

UKRAINE SHRINKS AGAIN

By Tony Kevin

Feb 23, 2022

The dramatic declarations on 21 February illustrate yet again Barbara Tuchman's classic 'March of Folly' thesis - how often intelligent governments can act foolishly and against their best interest. Barbara Tuchman's March of Folly wins again.

The dramatic declarations on 21 February of independence by Donbass city-states Donetsk and Lugansk, and Russia's accompanying military guarantee to protect them against further heavy artillery attack by Kiev forces, illustrate yet again Barbara Tuchman's classic 'March of Folly' thesis - how often intelligent governments can act foolishly and against their best interest: in this case, illustrated by Washington and Kiev.

This analysis will be unpalatable to many in Australia and indeed in the West generally. It is hard for us to see beyond the all-enveloping narrative that surrounds us of Western good intentions with occasional mistakes in implementation, versus our horror comic negative mental images of Russia's President Putin. The latter images are far from the truth but very compelling. The people who create and sustain our mental furniture are top professionals at what they do. They condition our thinking and emotions, through powerful images and memes as



well as words. Highly intelligent people hate to admit they have fallen for such propaganda, and often get angry when it is suggested to them that they have.

The fact is that there have been many speeches over the years by Putin acknowledging full Ukrainian sovereignty since the 1991 breakup of the former Soviet Union, an authoritarian state in which Ukrainian Communists had played a major leadership role. Putin consistently has asked for two things of Ukraine. First, decent good-neighbourly relations based on mutual respect and mutual security, as between the US and Canada. And second, as in Canada, respect for the full human rights of Ukraine's numerous 'French Canadians'- the 50% plus of Ukrainians who share Russian native language and culture. This importantly includes a right to

share in the formation of Ukraine's national security policies and priorities. But the US has at least since 2013 used Ukraine's Nazis, and there are plenty of those, as the spearhead of its determination to make

Ukraine monocultural, militarised and permanently hostile to Russia. Just because Putin asserts these things does not mean they are not true. I believe they are true. Putin, President Macron of France and Chancellor Stolz of Germany (as with Merkel before him) in recent years and weeks did their best to find pathways

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# DISARMING TIMES

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through the growing confrontation, but in the end they could not halt the determination of Washington and Kiev foolishly to provoke the Russian bear. Over months, Putin had warned the West to step backwards from the militarisation of Ukraine, and to work with Russia towards a wider European settlement, reversing NATO's dangerous expansion towards Russia's borders since 1996.(see my two recent essays on Russian settlement proposals.)

As usual, the West cherry-picked, they prevaricated, and—the biggest Western blunder of all— Washington's Biden supplied powerful city-destroying heavy weapons to the ill-disciplined and Nazi-infected Ukrainian army. The temptation to start using them was irresistible.

We saw from 17 Feb onwards a determined, very threatening, but foolish attempt by Kiev's armed forces along the line of contact, including the notorious Azov Battalion, to advance into and occupy Donbass even under the noses of the 130,000 Russian troops waiting for orders in nearby Russia. The Ukrainian government of President Zelensky and his American advisers like Victoria Nuland had convinced themselves that Putin would not now dare to invade Ukraine after all the Western warnings of wider retribution. How wrong they were : right that he would not try to occupy Kiev, but wrong that he would let Donbass fall, creating unacceptable high risks of brutal ethnic cleansing of up to 4 million Russian Ukrainians forced to flee Donbass into Russia. And what a political humiliation this would have been for Putin.

By 18 Feb it was already clear from Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe reporting that a sharp escalation in Kiev's shelling of Donbass was taking place. Donetsk suburbs were being shelled. A Ukrainian special forces commando raid into neighbouring Rostov province in Russia was discovered and neutralised. The Donbass leaders wisely ordered evacuations, not to leave civilian hostages in place in cities at imminent risk of carpet-bombing, if they did not surrender.

Aleppo was the stark example of what could have happened.

Now Russia has given the green light to Donbass independence, protected by Russian military might, as was the case in Crimea.

It cannot have been an easy decision for Putin and his National, Security Council, urged on by the Duma as they were to do something. Donbass does not have the many strategic and economic attractions and assets of Crimea. Reconstruction will be huge and expensive and the diplomatic costs to Russia very high.

But Putin had no alternative: in the end, he had to defend Russians at grave risk abroad, with real threats to their lives as reported by OSCE and Russian intelligence. The Minsk Accords are now dead. These steps already seem irreversible. Sooner or later these temporarily independent statelets will merge into Russia. The irony is that France and Germany the guarantor powers had for years since 2015 been urging Kiev to accept the federal solutions proposed by the Minsk Accords. But then, Kiev nationalists, quietly backed by NATO, had reneged on Minsk, confident that in the end they could achieve the unitary Ukraine they wanted by letting the Minsk Accords be forgotten. Now, ironically, Kiev pleads in the UNSC for a return to the Minsk accords. But this train has already left the station.

There will be downside consequences for both East and West. There will be immediate major losses of French and German sovereignty. They will be sucked back into US alliance hegemony. There will be immediate setbacks to Russia -France and Russia -Germany possibilities for detente. These two major states now will be, albeit reluctantly, more firmly locked into US-led NATO military operations. It is hard to see the Nordstream pipeline opening now, which will be a great economic and humanitarian loss to Europe. There will be greater sanctions intensity, hurting both sides economically, and a huge setback to detente generally. The new Cold War will be more firmly lodged in

in place.

Will Russia advance further into Ukraine? I would predict almost certainly not, though we will hear Western propaganda for weeks that Russia will do so. The present line of contact will become the frontier, as it has de facto been the frontier since 2015 after Poroshenko's failed attempt to overwhelm Donbass.

How will China and the nonaligned world react? These are the most important questions now. Will they see through this latest Anglo-American false narrative of unprovoked Russian aggression, or will they be fooled yet again by the information warriors? I would like to think the former, but I fear the sedulous

power of the Western false narrative. I believe that China, and more quietly India, will stand by Russia. Others— we shall see.

