.* The patterns of war and rivalry and the transactional international diplomacy of the kind unfolding around us day by day, the basic paradigm is that my neighbour must be frightened for me to be safe, my neighbour must be unfree for me to be free.

If your enemy is hungry, feed them, if they are thirsty, give them

something to drink, there is normality. Our faith points to a Normality in deepest tension with what is usual, Normal in the sense of tragically predictable. And so Christian Aid through these decades and for decades to come is and will be committed to challenging expectations in the name not of what is common, expected and predicted but in the name of what is life giving, It is the harmony of the universe where it is possible for a life to be fair, to be shared. It is the life-giving possibilities of reconciliation and of justice. That is what we are invited to live by. Not a lifestyle choice, but a choice of life rather than death.

Because if we do live by the principle that for me to be safe my neighbour must be afraid, we are condemning ourselves. I will always be afraid that my neighbour isn't afraid enough. To be sprung from that trap by the hope and promise of reconciliation, that surely is the gospel in its essence: to be sprung from the trap of fear. *Perfect love casts our fear* says our scripture. Love, along with faith and hope is intrinsically opposed to fear. If we live without fear, we must learn the true New Norm. that is the Norm of the Gospel, the Norm of generosity, of shared life, of everything that teaches us that our safety, our life of flourishing is burned up with the good of the neighbour. If we fail to see that we condemn ourselves as we condemn the neighbour to terror, to butchery, to constant rivalry, to unceasing war.

It will be good in many ways to pray today as we prayed at previous anniversaries for Christian Aid, that Christian Aid will do ourselves out of a job one day. That the Norm by which we live and the hope which we breathe, which we drink, which nourishes us and keeps us going becomes the hope of the world in which we live. That in another eighty years there will be no need for Christian Aid or any such organisation. Don't hold your breath. But to know that we could pray that now, at some level of our hearts, we may be praying to know that we are indeed truly committed

to a standard, a Norm, a reality. This reality is the interactive life of self giving, of what theologians call kenotic life, self emptying life. That is what we must live by. That is where life is to be found. Without that there is only fear. Without that there is only violence. Can we believe that that is indeed a Norm, not vulnerable to the changes of geopolitics and the changes of moral fashion but the wellspring of renewal day after day? Listening to those words about New Normality and New Norms, it was hard not to be reminded of the title of a book by the novelist Jeanette Winterson about upbringing: *Why be Happy if You could be Normal?* Why are we happy when you could be Normal? Why are we happy not to accept what everyone seems to be content with, tinted with the way we are? Why not settle with the endless unfinished business of Israel and Pales-

tine, of Russia and Ukraine, of India and Pakistan? Not in the brutal terms we so often use these days, Just get used to it.

The answer is simple. That is to opt for unreality, for untruth and self-destruction. That is to opt for a lie. Any language that speaks of a New Norm in the sense of a new standard by which we can live ignoring that truth, commits us to a great corporate global lie. Christian Aid sought year after year to nail that lie for what it is. It's not out of business yet. Naming the lies of selfishness, the lies of violence is something we are not going to stop needing anytime soon. And I hope, in eighty years we'll not be out of business. Our hope is that we will be kept fresh in that vision. That we will be kept alive in our faith, our trust and our confidence. That the world is not Normatively a place of conflict and exclusion. May God keep us

faithful to that Normality which is God's own wisdom. May God keep us faithful to the discontent with what we can expect and assume on the basis of what prevails in our world. May God keep us faithful to the apparent impossibility of a new world where I know that I will live when my neighbour lives and my neighbour will live when I live. My task is not to keep my neighbour frightened and dispossessed, at arm's length, but to find and create a world in which together we can share promise and share justice. God keep us fresh in that vision and that commitment for however long it takes. Jesus says to St. Peter at the end of the Fourth Gospel: *If it is my will that he tarry until I come, what is that to you?* If we have to go on doing this until the end of the world, so be it. It is worth it. It is the truth and it is life. And there is no other.

REFLECTIONS ON FIGHTING FOR A DYING WORLD

Lilli Barto

Lilli Barto is a peace and climate activist. This is an address to the 2025 AGM of Pax Christi New South Wales.

J was born in 1993 into a world that had just begun to realise it was dying. Climate change was not yet in common parlance, but my Mum is an old school environmentalist who always took her canvas bags to the shops so as a small child I knew about pollution, deforestation, plastic in the ocean, the whales, the orang-utans, pesticides, top soil loss, and corporations that spew whatever was inconvenient for them into the river for the people downstream to deal with.

My Dad is from the states and he was a medic in Vietnam. He was literally only 19. I am older now than he was when he returned from four years of service. He describes Vietnam as an important stage in the American people's coming of age, because it was one of the first times he remembers where a whole bunch of people simultaneously became aware that their government lies to them. He says that was important. Like Mum he is also no great fan of corporations either and described



their modus operandi to me from a young age as "Whatever isn't nailed down is mine and whatever I can pry loose isn't nailed down".

As I mentioned, the world had not yet started the conversation about climate change, but the nineties still had a somewhat apocalyptic mood. The anti-globalisation movement, which called itself the global justice movement, was nearing its peak reflecting a wide spread malaise with the society. It wasn't yet existential in the way it is now, but large collective bodies of people were loudly expressing that they were no longer buying the progress narrative that everything would basically just get better forever for everyone. We were told we just had to be patient, we will hit some bumps in the road, but one day Africans will have mobile

phones, racism will be gone, women will be CEOs and technology will free up everyone's time to pursue soul nourishing activities like art. Now it's 2025 and AI makes the art.

