

# DISARMING TIMES

*The Journal of Pax Christi Australia*

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## 50 Years of Peacemaking 1974-2024

### TIME TO SILENCE THE DRUMS OF WAR AND GIVE VOICE TO THE HUMAN SPIRIT

Dr. Joseph Camilleri

#### *Launching the Pax Christi Victoria Human Security project*

*May I first pay my respects to the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation on whose land I stand, and to all Indigenous leaders, past, present and emerging, and look forward to the day when we will have extended to our First Nations the justice and recognition so long overdue.*

**W**e have reached a transformative moment in human history. Yet, Australia has still to awaken from its deep slumber, oblivious of the gathering clouds or of the new beginnings that beckon.

As UN Secretary-General António Guterres has signalled to the world, catastrophic risks are pressing in on us:

*The pandemic, climate disruption, pollution and biodiversity loss, protracted conflicts, skyrocketing inequalities, the dark side of technological advancement and large-scale displacement all pose pressing risks. . . This is our moment to change course.*

This was said prior to the unspeakable Gazan genocide that is unfolding on our TV screens.

Let me begin by sharing with you the thinking that lies behind Pax Christi's "Human Security" project which we hope to flesh out in consultation and collaboration with



groups and networks of diverse backgrounds and interests.

Australia's view of the world remains deeply rooted in the history that begins with European settlement: a period of history that saw the first nations of this country dispossessed, marginalised and excluded from all decision making.

They were repeatedly made the victims of barbarous crimes, at times of genocidal proportions. They were dehumanised. This was settler colonialism at its worst.

And, as the voice to parliament debacle has shown, we are still far from acknowledging, let alone healing, the wounds we have inflicted.

The colonially inspired racism that has shaped our attitudes to Indigenous Australia has also coloured our relations with non-Western peoples in our region and beyond.

We may have done away with the White Australia policy, yet racial prejudice and xenophobia remain alive in our asylum seeker and refugee policies, in relations with our

First Nations, in our treatment of migrants of colour and in our military alignments and diplomacy.

For White Australia, kith and kin still feel far away and strangers and potential enemies uncomfortably close. Hence we carry deep seated fears, we are obsessed with threats and the visceral need for protection. Australia has rightly been labelled the "anxious nation", the "frightened country".

With the fixation on external threats comes the addiction to empire, once the British empire, more recently the American empire. We remain trapped in the Anglosphere. This is the deeper meaning of AUKUS.

In our recent history we see a succession of perceived or imaginary threats. In the aftermath of World War II, we were still preoccupied

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# DISARMING TIMES

A quarterly journal of Pax Christi Australia. It aims to provide members and interested peacemakers with peace news and views both local and international. We endeavour in each edition to reflect the three-fold emphasis of Pax Christi which engages members in study, Non-violent action and prayer for peace, justice, human rights, development and inter-faith and inter-civilisation dialogue.

## **PAX CHRISTI AUSTRALIA**

*is an Australia-wide*

*Christian Peace Movement, affiliated with Pax Christi International.*

*Human rights, justice and integrity of creation are central to its work.*

*We take a stand against militarism, nuclear weapons and the arms race.*

*As an ecumenical Christian movement*

*Pax Christi fosters the spiritual and scriptural dimensions of peace-making.*

**[www.paxchristi.org.au](http://www.paxchristi.org.au)**

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with a succession of perceived or imaginary threats.

In the aftermath of World War II, we were still preoccupied with the Japanese threat. Soon after came the Communist threat – the period when reds could be found under everyone's bed. And no sooner had the Cold War come to an end, than the Islamist threat took over, and more recently the Chinese threat.

Given these threats, Australia, we were told, a large continent with a very long coastline, needed the protection of *great and powerful friends*. To ensure that such protection, we had to constantly demonstrate our loyalty to the protector, which in practice meant supporting – and fighting side by side with – the protector in times of tension and conflict.

There is more to this than just an accidental or spontaneous mindset, a kind of national psychosis. It is a mindset that has been relentlessly and ruthlessly fuelled and exploited by our military, intelligence, bureaucratic and political elites as well as media moguls.