It did not have to be this lose-lose outcome. A Canadian solution was possible, if there had been a modicum of goodwill from Kiev: a federal Ukrainian state with real sovereignty rights for Russian Ukrainians, including importantly a real say in Ukraine foreign policy choices.

Putin was desperate for this outcome and he waited as long as he could. But Washington and Kiev wanted confrontation and permanent East-West hostility, whipped up by Victoria Nuland and her ilk. They now have this. Ukraine will remain poor,

depopulated, illiberal and militarised. It is a tragedy, but the threatened genocide and ethnic cleansing of Donbass Russians would have been intolerable for the majority of Russians, as it was personally, for an obviously angry and distressed Putin. This outcome will bring him and his key advisers no great joy, but it was the right decision to take.

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*This article first appeared in "Pearls and Irritations."*

## THE UKRAINE CRISIS COULD TRIGGER A NUCLEAR CATASTROPHE

Tilman Ruff

**E**ruption of armed conflict in Ukraine risks involving not only Ukraine and Russia (and Crimea and parts of eastern Ukraine it has occupied), but neighbouring countries where Russian forces are stationed. (Image: Ministry of Defence of Ukraine)

*There are two potential nuclear dimensions to a war in Ukraine, which could create a massive humanitarian disaster and have profound global implications.*

In the first week of February, US officials estimated that if war using conventional weapons broke out, 25,000 to 50,000 civilians could die in Ukraine, along with 5,000 to 25,000 Ukrainian and 3,000 to 10,000 Russian soldiers, and that between 1 and 5 million people would flee their homes and become refugees.

The toll could be much greater, especially if the conflict spread to neighbouring countries and NATO forces became embroiled. As Max Fisher wrote in the New York Times on 15 Feb: "threats and bluffs work best when they are backed up by action, increasing the risk of a war that neither side may truly want", and "the more both sides try to make their threats credible, for example by relocating troops, the more they heighten the risk of a miscalculation that could careen out of control. He quotes Columbia University international relations scholar Dr.



Keren Yarhi-Milo: "Every day that we're not resolving it, we are increasing the percentage chance that something will go wrong".

Conventional wars can be horrific enough. There must scarcely be a family in Russia or Ukraine without a relative among the close to 14 million Russians or 7 million Ukrainians who died during World War II, and Ukraine has been scarred by repeated invasions from both east and west. Modern weapons have greater destructiveness, range, accuracy while military spending has continued to increase to record levels even through the COVID-19 pandemic, to a staggering USD 1981 billion in 2020. NATO members account for 56%, the US alone for 39%, and Russia for 3.1% of the global total.

Eruption of armed conflict in Ukraine risks involving not only Ukraine and Russia (and Crimea and parts of eastern Ukraine it has occupied), but neighbouring countries where Russian forces are stationed – Belarus and Moldova, and many of NATO's 30 members in Europe and

across the Atlantic, notably the US, with forces stationed in many other NATO countries.

However a war in Ukraine could have two potentially devastating nuclear dimensions.

### **Nuclear power plants as potential 'dirty' bombs**

Nuclear power plants are huge potential pre-positioned radiological weapons.

Ukraine, site of the world's worst ever civilian nuclear disaster in Chernobyl, has 15 operating nuclear power reactors in 4 nuclear plants in different parts of the country. The largest is Zaporozhye, in Enerhodar in the southeast of the country. It lies on the east (towards Russia) side of the Dniepr River, 330km west of the city of Donetsk and 200 km from the border of the Donetsk region, part of which has been taken over by Russian/Russian-backed forces. The site has 6 nuclear reactors of 950 Mw each, producing about a quarter of Ukraine's electricity. It is the second largest nuclear power plant in Europe and one of the 10 largest in the world.

Like most nuclear power plants, highly radioactive and hot used reactor fuel is onsite in cooling ponds, as the fuel needs to be actively cooled for several years, before being put in dry assemblies, which are also on site. As reactor fuel becomes more radioactive the longer it is inside a reactor, cooling ponds often contain

more radioactivity in the spent fuel than the reactors themselves do, but are housed in simple buildings without the multiple engineered layers of containment reactors typically have. As we saw in the Fukushima nuclear disaster, reactor meltdowns and explosions releasing vast amounts of radioactivity do not require a high level military assault breaching reactor cores. They can happen simply from disruption to the constant power and circulating water system required to keep reactors and spent fuels pools cool. At the Fukushima Daiichi site at the time of the disaster, 70% of all the radioactivity on site was in the spent fuel pools.

Nobel laureate physicist Prof Joseph Rotblat described in his landmark 1981 study "Nuclear Radiation in Warfare" that precision-guided bombardment or a commando raid with conventional weapons could rupture a reactor's containment and pressure vessel, but that very serious radiological consequences could ensue even without rupture of the pressure vessel if the reactor cooling system were put out of action. He stated that: "In a pressurized water reactor [all Ukraine's operating power reactors are of this type] the meltdown of the core could occur within less than one minute after the loss of coolant".

War in Ukraine could turn nuclear if any of its nuclear power reactors and/or spent reactor fuel cooling ponds were damaged sufficiently to cause loss of coolant meltdown and/or explosion. The Russian-made Buk missile which brought down Malaysian Airlines flight MH17 in eastern Ukraine in 2014, killing all 298 people on board, appears to have been launched by Russian-backed separatists

A nuclear power plant may be an attractive high-impact target, including for proxy groups who may

not be under direct military control but have access to high level weaponry.

Russia is one of the growing number of states actively engaged in cyberwarfare. Nuclear power plants and other nuclear facilities have repeatedly been targets of cyberattack, including infamously the **Stuxnet** computer virus targeted by Israel and the US to disrupt Iran's uranium enrichment centrifuges in 2009.