Now I am not saying that there was ever a time where absolutely everyone believed that narrative, but I do feel that the nineties and early 2000's was a period where the social pressure to pretend you believed it loosened significantly.

So, by 2003 I was ten years old, right at the beginning of an important developmental stage where you're starting to become aware of the world beyond your immediate sphere of experience. 2003 witnessed what was at the time the largest mass demonstration in Australia's history when we marched against the Iraq war. And then we went to Iraq anyway. More people than had ever demonstrated for anything demonstrated against the Iraq war, and we went to Iraq anyway. Now, I certainly couldn't have articulated this as a ten-year-old so I being a little bit teleological here, but I think that did something to me and

people around about my age. It showed us, in front of our own young eyes, that marching doesn't work. And it doesn't work because the government doesn't actually give a shit what any of us want. Public sentiment is simply not what they are optimising for. It also showed us that appealing to ethics or the moral compass of our so-called leaders also doesn't work. There is this kind of unspoken narrative that runs through a lot of the received wisdom about campaigning and organising that if we speak truth to power and we band together to point out the moral flaws in our society then everyone will see the light and our leaders will go "Oh wow, yeah you're right. Directly facilitating the deaths of tens of thousands of civilians so we can secure cheaper oil is wrong. Well, now that I know that, I'll just set about dismantling global capitalism. Leave it with me". And they will fix it for us. We just have to show them that lots and lots of us want them to. Then they will do the rest. But we went to Iraq anyway.

Fast forward to 2007, I'm thirteen years old and the only Prime Minister I can remember is Howard. The only US President I can remember is Bush. They had been in power for what felt like the entirety of my life. Then, the tide turned. We elected Kevin Rudd. America elected Obama. His slogan was literally "hope". I think that will prove to be the last time for the rest of my lifetime where making "hope" your slogan works. The bad guys were gone! Hooray! Democracy prevails!

And then nothing substantively changed. K-Rudd said sorry but didn't implement the recommendations of the royal commission into deaths in custody. He signed the Kyoto protocol but we kept on digging up coal. He shouted us all a flat screen which to be fair did actually help insulate us from the GFC but he didn't raise the dole and in Australia today 1 in 6 children live in poverty. This was another important event for my generation. It showed us that the problem ran much, much deeper than the wrong people being in

power. Today I almost wish that was the problem, that problem has an obvious solution. But if the ship is sinking, changing the captain doesn't stop the water from streaming into the hull. Obama bailed out the banks, and the world kept on turning. No one came to save us.

Around a similar time the film *An Inconvenient Truth* came out, and now the whole world knew the words "climate change". And it did nothing. People marched and shouted and researched and wrote letters and signed petitions and still we continue to do nothing even remotely adequate to address the fact that we are steadily destroying the earth's ability to keep us alive. Everyone knows now. There are conspiracy theorists and there always will be, but no one takes them seriously anymore and while they can be loud they are few in numbers. The problem isn't that people don't know. Again, maybe the problem is that the government doesn't understand just how many people want them to do more about the climate. They have entire teams of highly educated well paid people to monitor what we do and don't know, and what we do and don't care about. They know. They know that we're mad about them wrecking the climate, but no amount of marching competes with the hard, raw, material power of money and resources. That made me and many of my generation draw the conclusion that until and unless our movements actually materially threaten the mechanisms by which our elected and corporate rulers accumulate and consolidate wealth and power – they shall not be moved.

Now, there's this line from some pop culture article that I forget the name of but this line has always stuck with me. On the one hand I think it's reductionist and a bit of a naff way to put it but on the other hand I think it speaks to something real. The line is: "*Superman is dead; we live in the age of batman*". And what I think is super real about that is that I do feel like people my age and younger are just a bit darker and more cynical at a younger age than possibly

previous generations were. "Hope" narratives not only fail to resonate with us or motivate us, they actually kind of shit us to tears. There is a term for this, *hopium*. *Hopium* narratives tell you that if you do this one simple thing, and encourage everyone you know to do that same simple thing, then we'll be okay. We'll turn the tide of global civilization. Just make sure you rinse those bloody cans before recycling them. *Hopium* pushers send you emails that start with "Lilli! There has never been a more important time to stand up and be counted!". *Hopium* pushers will tell you that resistance is both fun and easy. They present fighting for justice as being a similar emotional experience to attending a weekly dance class with a nice group of like-minded people. *Hopium* pushers would generally rather receive your donations than your opinions. But all of that might be forgivable, if *hopium* pushers didn't lie to you about how power works. They're still telling us that if you stand up and be counted, use your voice, withdraw your consent (but not your labour 'cause that's illegal!) – that power at the top shifts in response to a mere expression of popular opinion.

And that cynicism brings me to an example I wanted to use where I feel like I've seen this play out in my actual organising life, and it's a debate that comes up in peace movement spaces perennially and that's "do we want to be anti-war activists or peace activists?". And, I want to be clear I am not here to disrespect anyone who identifies as a peace activist and also I think ultimately it doesn't matter what we call ourselves it matters what we do - I'm just trying to use this as an illustrative example. People my age think peace is naff, *kumbaya* bullshit. And second of all we've never seen it. What peace? Afghanistan has been fucked my whole life, and a global majority of people are subjected to systemic and structural economic violence (and just straight up, regular physical violence) every single day. What peace? If Netanyahu stopped bombing Gaza tomorrow would the world be at peace? We don't con-

conceptualise what we're doing as fighting for peace we're fighting against Imperialism because Imperialism kills people. We don't fight for utopia we fight for collective survival. And again, I don't mean any disrespect to anyone here, one of my closest activist mentors strongly identifies as a peace activist and that's her call, that's fine – I'm just trying to reflect on why my generation is and isn't motivated by certain rhetorics. But often when this anti-war/pro-peace discussion comes up someone always says "oh but it's such a negative frame why don't we associate ourselves with something positive?". Guys, the ship is sinking. I'm sorry but fuck positivity. Fuck positivity, fuck *hopium*, and fuck thinking that we can trick people into doing the right thing by telling them that it will be fun! At this point you're honestly helping them more by telling them to stock up on non-perishable pantry foods.