Rotblat also described how the radioactive fallout from a damaged reactor, and even more so from an explosion in a spent fuel pool, could release more and longer-lived radioactivity than detonation of a nuclear bomb.

Thus nuclear power plants are effectively huge pre-positioned potential radiological weapons.

#### **War turning nuclear**

If fighting erupted in Ukraine, it would almost certainly begin with conventional weapons. Many of these have sufficient accuracy, range and destructiveness to put targets that are of high military value to Ukraine, Russia and NATO members at risk, even far from any frontline – like military and air bases; intelligence, command and logistical centres. Both Russian and NATO/US military doctrines allow first use of nuclear weapons in situations where the prospect of military defeat looms.

Russia has 1600 deployed strategic nuclear weapons, and 1912 tactical nuclear weapons. Most of the delivery systems for the latter can carry either conventional or nuclear warheads, increasing the risk of worst-case thinking and precipitous and over reaction on the other side, and the danger of the threshold to nuclear escalation being crossed.

The US has 1650 deployed strategic nuclear weapons, and 100 B-61 nuclear bombs deployed to bases

in Belgium, Germany, Italy, Netherlands and Turkey for delivery by aircraft of those nations. In addition, France has 280 deployed nuclear weapons, and the UK 120 deployed nuclear weapons.

If the threshold of use of nuclear weapons is crossed, those who have managed nuclear weapons and nuclear war plans tell us the risks or rapid and large-scale escalation are very high. The current Ukraine crisis involves not only complicated history, politics and personalities, but hundreds of senior officials; many thousands of civilian and military officials and advisors; multiple enormous complex and dispersed command, control and communications systems; a web of often unconnected communications across many time zones and languages; and through Russia and NATO involves the 4 nations that possess all the world's 3750 currently deployed nuclear weapons including all the 2000 nuclear weapons on high alert ready to be launched on short notice (counted in minutes).

There is a lot that can go wrong. Diplomacy to remove the danger of nuclear escalation is desperately urgent and needs to progress to negotiations among all nuclear armed states to eliminate their nuclear arsenals under strict verification and timelines. Otherwise it will be a matter of time before our luck finally runs out.

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*This article first appeared in "Pearls and Irritations."*

*'The fundamental sin is exploitation, whether it be expressed in the domination of male over female, white over black, rich over poor, strong over weak, armed military over unarmed civilians, human beings over nature. These analogously abusive patterns interlock because they reset on the same base: a structure where an elite insists on its superiority and claims the right to exercise dominative power over all others considered subordinate, for its own benefit. ... What is being looked for is not simply the solution to one problem, but an entire shift of world view away from patterns of dominance toward mutually enhancing relationships.'*

*Elizabeth Johnson CSJ. **She Who Is***

# THE SACRALISATION OF WAR, AMERICAN-STYLE

Kelly Denton Borhaug

**L**ately, random verses from the Bible have been popping into my mind unbidden, like St. Paul's famous line from Galatians, "A person reaps what they sow." The words sprang into my consciousness when I

learned of the death of the 95-year-old Vietnamese Buddhist monk and peace activist **Thich Nat Hanh**, who helped encourage Martin Luther King to declare his opposition to the Vietnam War so long ago.

For decades, I've been moved by Hanh's witness and his writings, which shined such a light on the destructive consequences of our country's militarism. As he said, "To prepare for war, to give millions of men and women the opportunity to practice killing day and night in their hearts, is to plant millions of seeds of violence, anger, frustration, and fear that will be passed on for generations to come."

We reap what we sow. It seems so obvious, but in these endless years of U.S. war-making across the globe, this simple truth seems to have escaped most Americans.

Why? It's not as if no one's noticed that the U.S. has, in so many ways, become a more violent society. Many public intellectuals (progressives and conservatives, too) are wringing their hands regarding the dangerous uptick in social violence of all sorts in this country, including voluminous gun purchases, distrust and anger, racism, xenophobia, misogyny, rising deaths from avoidable causes like refusing to be vaccinated—and the list only goes on.

But a thinker like Thich Nhat Hanh stands out from the rest. His insights differed from the norm because he saw so clearly how the seeds of violence in war-culture sprout into a kind of invasive kudzu vine capable of spreading across every aspect of life, while crushing, asphyxiating, and killing so much along the way.

## **War-Culture as an Invasive, Destructive Vine**

I wonder why the media haven't more thoroughly investigated the



psychology that enables our congressional representatives almost unanimously to approve outlandish, ever larger military budgets, no matter how poorly the U.S. military may be doing in the world. The violent infrastructure of this nation is like a noxious vine with destructive results for us all, but few connect this to other rising forms of violence in the U.S. For instance, our leaders couldn't find it in their hearts to approve an extension of the child tax credit, even though it played a role in lifting 4.6 million children out of poverty. One study even showed how such cash stipends and tax credits, when provided to poor mothers with babies in the first year of life, resulted in changed brain activity in their children and improved cognitive development.

But West Virginia Democratic Senator Joe Manchin (along with all the Senate Republicans) refused to support continuing that program, while, like almost every one of those Republicans and most of his Democratic colleagues, he had no problem whatsoever approving an astronomical defence budget, even in the wake of the Afghan withdrawal. Parents, he insisted, should have to work to receive any assistance for their children, but the military doesn't have to work for that \$738 million to be approved. There's no requirement for a financial accounting or any demand for evidence that the U.S. military solves "national security" problems of any sort.

While at least \$6 trillion were spent on this country's post-9/11 wars, crucial issues like climate change and medical care for the elderly and the rest of us are treated with a bake-sale mentality by our lawmakers, with precious little questioning of that reality. Are our leaders afraid of

the weapons-making titans of the military-industrial complex (of which they are increasingly a part)? Do they really believe that this is the way to build a more secure world? The 3.7 million children whose families just fell back into poverty as

a result of the heartless erasure of the Child Tax Credit are only less safe as they fall asleep tonight. What about our nation's responsibility to them?

And here's another all-too-relevant question: Why don't the rest of us step up to make it stop? Where has the anti-war movement and a movement against that military-industrial-congressional complex been all these years? So many of us are easily distracted, pay too little attention, and focus on our private business, while passing on the seeds of violence, anger, frustration, and fear to each new generation.

Worse yet, in our culture, the military budget is widely viewed as a social, even global good, though both Thich Nhat Hanh and Martin Luther King would have considered this a lie of the first order. The hum of the continuing violence embedded in and eternally reinforced by this country's war-making structure is so constant that most of us don't even notice or question it. The structural violence of a nation that puts more money into its military than the next 11 military spenders combined is intolerable, especially because it's guaranteed to undermine democracy and public health here and in the wider world. It shouldn't surprise us that people outside the United States now see us as one of the "main threats to world peace."

## **Malignant Normality: Serving the "Pentagod"**

What makes such widespread obliviousness to, apathy about and denial of our addiction to violence so invisible to so many of us? Here, I have to point to one of the moral touchstones in my own life: Jon Sobrino, a priest, writer, and activist who survived the massacre of eight other Jesuit priests and women domestic

workers at the José Simeón Cañas Central American University on the outskirts of El Salvador's capital in 1989. His housemates and colleagues were murdered in cold blood by the Salvadoran Army (backed at the time by Washington) because the priests were calling for social justice, ministering to people caught in war zones, and encouraging those who were too afraid to speak up. Sobrino himself escaped death only because he happened to be out of the country, lecturing, when the slaughter took place.

His spiritual starting point is one I try to adopt in every project I undertake. The first step, he insists, is always to demonstrate "honesty toward reality." Now, Sobrino may be a theologian, but his approach applies to us all. We simply can't assume honesty in this dishonest world. We must work for it. And Sobrino takes this further, because his own life experience taught him that being truly honest about our world is difficult indeed, given that violence and injustice are so often "concealed."

This is where I find his insights so compelling. Being honest about our all-American reality is challenging indeed since the destructive seeds of violence slip so easily and comfortably under the surface of things. This not only makes it difficult to see them clearly, but also much harder to hold accountable those who mischaracterize such incipient, well-funded violence as good, not evil.

Social psychologist Robert Jay Lifton described this as "malignant normality," the imposition of destructive or violent behaviour on Americans as a built-in part of everyday life. Lifton studied the practices of Communist Chinese "thought reform" (once known here as "brainwashing") and the work of doctors in the Nazi regime to try to understand how people turn away from reality and get caught up in worlds of dishonesty that sow the seeds of harm and destruction.

In this context, I continue to listen to the voices of military service members and veterans who have opened themselves to the uncomfortable truths about how this country is now reaping what its war-

culture has sown globally. They have experienced its lethal growth, destruction, and death all too personally. They know in a way the rest of us often don't what it means to be acculturated to "malignant normality." Take, for example, retired Air Force Lieutenant Colonel William Astore who recently wrote a piece for TomDispatch about "the Pentagod" he so faithfully served for 20 years. Stationed in "a cathedral of military power," a more or less literal "temple of doom" under tons of granite in Cheyenne mountain, Colorado, he ministered, he wrote, to the "jealous and wrathful god" of the nuclear-industrial complex.

Eventually, however, he lost his faith in the American god of war, who "always wanted more." The bottomless craving of today's Pentagod is behind more than just the soaring military budget. Remember that, among the latest insanities of that complex, are plans to "modernize" this country's vast nuclear arsenal at a cost, over the next three decades, of near \$2 trillion. That includes Northrup Grumman's \$264 billion "potential lifecycle" price tag on a new set of land-based nuclear missiles that will be siloed in heartland states like Wyoming and North Dakota. And we call this "good"?

Last December, I was privileged to hear veterans from the Moral Injury Programme at Philadelphia's Corporal Michael J. Crescenz VA Medical Centre testify publicly at a "healing ceremony" about their own encounters with the god of war, the malignant normality of this country's war-culture, and the seeds of violence it sowed so deeply and painfully in their own lives. One of them was Matthew Abbadusky, who shared a public letter he wrote explaining why he resigned his commission as an Army National Guard chaplain. Its telling first sentence was: "Honesty is the beginning of spiritual life."

Like Astore, he was no longer willing to serve the U.S. god of war. "I cannot, in good conscience, lend religious and ethical support to a military institution that primarily benefits an economy of corporate, expansionist greed and inconspicuous lust for destruction," he wrote. His

experiences as an infantryman in the 10th Mountain Division, including a 15-month deployment to Iraq and later his work as a military chaplain stateside, "enabled me to arrive at this waypoint on my journey."

He spoke with passion about "the lifelong visible and invisible wounds" borne by so many of his compatriots in the armed forces:

The morally confounding circumstances a soldier faces on the battlefield are a manifestation of political and corporate moral bankruptcy. The plight they face often places their lives into extreme danger and requires them to make unfathomable decisions, wreaking destruction without, and confusion and chaos within.

### **Digging Out**

To dig ourselves out of the dishonesty, complacency, apathy, and lies of American war-culture, we're going to need greater honesty about the way Christianity has been weaponised and manipulated to support our society's malignant normality. It's time, for instance, call out the dishonesty of using certain verses from the New Testament to sacralise war.

For example, not just chaplains and religious leaders but military commanders, military families, and everyday citizens regularly valorise what soldiers do by referring to the Gospel of John: "*Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.*"

It is indeed a beautiful, evocative verse that holds so much meaning for so many people. But there's a long history of dishonesty surrounding its use in the context of war-culture. Especially on occasions like Veterans Day or Memorial Day, you'll hear this verse in political speeches, commercials, public-school programs, and ceremonies of all sorts. Exploiting citizens' honest desire to care for veterans, the militarized use of such words hides the truth about how our soldiers have laboured at the forefront of this murderous society.