So, if hope, progress, world peace, and #goodvibes don't speak to young people – why are young people resisting at all? Because they very much are. I was at Disrupt Land Forces last year and I met 15-year-olds that are honestly more hardcore now than I'll ever be.

Well, there's two main currents of thought toward this that I observe within movement spaces and I am going to try to characterise them – but I confess I am about to put words in a whole bunch of people's mouths, do some blatant homogenizing of diverse sets of movement actors and engage in practicing psychoanalysis without a license. But here we go.

One strand of thought that I see emerging is like a revolutionary adaptation of the progress narrative. I think that's understandable because across history you can see that whenever we, as societies or collective social bodies try to flip the script on something, you can always detect the echoes of the old script if you read between the lines of the flipped one. We don't actually change that fast and we can't instantly shed conditioning of the old script even if we hated every second of the play. This modern adaptation of the manifest destiny pro-

gress narrative is basically still that stuff on average across the ages has steadily gotten better, but we're currently in this rut called capitalism but eventually the people will rise up and overthrow capitalism and then progress can continue, because the progress will be shared equally instead of allowed to basically accumulate in the hands of the very few while the rest of us die. So the main problem is that the dividends of the progress have not been evenly distributed. The shape of the predicted revolution is eerily similar to a "pull yourselves up by your bootstraps" narrative but rather than speaking to your individual material success it speaks to the collective success of the movement beating the odds. It has shed or subverted many of the toxic aspects of the bootstraps narrative, but it still tacitly assumes that progress is linear, predictable, almost Newtonian. If the movement does x then y will happen. The arc of history bends toward justice, and all that. You can take this narrative to a lot of different places but one that pops up again and again seems to be "we gotta make an umbrella organization". We gotta come up with a magic strategy, that everyone in the movement will agree with and get behind, and then when we are all behind the same banner and chanting the same chant and speaking with one voice and everyone's in lock step together then we'll win. And that's what I think all our movements have been doing for the whole time I have been involved in them, we're trying to find this magic, singular, monolithic strategy that is just so damn good that everyone will do it and then we'll win. I'll give you that that is a compelling story. But, it has been tried, many times, by many people who were and are clever, dedicated, thoughtful, skilful organisers. And no one has done it yet.

When I reflect on why this hasn't happened despite countless competent people trying really hard to make it happen is that I think we're now seeing the social conditions under which grand narrative strategies break down because the world is too complex, too materially inter-

connected yet socially fragmented, and happening too damn fast. We're in the realm of quantum social change now. Like, under most conditions you encounter in your day-to-day life, Newtonian physics works just fine. It can tell you where the ball will land; it can tell you if the bridge will stay up when a truck drives across it. It's good stuff. But, as physicists started to realise in the 1920s there are sets of circumstances under which Newtonian models break down, and can no longer accurately predict outcomes. In fact, there are some outcomes that can't be predicted at all. I think we're in an age where our Newtonian organising models are starting to break down, because we're encountering the conditions where their limitations become obvious.

This brings me to the second broad strand of thought that I see emerging across our movements, and it's definitely nascent, emerging, and in the minority. Basically I think it's still being born. I am going to call it for the sake of having a name for it – *the dark horizon frame* – which I have stolen from a zine that is very good; that's called *beyond the dark horizon*. I find this narrative more compelling, and ironically more hopeful, because I find it more believable. Having said that, what would I know? No seriously, we're all just trying shit out and seeing what it does in this resistance business. None of us actually knows what works because if we knew that we'd have done it and won by now. We're all just experimenting with what sets of activities have the capacity to change which sets of things. I prefer to organize in spaces that are self-aware about that and don't lie to their new recruits by saying that they have all the answers and we already know how to win, because none of us do. I'll quote at length from the zine now – "Where, to my eye, the ground and sky meet lies the horizon. Moving with my perceptual field, the horizon is a place that is nowhere and everywhere, whilst never being here. The horizon is always there, over there, there at the limits of my visual field. There's

something maddening about never being-there, at the horizon, because as I move the horizon moves. As I move my limits change.

I cannot know what is happening at the horizon. Life there is uncertain to me. It is a thoroughly unintimate encounter, devoid of touch, smell or taste.

In darkness I encounter uncertainty and in the endarkening of the world I experience unknowing. To those animals who have sought to survive amidst the totalitarian presence of mass extinction culture by embracing the dark of night, endarkening, through becoming unknowable, or non-localisable, the darkness has become a means of escaping the gaze of totalitarianism.

I do not find darkness to be lightlessness. Endarkenment strikes me as a space of darklight – not a blinding brightness that renders the world unseeable, but a cool and gentle light that is blended with the intensities of darkness. Darklight is fuzzy and shimmers, with beautiful indefiniteness, affecting the space around it so that all is undefinable. I am imagining now a dark-sunrise. [...]

I see a dark-sunrise just beyond the horizon. Its uncertain, indefinite and undefinable. But I see it, like a beech tree lit by moonlight on a clear night. Quite different than the blinding bright artificial lights of transhumanist prophets, the dark-sunrise is a pessimistic beautifully sombre light. An apocalypse, uncovering that hidden by the blinding light, the dark-sunrise is the destruction of the future-world prophesied, with the sacrifice of the flesh that is the living-world.