In this way (and there are so many similar examples, religious and otherwise), war is covered with a sacred sheen, while its seeds of vio-

violence are normalized and slip ever further from our consciousness. But being honest requires that we face reality and the truth about the consequences of war. As scholar and activist Khury Petersen-Smith of the Institute for Policy Studies put it, "Military violence always requires dehumanization and the denial of rights—and this inevitably corrupts any notions of democracy." Despite the regular hijacking of that verse from John to soften and conceal the ugly violence of American-style war, those words are part of Jesus's teaching about nonviolent service to others. In fact, biblical scholars agree that the historical Jesus rejected militarized violence. And don't forget that, in the end, he was executed by the Roman impe-

rial power structure. It's worth asking: Who exactly benefits from making the violence of war into something sacred? Do veterans? Countless times I've heard them testify that such super-valourisation and sacralisation of war silences any honesty about the reality they experienced. And that's true not only of people who participated in the violence of the battlefield, but also those like Astore and Abbadusky who struggle to reckon with the roles they played in the structural violence of war-culture, sowing the seeds of destruction and bearing witness to the consequences. And what do they need from the rest of us? At the very least, we, too, can strive for deeper honesty regarding this country of ours, which

is visibly in trouble and still focused on future wars as the best way to address our fears about the threats that face us. We seem to be unable to think any differently, despite evidence that more war will only make matters worse for the world, as well as for the United States.

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*This article first appeared in "Countercurrents."*

## **New Book** AN ASIAN INTRODUCTION TO THE NEW TESTAMENT

Edited by Johnson Thomaskutty,

**A**n *Asian Introduction to the New Testament*, (Fortress Press 2021) is the first book of its kind with a focus on the NT writings in relation to the wider Asian realities. The Asian realities such as the multi-religious, multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, and pluralistic phenomena set some of the common aspects of the Asian societies. As the Jesus Movement was emerged out of the contextual realities of his time and the growth of Christianity was spearheaded in Jewish and Asian contexts, understanding the NT writings from the Asian context might provide a unique perspective in the interpretation of the Christian Scriptures. Contemporary issues such as poverty, casteism, class structure, honour and shame aspects, colonial realities, discrimination against women, and others cannot be neglected when an interpreter engages in NT exegesis and its hermeneutical application. Perceiving the NT from the above mentioned contextual perspective, both from the "there and then" and "here and now" aspects, enable the reader to throw light on those issues and relate the Jesus Movement with the contemporary situations. The beginnings of the Jesus Movement in the Asian

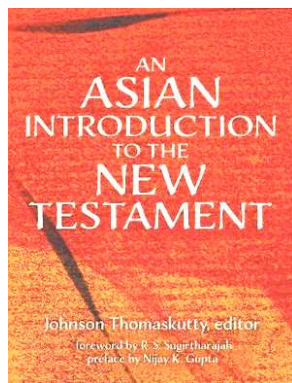
context, the spread of the mission through the initiatives of Paul and other apostles across the globe, and the later canonization of the Christian scriptures can be understood as progressive movements only if it is accepted that the kernels of Christianity sprouted out of the Asian contextual realities.

As Asian realities are family-centred and community-oriented, an emphasis on the integral relationship within the family, clan, and tribe can be explored within the framework of the NT thought-world. The household codes of the biblical narratives demand significant treatment in that regard. Frederick C. Tiffany and Sharon H. Ringe state that, "The journey of biblical interpretation begins at home, with attention to the immediate contemporary environment in which the biblical text is encountered." As Asian realities are community-oriented, individuals are well connected to other social insti-

tutions and systems. This aspect of the Asian reality can be connected to the NT worldview through the oral and written reflections of Jesus, Paul, and other apostles. Thus, it is possible to build bridges between the historical situations of the authors and the contemporary realities of the Asian readers.

As Asia is the cradle of some of the major religions of the world, such as Judaism, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Jainism, Islam, Sikhism, Shintoism, Taoism, Confucianism, Shamanism, and others, the NT writings should be interpreted in the light of the pluriform religious and ideological aspects. Moreover, the existence of multiple Christian denominations demands a doctrinally and conceptually balanced interpretation of the scriptures. In that sense, the present book shall demonstrate inclusive biblical claims within the multi-religious and multi-denominational contexts. With the understanding of these diversities, the authors of the essays guide their readers toward the core biblical axioms, belief aspects, anthropocentric and cosmic realities for a new way forward.

***This book is available from [www.booktopia.com](http://www.booktopia.com) for \$60.25 or \$43.00 E-Book***



# THE SMEARING OF EMMA WATSON A BLUNDER AND SMEAR AGAINST AN OUTSPOKEN ACTIVIST.

Sut Jhally and Roger Waters

Anyone who has ever been critical of Israeli actions toward the Palestinian people knows what to expect next—an avalanche of pit-bull attacks and smears that their criticisms of Israel are motivated by racism and anti-Semitism. The latest example is the response to actress Emma Watson's pro-Palestinian Instagram post, which led (predictably) to Israeli officials and supporters accusing her of anti-Semitism. Among many others, former Israeli UN Representative Danny Danon—in a tone-deaf post—wrote, “10 points from Gryffindor for being an anti-Semite

The purpose of such false accusations is of course to deflect attention away from what is happening on the ground—the real (war) crimes that Israel is perpetrating against the Palestinian people—to the supposed motivations of the critics. Unable to defend its criminal actions, all that Israel's increasingly desperate defenders have left is smear and innuendo, as the attacks on Emma Watson make clear.

But the accusations may also have some other unintended consequences—they make real anti-Semitism (the right-wing fascist variety that really does hate Jews as Jews) more respectable and legitimate—and thus even more deadly. In that sense, the Zionist defenders of Israel are among the most dangerous purveyors of contemporary anti-Semitism—the hatred of Jews as a collective.