There's mourning in the morning of the dark-sunrise and there's a dawn chorus that is a sound unlike any I have heard before. There's beautiful music to dance to on this day."

So, the dark horizon frame contends that the world we live in is ending but the project before us is NOT to prevent it from ending. It is to learn to hold each other lovingly through catastrophe, and to midwife the new world that will take its place. That

world won't be perfect either, it won't be free from oppression, it won't be fully automated luxury gay space communism, but it will be young and impressionable.

At this point people usually turn away from this frame because they think what it's telling them is "give up, we're too late" or a slightly more generous "just wait for society to collapse and then build communes in its ashes or something". It doesn't say either of those things to me. When a community knows that a cyclone is coming, it doesn't just say to itself "well it can't be prevented so there is nothing to do but wait". People don't sit on their hands and wait. They don't give up on their community even though they accept the inevitability of the cyclone reaching them. People wrap their mattresses in plastic wrap, they sand bag stuff, and amazingly, they actually don't tend to fall into sectarian arguments about the most effective way to mobilise people to evacuate the town - they just do it. Another thing they don't do, is go around telling people that if they elect more independents and greens to the senate they can prevent the



cyclone from making landfall nor do they show up in numbers on the beach flying kites to show the cyclone that they don't recognize it's authority. They recognize that the cyclone is bigger than all of them, and to get through it they need each other. There is another saying that I can't remember where I heard it that says "when old ideas are shown to be unviable people will pick up whatever other ideas are lying around", and the more time I spend doing movement work the more drawn I am to the idea that our

task, at minimum, is to make sure than when it all falls apart (so like, now) – there are more of our ideas lying around than there is fascism.

The world is going to change immensely over the next few decades regardless of anything we do. And also, we're living in an age where the power structures that have conditioned our lives for so long are crumbling partly because good people have fought hard for a long time against them, but also because, as we've been at pains to point out, they were always inherently unsustainable. They were never going to last forever that's literally what we've been saying this whole time! And so, to me -accepting the inevitability of living through collapse is liberating rather than a cause for despair. It isn't idly waiting for a definite future to take shape and arrive, and neither is it thrashing against time to prevent its arrival altogether. It is leaning in to the world's complexity, and being liberated by the knowledge that you don't have to come up with a perfect plan because no such plan can exist. There will be no one plan, and if we manage to have a revolution – what actually happens will not have been planned by anyone. It will be a messy, emergent, sometimes internally contradictory chaos storm that no one is actually in control of. So I think some of the questions we need to grapple with are not "what is the best strategy that will solve this problem forever" or "how do we get all of the groups to join up under a singular umbrella organization" but instead "what does it look like to design a strategy that doesn't require everyone to do it to succeed?", "what can we do to maintain group cohesion during stressful and emotionally volatile times?", "how will we look after each other as the world falls apart?", and finally "how can we learn to thrive in the chaos and uncertainty that is most certainly coming for us all?"

CHRISTIANITY: THE ANTITHESIS OF ZIONISM

Bishop George Browning

Zionism has both secular nationalist roots, as well as religious messianic roots. But neither have any basis in Christianity.

This week I attended a symposium — “Who owns the Holy Land” — sponsored by PIEN (Palestine Israel Ecumenical Network). It was extremely well attended and was an excellent night. If the symposium is still on its way to your city — please attend. However, in answer to questions one of the speakers shocked me by saying, “Zionism is rooted in Christianity”. I completely understand why this was said, given the influence of the American Christian Right, together with its offshoots in most Western countries, including Australia. However, to consequently assume Israel must be defended from a Christian perspective has become one reason why criticism of Israel is weaponised as anti-Semitism and censorship of Palestinian voices has become so prevalent in Australian public discourse. I wish to explain.

Let’s deal with the secular (even atheistic), nationalistic roots first. After the catastrophe of the fall of Jerusalem and destruction of the second temple in AD 70, Judaism survived for millennia among the diaspora. We are familiar with the terrible persecutions suffered by Jews over centuries, especially in Europe, culminating in the Holocaust.

Towards the end of the 18th century, and into the 19th century, tension arose between those members of the Jewish community who believed their future lay with appropriate integration into Bavarian, French, or whatever culture prevailed in the lands in which they were domiciled, and those who strongly opposed such a move. Integration does not mean loss of identity or religion, but it does mean accepting the governing rules and requirements of the state in which you live. Jews, along with most cultures across the globe, are thoroughly integrated into most Western countries, including Australia, with-

out loss of identity, culture or religion. Not accepting the norms and rules of the country where you live inevitably means living in ghettos.

Strong voices resisted integration. The Zionist movement was born. A homeland was sought to be ruled, owned and governed for Jews to the exclusion of others. Nationalistic Zionism, by definition, cannot be anything other than racist, clearly attested through statements of its early and present leadership including David Ben Gurion, Golda Meir and Benjamin Netanyahu. Failure to understand that harmonious living together in the Holy Land by Christians, Jews and Muslims, in the time of the Ottomans, could not prevail with the introduction of Zionism was, and remains, a massive failure of the West. (The 1917 Balfour Declaration was written assuming such harmonious co-operation and the honouring of the rights of all residents). Since 1967, Israel has controlled the lives of every man woman and child, whether they live in the lands designated Israel, or East Jerusalem, West Bank or Gaza. Half the people with unencumbered Israeli citizenship live with the rights and privileges of nationhood. The other half, depending where they live, either have greatly restricted rights, or they live with constant expectation of their lands being confiscated or, as in Gaza, they have lived with a seemingly endless blockade and, of course, now with starvation. One-state solution, two-state solution: peace and prosperity for all is not possible with an Israel that maintains a nationalistic Zionist mindset.



Nationalistic Zionism is of course buttressed by historical religious belief that the land was promised to Israel by God. Bizarre that historical religion should buttress modern-day national secularism! Bizarre too that politicians, often with no known spiritual background, appear to give weight to this argument. Wide sections of the Christian community gloss over sufferings inflicted, legality ignored, human rights abused, holding a priori that Palestinians must be the bad guys and Israelis the good guys because of priority given to this claim.

There are so many problems with this claim.

- According to the biblical story, the promise of the land was made to Abraham along with the expectation that through his descendants all nations on earth would be blessed. Since 1948, the creation of Israel has not been a blessing, especially not to its neighbours; in contrast, members of the Jewish diaspora have been, and continue to be, a blessing beyond measure.

- The last time an entity called Israel held even fleeting sovereignty over a portion of this land was 721 BC.

- Most Jewish settlers in the 20th and 21st centuries have no historic connection to the land whatsoever, they are Europeans, Russians and Americans who have brought with them agendas from afar and a total lack of tolerance for anyone who is not Jewish. Jews with historic connection to the land lived in harmony with their neighbours.

It is utterly inconceivable that God would countenance large-scale suffering, if not annihilation, of another people to achieve the “promise”. Now, let me come to the hopes and aspirations of religious Zionism.

Christian Zionism’s origins in the US post-date the nationalistic fervour of the late 18th and 19th century Zionism in Europe, and conveniently piggyback on them. Christian Zionism

has no connection with Orthodox Judaism's hopes for the coming of a messiah.

We know little about the first Jewish diaspora, which occurred following the annihilation of the northern kingdom of Israel in 721 BC. This diaspora is often referred to as "the lost 10 tribes". The remaining tribe, Judah, with its capital Jerusalem, survived until 586 BC. The exile to Babylon was both utterly devastating and totally transformative. What had been, in effect, the religion of a relatively inconsequential tribal kingdom who believed their God dwelt in Jerusalem's temple, had to admit they were wrong, or that if God was God, then God could also be worshipped in Babylon – monotheism was born. They dared to believe that they had a role in hosting the presence of God for all humankind and dreamed of a return to Jerusalem and the establishment of a "Holy Hill" – Zion – to which all the nations of the world could be drawn. (Please forgive me for reflecting the UN hopes for Jerusalem are not new)!

Unfortunately, when the return occurred under the Persian Cyrus, the particularity of being Jewish pre-

vailed and any vision for hosting divine presence in harmony and peace for the world vanished.

Now, fast forward to Christ and the birth of Christianity. Antagonism existed between those who claimed to be survivors of the long-lost Northern Kingdom of Israel, known as Samaritans, and the Jewish community focused on the second temple in Jerusalem. Christ was asked in which place should God be worshipped. He answered – neither.

It is Christian belief that "in Christ, God had been pleased to dwell". If "Zion" is the dwelling place of God, then Christ is that Zion. Place has become person. The presence of the living one, the risen one, the light of the world, the prince of peace is present for all humankind; at our best, we Christians facilitate that presence, at our worst we get in the way.

There has never been a century in the last 2000 years when end times have not been immediately predicted. One of the ways in which some Christians seriously get in the way is by re-linking, with zero justification, the living person who personifies "Zion", with place. These people, drawing on their interpreta-

tion of apocalyptic writings, foresee an end to this world as we understand it through the "coming of Christ" in a final history of the Middle East. They have come to believe his coming will occur when Israel is all in all, from the river to the sea. It is bizarre that these Christians, strong supporters of Zionist Israel, really have no interest in the long-term future of Israel, but in what they perceive to be the long awaited "end times".

No, Zionism is totally and completely antithetical to Christian belief and it should be the obligation of all Christians everywhere to speak loudly and clearly in its condemnation, of course for Palestinians, but also for Israelis. What future is there for people who have become a pariah to everyone else?

George Browning was Anglican Bishop of Canberra Goulburn 1993 – 2008. He was President of the Australia Palestine Advocacy Network 2013 – 2022. He is now its Patron. He is also Patron of Palestinian Christians in Australia, and of the Palestinian ecumenical liberation theology centre -Sabeel. This article first appeared in "Pearls and Irritations"

A NEW COLD WAR IS SWEEPING ACROSS EUROPE – WITH GLOBAL REPERCUSSIONS

Joseph Camilleri

The last three and more years have seen the bloodiest war on European soil for the better part of 80 years.

With it has come rhetoric of disturbing belligerence and a military spending spree that has engulfed the whole of Europe.

Ostensibly, the conflict is between Russia and Ukraine. In reality, it has lasted as long as it has, and brought into play such a vast arsenal of destructive firepower, because the stakes are much higher and perhaps less visible than the bilateral dispute.

As we shall see, this is the single most dangerous geopolitical confrontation since the end of the Cold War, which is not to downplay the mayhem caused by Israeli military aggression in the Middle East or the seriousness of a possible Sino-US

collision.

The costs borne by the two sides over the last three years shed light on the gravity of the situation.

Official figures are scant and unreliable and, to make matters worse, Western sources tend to focus on evidence that supports the generally upbeat Ukrainian narrative. It is, nevertheless, possible to distil in broad outline the military dynamic and scale of this conflict and its far-reaching consequences.

There is no denying the costs Russia has incurred on the battlefield.