There are two steps to how these unintended consequences are blundered into.

First, there is the claim that Israel and Jewishness are the same thing—that Israel is not the state of all its citizens but is the state of the Jewish people alone. The nation-state law, passed in 2018—which gives Jews alone the right of self-determination in Israel, recognizing Hebrew as the sole official national language, and establishing “Jewish settlement as a national value”—

makes the link between the Israeli state and Jewishness formal and official. Similarly, the widely adopted International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of anti-Semitism cites one example as “the targeting of the state of Israel, conceived as a Jewish collectivity” and has a similar thrust—Israel equals Jews.

The second step is the increasing visibility of Israeli violence toward Palestinians. Although Israeli propaganda had succeeded for decades in deflecting mainstream attention away from Israel's crimes, the cloak of invisibility created by its public relations efforts—its *hasbara*—is disintegrating before the force of reality, its own increasingly cruel and vicious actions, as well as the work of the growing number of pro-Palestinian activists around the world who are using the power of social media to bypass the normal media gatekeepers. While anyone with a passing knowledge of the situation has long known about the brutal matrix of violence and control—from the river to the sea—exerted by Israel over the Palestinian population, that understanding is now increasingly visible and mainstream. (As evidence of this, Emma Watson's post quickly drew over 1 million likes.)

The problem for all of us, not just Israel, is when these two things are put together—the equation of Israel with Jews and the visibility of Israeli atrocities—then Jews as a whole become tarred with the crimes of the Israeli state. As the Israeli journalist Gideon Levy wrote in 2015, “Some of the hatred toward Jews elsewhere in the world—emphatically, only some and not all of it—is fed by the policies of the state of Israel and especially by its continuing occupation and abuse, decade after decade, of the Palestinian people.”

In this process, the danger is that actually existing anti-Semitism is being made more respectable as

there seems to be some rational basis for it—Israeli atrocities. At a time when the real and dangerous anti-Semitism of the fascist right is on the rise—remember the white supremacist Charlottesville thugs were chanting “Jews will not replace us”—the last thing that is needed is to give it any sheen of respectability, as, albeit unwittingly, do those who insist on the indissoluble link between the brutal violence of the Zionist project and Jewishness.

Such a link is of course nonsense. Jews of all political stripes have long been on the front lines of the fight against the racist Zionist enterprise, insisting that it has no part in their own Jewish values based on a belief in universal—not particular—human rights. It is why groups such as Rabbis for Human Rights act as human shields against the attacks on Palestinians by settlers and the Israel Defense Forces. The fight against Israeli policies and Zionist violence is driven by the concerns of social justice and solidarity, not racism toward Jews.

Emma Watson is part of an exponentially fast-growing choir of decent like-minded men and women of good faith all over the world, united in their belief that all people, irrespective of their ethnicity or their religion or their nationality, must have inalienable human rights, including the right to life and liberty and self-determination, from every river to every sea everywhere. That includes the long-suffering people of Palestine. The attempted weaponisation of anti-Semitism against this movement not only weakens the term as a description of real fascist racism, but in fact serves to legitimate it. If criticizing cruel Israeli policies toward the Palestinians is anti-Semitic, then what is so wrong with anti-Semitism, so this misguided line of thinking goes. As Robert Fisk once noted, “if this continued campaign of abuse against decent people, trying to shut them up by falsely accusing



"if this continued campaign of abuse against decent people, trying to shut them up by falsely accusing them of anti-Semitism, continues, the word 'anti-Semitism' will begin to become respectable. And that is a great danger."

The solution to this is clear: break the erroneous link between Israel and all Jews (between Israel and

Judaism) and concentrate on the reality that the Zionist enterprise is an old-fashioned settler-colonial project—driven in large part by the geopolitical interests of its principal sponsor, the United States. Once we eliminate the obfuscation and confusion that result from the lazy (but calculated) accusation of anti-Semitism, the building of an unstop-

pable international movement of justice for the Palestinians can continue. Let's get to it!

*This article was produced by Globe-trotter.*

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## THE BEST OF TIMES, THE WORST OF TIMES

Joseph Camilleri

**T**he best of times, the worst of times. Few words better describe the contradictions of our world precariously poised between noble aspirations and sordid politics. Three questions arise: Are the contradictions deepening? If so, why? Can anything be done about it?

**An innovative, much anticipated series to be held in April-June, will address these questions head on.**

As I write, we are witnessing Russia's military thrust into Ukraine, with no immediate end to the fighting in sight. It is also likely that sanctions imposed on Russia will do considerable damage to the Russian but also to Western economies.

During the past few months, US sanctions aimed at the Taliban regime have managed to inflict widespread hunger and death on the people of Afghanistan, and this after a traumatic twenty-year war.

All of this points to political and military establishments that have scant regard for human security and well-being.

Closer to home, the picture is bleak. China remains the target of undisguised and ill informed political and media vitriol. Militaristic jingoism is centre stage in Australian politics.

Our climate change policies proudly announce support for renewable energy sources, while busily authorising new coal projects. Government policies on religious freedom and human rights expose the disturbing influence exercised by Christian fundamentalism.

Every day, it seems, we are confronted both at home and abroad by the reality of dysfunctional policies, corruption in high places, the politics of bigotry. and media largely

disconnected from the truth.

Of course, Pax Christi and other peace groups are pointing us in more promising directions. In this they are not alone.

Intellectuals, artists and scientists around the world, some religious leaders, small media outlets, countless advocates and activists toiling away on different fronts offer an inspiring alternative to what is.

Charles Dickens's great historical novel, *A Tale of Two Cities*, set against the violent upheaval of the French Revolution, manages to compress an event of immense complexity to the scale of a family history.