According to the thorough and regularly updated analysis conducted by [Mediazona in collaboration with BBC News Russian Service](#), named Russian military personnel killed between 24 February 2022 and 5 June 2025 numbered 111,387. Using a

different calculation based on excess mortality among men, its estimate of the number of deaths to December 2024 rises to 167,000, which suggests a current total close to 250,000.

The Russian economy has also come under pressure, but given the sustained sanctions imposed by Europe and the US, it has fared better than most Western analysts critical of Russian policies have consistently predicted.

That said, Russia's economic growth, which averaged 4% in 2023-24, will slow down appreciably this year and the next. Sanctions, falling oil prices, and a shrinking workforce are taking their toll, and the massive increase in military spending, though it has created employment opportunities, is stifling Russia's productive civilian

sectors. On the Ukrainian side, the picture is bleak, In February, [Zelenskyy told US news outlet NBC](#) that more than 46,000 Ukrainian soldiers had been killed and some 380,000 wounded. Independent Ukrainian war correspondent [Yuri Butusov](#) indicated in December 2024 that his army sources estimated some 70,000 dead and 35,000 missing. Other estimates are even higher, and the death toll has risen considerably over the last six months.

Casualties on the battlefield are only part of the damage the war has inflicted on Ukraine, its people, its economy and its social and political institutions. In its [May update](#), the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights placed the number of civilians killed since February 2022 at 13,341 and the number injured at 32,744.

As of February 2025, 10.7 million Ukrainians had been displaced, that is just under a quarter of Ukraine's pre-invasion population of 44 million. Over the same period, the Ukrainian economy has shrunk by 22%.

More telling, perhaps, is the damage to [Ukraine's infrastructure](#). As of 2024, Ukraine was left with its transmission infrastructure substantially disabled, 64% of its electricity generating capacity destroyed or occupied, and its thermal capacity reduced by 80%.

Why have the two adversaries been prepared to absorb so much pain and for so long? For the Ukrainian leadership, it has been a matter of preserving itself and the country's territorial integrity, safe in the knowledge that the NATO powers would come to its rescue.

In Russia's case, Putin decided that NATO's relentless expansion and the coming to power of a Ukrainian Government committed to NATO membership had crossed a red line. His response, beginning with the annexation of Crimea in March 2014, was predictable. Eleven years later it remains unchanged.

The [Russian memorandum](#) released less than two weeks ago during the ceasefire talks in Istanbul restates the Russian position and sets out a



long list of demands, four of which are worth highlighting:

- Full rights and freedoms for Russian speakers in Ukraine;
- The complete withdrawal of the Ukrainian military from the Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions, which Russia presently occupies, though not fully;
- Ukrainian neutrality, including a pledge not to join military alliances or coalitions and a ban on any military activity by third countries on Ukrainian territory; and
- A halt to the supply of all arms and provision of intelligence data from Western sources.

What these demands make clear is that the war is first and foremost a conflict between Russia and NATO. The addition of Finland and Sweden as NATO's newest members in 2023-24 has merely strengthened Russian resolve.

So have Ukraine's increasingly daring attacks on Russian airfields and war production facilities, notably the recent Operation Spiderweb which targeted and successfully hit several of Russia's strategic cruise-missile and nuclear-weapon carriers.

It is hard to believe that such a complex operation 18 months in the planning could have been attempted without intelligence and targeting support from US and UK security agencies.

All of which has reinforced the Kremlin's view that Ukraine is serving as a NATO proxy, and that Western military establishments are intent on inflicting maximum damage on Russia's strategic and economic interests.

Russian anxieties have deepened, given the scale of US and European military and financial aid to Ukraine.

Total [US aid](#) is estimated to have reached US\$175 billion. Additionally, last December, the US provided a US\$20 billion loan to be paid back with interest from frozen Russian assets. As of May, the [European contribution](#) amounted to just under US\$200 billion.

In this unfolding strategy, states are not the only players. Much of this aid has been military related. Important beneficiaries have been the arms manufacturers, notably Lockheed Martin, Raytheon, Northrop Grumman and General Dynamics, that supply Ukraine or replenish domestic weapons stocks. According to one estimate, US aid to Ukraine has funded the arms industry in more than 70 US cities.

Other notable beneficiaries include the major oil companies that have profited from higher oil prices, the inevitable result of sanctions aimed at Russia's oil exports. [According to one estimate](#), BP, Shell, Chevron, ExxonMobil and TotalEnergies have made record profits of more than US\$380 billion since the invasion.

Side by side with the transfer of arms to Ukraine has been the massive increase in European military spending, invariably justified by reference to the threat posed by Russian aggression. Over a remarkably short period, EU member states' defence budgets have risen sharply from €218 billion in 2021 to €326 billion in 2024, with a further increase of at least €100 billion projected by 2027.

In March, Ursula von der Leyen, president of the European Commission, issued an urgent call for Europe to re-arm, and help turn Ukraine into a "steel porcupine". To this end, she announced the [ReArm Europe Plan](#), including a €150 billion European fund, designed to facilitate increased defence spending by EU member countries.

For its part, France has approved a record defence budget for 2025 (€47.2 billion). Germany has committed to raising its troop strength by 60,000 under new NATO targets so as to be ready to be at war with Russia by 2029.

Two weeks ago, the UK Government, responding to what it called

"threats" posed by "growing Russian aggression", unveiled a [radical defence overhaul](#). New investments in nuclear warheads, a fleet of new submarines and new munitions factories were intended to bring the country to "war-fighting readiness". The horrific Ukraine war may be a

harbinger of things to come. Narrowly conceived but powerful political, economic and military interests are driving Europe to war-fighting strategies that can only end in tears. Civil society in Europe needs to awaken from its slumber. *Joseph Camilleri is Emeritus Profes-*

sor at La Trobe University in Melbourne, a Fellow of the Australian Academy of Social Sciences, Convener of Conversation at the Crossroads, and Co-Convener of SHAPE (Saving Humanity and Planet Earth) This article first appeared in Pearls and Irritations.

BUILDING RESPECTFUL RELATIONSHIPS –

Pax Christi Victoria Agape 25 June 2025,

John Ball & Maxine Barry

Six people brought to our Agape gathering reports of their grassroots work building peace. Our Chairperson, Catriona Devlin introduced the discussion, speaking of the numerous concerning events recently that indicate the problems of violence in our communities. This Agape was designed to contribute to the larger Human Security Project that Pax Christi has in progress.

Caesar d'Mello set the scene with a report from the International Pax Christi Non-violence Initiative. (PX NVI) . Some questions posed included, "Am I at peace - with a family member or neighbour?" Is discrimination experienced because of my identity? Perpetrators may use race, autocratic power or other violence, such as armaments, weapons research and propaganda to justify violence, robbing resources, for future other needs. We need to reflect on Shalom, a vision of peace and non-violence. Pope Francis spoke of the need to transform violence, moving from the wish to dominate others. to instead, turning the other cheek.

A 'Just War theory and practice' conference was held in 2016. In view of modern weaponry and warfare, it was concluded that there is no such thing as a just war. Non-violence is central to the Christian faith and spirituality - a universal ethic, and at the heart of the Gospel. The PX NVI is to promote peace in the church and the world, pursuing dialogue for peace. There are implications at all levels from personal to international. A choice of non -violence is a style of life.

Judy Lamb spoke about the Mor-dialloc Parish Justice Action Group. Action was inspired by the Australian Catholic Bishops' 2022 statement on family violence. The Action Group

got help from Catholic Social Services. The group has a wide remit with focus varying across the years, most recently on intimate partner violence. The team organised a parish forum that included consciousness-raising lead-up activities.. Organisations , including school teachers and churches, working in this space were contacted. The forum attracted 50 attendees. Word had been spread beyond local Catholic parishes. There were Respectful Relationships programmes in at least two schools. There was a skill building component and men's workshops, and a retreat for 25 men. Support for victims was included. The obstacles that were tackled were denial - not in OUR community! - reluctance to name the behaviours. The dominance of males in Church structures and in parishes was highlighted.

Dale Hess represented Pace e Bene and told of a project in Bunbury, Western Australia, where a group with 50 participants was set up inspired by the book, *See What You Made Me Do* by Jess Hill. It involved men against domestic violence and acknowledged that men have to change their behaviour. In 2024, 51 women were murdered by their intimate partners. It is not enough just to abstain from violence, the group affirmed. As well as awareness raising, a men's choir formed. A concert attracted other choirs as well, with a total of 70 performers, and raised funds for domestic violence services. Talks on domestic violence were well received. Things that worked included: recruitment was good though not maximum; discussions helped participants step outside their comfort zones; and the concert had great variety. An area for improvement was the need for more and better promotional methods,

because the ticket sales were disappointing.

Justine Mickle is a volunteer whose day job is social work, where she learns of domestic violence with depressing frequency, She is a trained volunteer with AVP (Alternatives to Violence Project). This now worldwide movement originated in the Bronx prison, USA,, where older African-American men serving long sentences were deeply concerned about recidivism among young men from their community. They reached out for help to the Quakers, whose work was known from the Civil Rights movement. That was the beginning of setting up AVP groups in the prison. The program involves a two-day workshop, with engaging activities that lead to deep personal reflection in a non-threatening way - they look like play but reach into participants' hearts. They then go more deeply and have 'train the trainer' initiatives. By word of mouth, people request workshops for their communities - AVP has wide application to all manner of groups and a range of ages. It is now Australia wide. The workshops do not need to have a particular label - such as "tackling domestic violence" .Participants do not have to own guilt and shame to benefit from the change of heart that unfolds! Other groups attending the workshops have been refugees – from the Congo, South Sudan, Myanmar and Afghanistan - addressing trauma.

The NVP also did a programme for middle school, involving refugees and long-term Australian background children. Justine spoke of naming a workshop "Peace Leadership". It is non-denominational and is flexible enough to have been implemented by a group of illiterate

Burundian women refugees. A key resource book is "Building Peace and Community - AVP Around the World" by Graeme Stuart et al. AVP has a youth component called HIP. This is in the school curriculum in Western Australia. The programme is used in other states around schools where there is a problem. Coverage varies with states and governments, Building reputation and trust is important.

Matthew Tyler has been involved in a Jesuit Social Services (JSS) large-scale research project titled "Manbox", reflecting the JSS focus on systemic injustice. He emphasised the fact that so many men and boys who end up in the criminal justice system have themselves been victims and/or witnesses of domestic violence, and there has not been a helpful response then. Use of knives is common. JSS has worked with partners to carry out research, the largest project involving 3,500 males between 18 and 45 years old. The aim was to establish how many had been perpetrators of domestic violence.. Eight forms of violence were identified and 28% admitted to it. Attitudes as males, derived from society and the media, are the matrix in which men feel pressure to conform to harmful masculinity stereotypes.. Fifty percent of the surveyed men perceived pressure to conform. However, only about a quarter of respondents embraced these as personal values. Those who did were more likely to have com-