The opening lines offer a remarkable insight into the temper of the times. But they are even more revealing of the situation we presently confront. They merit quoting in full:

- It was the best of times,
- it was the worst of times
- It was the age of wisdom,
- it was the age of foolishness
- It was the epoch of belief,
- it was the epoch of incredulity
- it was the season of darkness
- It was the spring of hope,
- it was the winter of despair,
- We had everything before us, we had nothing before us.

No matter where one looks, in every area of policy, in Australia as in other parts of the Western world, the contrast between what is and what might be, between loudly proclaimed universal values and actual practice could not be greater.

Trump-style falsehoods, rising levels of inequality, deeply embedded forms of racism, a stubborn addiction to imperial power, and more

generally disregard for human life, not to mention extremist violence of the kind that irrupted on Capitol Hill, may be on flagrant display in the United States, but they are hardly absent in other parts of the world.

To describe the ailment which afflicts the body politic in Australia or elsewhere is a necessary first step. But it is not enough.

If the public conversation is to rise to the challenge and generate more effective engagement, other equally important steps must follow.

We must go beyond the symptoms and explore what lies behind the ailment. Can the desultory state of Australian politics be explained purely by reference to the moral foibles and intellectual and practical incompetence of the current bunch of politicians?

There is surely more to it. Simply put, we need a thorough diagnosis. Nor can we stop there. We must be able to paint a compelling picture, at least with a broad brush to begin with, which points to a healthier condition, a preferable state of affairs.

The initial sketch will need to be followed by a more detailed, carefully thought out set of desired outcomes, about which there will no doubt be differences of opinion. Such an exercise is itself a useful contribution to the public conversation.

Whatever alternative policy directions are proposed, it will soon be apparent that they will not be easily achieved. If substantial change is envisaged – let's say a substantial shift in current security policies, a thoroughgoing reset of relations with China, effective media

regulation, an energy policy that tackles consumption and not just production, or a taxation regime explicitly designed to reduce income and wealth inequality – it is safe to assume that the path to the preferred future will be strewn with roadblocks.

Likely roadblocks need to be identified. What if this involves more than just one or several recalcitrant personalities? What if we are dealing with stubborn resistance from powerful interests? Or deeply entrenched community mindsets? Or institutions that are no longer fit for purpose? This may include, for example, the political party and parliamentary system itself, at least as it currently operates. How might these formidable difficulties be approached? How are the roadblocks to be overcome?

Answers to these questions are urgently needed, but they will not appear overnight, or a consensus easily reached. For this we need a sustained and wide-ranging public conversation within and between countries.

An ambitious enterprise, to put it

mildly! As a modest contribution, I have been asked to run a 7-week series beginning late April. We've titled the series *The best of times, the worst of times: Navigating life at the crossroads*.

All details can be found on the Conversation at the Crossroads website [https://crossroadsconversation.com.au/?page\\_id=1229](https://crossroadsconversation.com.au/?page_id=1229).

We have identified seven inter-linked, provocatively titled themes which taken together constitute a microcosm of the complex social ailment we presently experience:

- A warming planet in Covid times: Lessons not yet learned
- Black Lives Matter: The time of reckoning
- Education and media: vested interests vs the common good
- The Anglo world vs Russia and China: Is conflict inevitable?
- Capitalism under mounting stress: Can we – should we – revive it?
- Seeing the world through new eyes – the power of conversation

- Politics and culture after the plague: Has the postliberal moment arrived?

In exploring each of these themes, the aim, in line with the approach outlined above, is to grapple with three key questions: How do we make sense of all this? How do we effectively communicate with others? How do we respond?

Joining me will be a number of distinguished guests from China, Hong Kong, the UK, Greece, Russia, Australia and elsewhere, including Geoff Raby, Yanis Varoufakis and Alexey Gromyko.

The point of this experiment is to design and apply interactive forms of communication, addressing sharper questions that go to the heart of our contemporary predicament. Worth a try?

*Joseph A. Camilleri OAM is Emeritus Professor at La Trobe University and a Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences in Australia*

*An earlier version of this article appeared in Pearls and Irritations 25 February 2022.*

## Myanmar coup anniversary:

### CARDINAL BO URGES CHRISTIANS TO BE 'WOUNDED HEALERS'

Robin Gomez

As Myanmar marks the first anniversary of the military coup on 1 February, the country's

As Myanmar marks the first anniversary of the military coup on 1 February, the country's Catholic Bishops are reiterating their closeness to the suffering people, urging the Church and Christians to be "the wounded healer" and "an instrument of peace".

"We feel your pain, your suffering, your starvation; we understand your disappointment; we understand your resistance," Myanmar Cardinal Charles Bo of Yangon told the country's people in a message sent to Vatican News, ahead of Tuesday's anniversary. "But to some who believe only in violent resistance, we say 'there are other means'," said the Cardinal, who is also president of

the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Myanmar (CBCM).

In the 1 February 2021 coup, Myanmar's military, headed by Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, deposed the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy, imprisoning her and other elected leaders. The coup triggered widespread protests and strikes, calling for her release and the restoration of the democratic process.

The junta's security forces responded with a bloody crackdown on opponents of the coup, killing more than 1,500 protesters and arresting over 11,800 so far, according to the latest tally by the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP), a rights group that documents and compiles casualties under the coup.

The coup signalled the end of 10

years of reforms towards democratic rule after nearly 5 decades of harsh military rule.

A food aid distribution centre.

#### Extended 'Way of the Cross'

Cardinal Bo, who has made numerous appeals for a peaceful return to civilian rule and respect for human rights and freedom, expressed deep concern over the dire situation of the people. He described the year-long human suffering under military rule as "the extended Way of the Cross, the Garden of Eden becoming the mount of Calvary".

According to the latest estimates by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Myanmar's turmoil is projected to have driven almost half the country's 54 million people into poverty, wiping out the impressive gains



Among the regions most affected by armed conflict are the states of Chin, Kayah and Karen. Churches that have been sheltering displaced people fleeing clashes between the army and armed groups are being targeted, raided and shelled by the military. Priests and pastors are being arrested, while many unarmed civilians, including Christians, have been killed.

made since 2005. It is now estimated that 14 out of 15 states and regions are within the critical threshold for acute malnutrition.