mitted violence against partners. There was also a correlation with other self-harming behaviours: gambling and suicidality, for example. Manbox is working with Catholic and state schools and workplaces promoting a language to describe ideas and values. It is important to create groups in which to have conversations about these. JSS has also worked on child sexual abuse. Disproportionately impacted by violence are indigenous women, women with a disability and Non-English Speaking Background (NESB) migrant women. Matt observed it is rare to get media coverage when an indigenous woman is killed, compared to a middle class, white woman. Members of Pax Christi can help by talking about violence and writing to Members of Parliament on these issues. **Megan Bourke** works for ACRATH (Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans), a 20 year old organisation. 50 million people worldwide are trafficked in one year! 90% are females, largely trafficked via forced marriages. Around 41,000 people are trafficked in and out of Australia each year; 90% are female. Forty two percent of all reports in Australia involve forced marriage. Often the perpetrators are in the family. Forced labour is another form of trafficking. Megan told two stories that illustrate the experience of forced marriage, one involving being sent overseas, and one being 'imported' to marry an older, dis-

abled man. Volunteers are trained to companion women rescued from these situations, who are often exiled from their families and communities for leaving the forced relationship. ACRATH partners with organisations such as the Red Cross, the Catholic health system, and the Federal Police support the work. One hundred organisations around the world work on trafficking issues. Men are also trafficked in Australia and this, and other, material can be read on the ACRATH website at: <https://acrath.org.au>

It was so encouraging to hear of the many varied ways in which grassroots groups are effecting changes in harmful attitudes and behaviours in ways that promote human thriving. It is obvious that there are many ways in which individuals can assist the work of such groups, including providing much needed funds!

Further reading: the groups have web pages FYI :

The Pax Christi Non-Violence Initiative: <https://paxchristi.net/cni-about-us/> Mordialloc Social Justice Action Group: <https://www.melbatholic.org/s/articles/a192w000000K0ayAAC/justice-action-group-charter-2024-2025>

Pace Bene Australia: <https://www.paceebene.org.au/> Jesuit Social Services: <https://jss.org.au/> ACRATH: <https://acrath.org.au> AVP: <https://avpaustralia.org>

<https://avpaustralia.org>

THE NIGHT THAT NEVER BREAKS INTO DAWN.

Batool Haidari

Within these walls of silent sorrow,
I pace, a shadow lost in time.
Heavy curtains guard the darkness
Let no silver moonlight shine.

Tired of walking, yet arriving nowhere,
Of hollow smiles and tears uncried.
Of reaching out to hands that vanish
Of battles fought and hope denied.

The rain taps soft against the window,
Beyond it sirens pierce the air.
A world in flames, a night unbroken,
A restless storm, a nameless prayer.

A knock- a voice, a call unanswered,
Shadow pressing at my door.
Glass shatters. Wind and water
rushing in forevermore .

A dome, a cross, a silent beacon,
A whisper in the weeping sky.
A love that shield, a voice that calls me,
A hope that will not fade or die.

With trembling steps. I move towards it.
A weary soul with nothing left.
Yet in its light my heart remembers-
Love endures and I am blessed.

Batool Haidari is an African asylum seeker. From an exhibition in St. Mary the Virgin Church, Oxford UK

NOTICE BOARD

**NEW SOUTH WALES
Pax Christi Meetings**

We normally meet on the First Monday of each month at 6.00pm for shared meal that members bring and the meeting follows at 6.30 pm.

**Contact: Claude Mostowik
0411 450 953**

The venue: 209A Edgeware Road, Enmore.

**QUEENSLAND
Pax Christi Meetings
Pax Christi Queensland**

Contact:

Pam Nair (Secretary): 07 3711 3273 pamnair@hotmail.com

**VICTORIA
Agapes and Public Forums**

Contact:

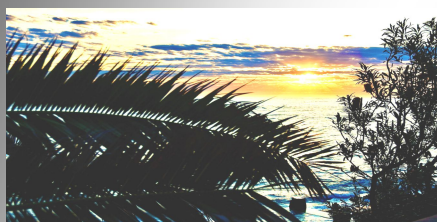
Catriona Devlin, Convenor
0419 109 830
catriona3171@gmail.com

**Pax Christi National Council
Meets on Zoom for national
issues**

Contact:

0411 450 953

SURE HOPE,, SURE
FOUNDATIONS OF
PEACE



*Life so uncertain vexed yet
ever inviting
into its new cycles.*

*Cycles ever gifting new dawn
and dusk,
new night and day*

*Spirit of Life ever present, ever
inviting, ever enabling.
Be ever still, aware, responsive
to Spirit of Life.*

*Forces of violence ever seeking
new allies, new victims.
Yet disturbed by dawn ever
welcoming companions of peace.*

*People enter this day being true
companions gifting
World near and far sure hope,
sure foundations of peace.*

*Br Jude Butcher cfc AM PhD
March 2 2025*

**IS DEMOCRACY FOR SALE?
NEOLIBERALISM'S FINAL ACT**

Democracy is in crisis in Australia as in much of the Western world, glaringly in Trump's America. Nor is it doing much better elsewhere.

The neo-liberal economic order ushered in the later 1970s with its emphasis on deregulation, privatisation and the dominance of the unfettered market seems to be crumbling. Inequality within and between countries has reached new heights.

How do we make sense of all this? Can we envision a more promising future? Is democratic renewal an option?

Two eminent public intellectuals, Professor John Keane and Professor John Quiggin will address these urgent questions in a fascinating online conversation with Professor Joseph Camilleri.

**Tuesday 8 July 2025 |
7.30pm – 9.15pm**

Register at
<https://www.trybooking.com/events/landing/1421694>

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