The UN estimates 25 million are in poverty, with 14.4 million in need of humanitarian aid in some form or other in 2022. The number includes 6.9 million men, 7.5 million women, and 5 million children. OCHA said \$826 million are needed to reach 6.2 million of the 14.4 million people in need of humanitarian assistance this year.

Before the 1 February coup, there were already some 340,000 internally displaced people (IDP). The coup has created another some 321,000 IDPs. Huge numbers are displaced, especially in Christian areas.

Cardinal Bo, who is also president of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), described the current situation as a time of "spiralling chaos, confusion, conflict and human agony." With people living in fear, anxiety and starvation, "the whole of Myanmar is a war zone," he said.

#### **Widening conflict**

The 73-year-old Cardinal said the bishops continue to accompany their people, "advocating for humanitarian access and urging all parties towards a journey of peace and reconciliation."

The military's offensive against protesters has reignited old conflicts with the country's armed rebel groups, especially in the predominantly Christian regions inhabited by the Kachin, Chin, Karen, and Kayah ethnic groups. Besides, numerous independent civil resistance groups have also sprung up in self-defence against the junta's atrocities.

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#### **Healers and peace-makers**

Noting that Christians have "suffered heavily" under the coup, Cardinal Bo expressed the Church's closeness to them in their "Way of the Cross".

"But as a Church and as Christians, we follow the direction of Pope Francis," he said. "Let us become the wounded healer, be an instrument of peace; let us light a candle of hope amidst the frustrating darkness."

#### **To the junta - respect freedom and rights**

Addressing the military leadership,

the president of Myanmar's bishops assured them that the Church is committed to the greater good of the people and for the peaceful resolution to all issues.

"We have constantly urged for dialogue, the release of the detained, greater freedom of expression and respect for basic human rights of all," the Cardinal said, urgently calling for humanitarian access to the affected millions.

#### **Don't forget Myanmar**

He lamented that after the "initial bout of interest, Myanmar seems to have disappeared from the radar of the world."

He thus urged the international community to remember Myanmar and help her in her struggle for peace-making. This, he said, they can do particularly by stopping the supply of weapons and granting greater humanitarian access to the people.

#### **Peace is possible**

Some 88 per cent of Myanmar's 53 million population is Buddhist. Christians form 6.2 per cent (including 750,000 Catholics), with Muslims making up 4.3 per cent and the rest are Hindu and animist. Despite the tiny minority Catholic community, the Catholic Church commands great respect.

Cardinal Bo is one of the 3 co-patrons of the Myanmar chapter of Religions for Peace, a non-profit international coalition of representatives from the world's religions dedicated to promoting peace and harmony through dialogue and cooperation.

In August last year, when he called for a national prayer campaign for at 2 weeks, he appealed to followers of all religions to pray in order to "melt



the hearts of all people and bring healing, peace and reconciliation".

# 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  
(02) 9550 3845 or 0411 450 953**

The venue: 209A Edgeware Road, Enmore.

## QUEENSLAND

### Pax Christi Meetings

Pax Christi Queensland

**Contact:**

**Pam Nair 07 3711 3273  
pamnair@hotmail.com**

## VICTORIA

**Contact**

**Harry Kerr 03 9077 6464  
ahmkerr@hotmail.com**

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

**Contact:**

**02 9550 3845  
0411 450 953**



### Walk for Justice for Refugees - Palm Sunday 2022

#### MELBOURNE

Sunday Apr 10 2022 at 2:00 pm  
State Library Victoria,  
328 Swanston Street

#### SYDNEY

Sunday Apr 10 2022 at 2:00 pm  
Belmore Park  
near Central Station

#### BLUE MOUNTAINS

Sunday April 10, 2022 2:00 pm  
Outside Catholic Church Convent

#### ADELAIDE

Sunday 10 April 2022 1:00 pm  
Nth West Triangle – Tarntanyangga (Victoria Square) to Tarn-tanya Wama Rotunda (Elder Park)

**WAR CREATES REFUGEES  
REJECT AUKUS & NUCLEAR  
SUBS  
JUSTICE FOR REFUGEES  
NO TO RACISM**

## PAX CHRISTI FORUM

**The Ukraine Crisis: Looking back, looking ahead**

On Zoom

**Thursday 10 March  
7.30 pm (AEDT)**

Joseph Camilleri in conversation with two leading experts

**Ramesh Thakur** Emeritus Professor, Australian National University, former United Nations Assistant Secretary-General.

**Tony Kevin** former Australian ambassador to Poland and Cambodia and an emeritus fellow at Australian National University, author of *Return to Moscow* (2017), presently on a visit to deliver a lecture in Russia

The tragic events in Ukraine are a salutary reminder of the precarious state of our world, and of the continuing risk of nuclear war. How did we get into this mess? Are we heading for a new Cold War? How can we, should we respond?

To register:

Email your name, Email address & phone no by 8 March to **ahmkerr@hotmail.com**

**I/We wish to apply for or renew membership of the International Christian Peace Movement - Pax Christi Australia.**

(Membership is from January to December)

(Please tick box if you wish to receive your copy of **Disarming Times** by e-mail)

**New South Wales Members** please return your membership application/renewal to  PO Box A 681 Sydney South 1235 NSW

**All others:** please return your membership application/ renewal to 13 Mascoma St, Strathmore, Vic 3041 . Direct transfer to Pax Christi Victoria Inc BSB 063-161 Account number 00900935

**Please Advise Terry Byrne, [t.byrne15@optusnet.com.au](mailto:t.byrne15@optusnet.com.au)**

Name..... Address.....

.....P'code.....Phone.....

Email..... Mobile.....

**ENCLOSED \$..... (Single \$35; Low income \$20; Family \$45)**