They see themselves as having privileged access to an exclusive and powerful club – once the British club, now the American club. They may have resigned themselves to the demise of the former but find it difficult to accept the slow but steady decline of the latter. They know their bread is buttered by imperial power.

Hence our never ending participation and support for war: the Boer War, World War I, World War II, the Korean War, the Malayan Emergency, Confrontation with Indonesia, the Vietnam War, the Gulf War, the Afghanistan War, the Iraq War, the war on terror, and now the drums of war are beating again with China in mind.

As these conflicts have gathered pace, so has the size of our security establishment, and the level of military spending. For 2023-24 the budget allocation for defence and the Australian Signals Directorate is \$52.6 billion, up from \$21.7 billion in 2009-2010.

Between 2001 and 2010 ASIO experienced a threefold increase in its staff numbers and a sixfold in-

crease in its budget. Its total budget currently stands at \$573 million (up from \$352 million in 2009-10).

All of this has come at great cost not just to our national budget, but to our diplomacy and security. Our close military alignment with the United States has deprived us of the capacity to contribute to the peaceful resolution of conflicts in our region and beyond.

More than that, it has severely corrupted our democracy; demeaned the values we supposedly cherish, not least human rights at home and abroad; and reduced our support for the poor and marginalised at home and abroad

So, Pax Christi's message – and my firm belief – is clear. It's time to rise from this morass. We need as a nation to shift our gaze from the interests of our security establishment to the security needs of people.

We need to listen to the cries of the poor and marginalised and the cries of the Earth. As Guterres has made clear:

*We must put people at the centre of our actions . . . We must break down siloes across sectors and institutions . . . We must boost inclusive partnerships that benefit from the perspectives of youth, women, and those whose voices are rarely heard, such as indigenous peoples.* If Australia is to do this, we must be ready to revisit our past and reimagine our future. We need a new narrative that:

- acknowledges the wounds of Indigenous dispossession and colonial violence
- calls into question the fears that have compelled Australia's addiction to imperial power
- makes way for constructive engagement with our Asian and Pacific neighbours
- deepens our appreciation of Australia's cultural diversity – don't let's forget that 5.5 million Australians speak a language other than English at home.

*We need to shift our focus from military to human security.* This will mean new ways of thinking and acting that integrate security with economic and social needs, human

rights, and environmental values.

We can best make sense of human security, especially when it comes to Australia's place in the world, if we keep uppermost in our minds three aspects of security.

**Common security.** We cannot be secure unless we reconcile the security interests of different parties. We must aim for the common security of all stakeholders. If we expect our Asian and Pacific neighbours to respect our security interests, then we must be ready to respect their security concerns. In the case of the Pacific Island nations, we have to respect their two primary concerns: climate change and the nuclear threat. The same principle applies at home. We must come to accept that the security and sovereignty of our First Nations lies at the heart of the security of Country.

**Cooperative security.** If we recognise the security needs of others, then we must act in concert with them.

Australia has a unique opportunity to pursue any number of joint initiatives with Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam and New Zealand, as well as with regional bodies like ASEAN and the Pacific Islands Forum – and not just to serve our economic interests.

We need to develop concrete policies that strive for: denuclearisation through support for the Nuclear Ban Treaty and the strengthening of Nuclear Weapons Free Zones; the establishment of zones of peace in the Indian Ocean and South Pacific; and the easing of tensions in the Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea.

Similarly, action could be taken to strengthen regional peacebuilding and peacekeeping capabilities in tandem with the United Nations, and to devise an ambitious program for joint action on climate change. Importantly, our cooperative efforts must not be limited to governments. They must involve the peoples in whose name they act.

**Comprehensive security.** Human security means protection from all that threatens the life and dignity of human beings, and other forms of life. It is alert to the mortal dangers of war and all forms of physical violence, but equally concerned with human trafficking, human rights violations, refugee flows, climate change, pandemics, and economic

arrangements that enrich the wealthy and exploit the poor, other creatures and entire ecological systems.

These concerns are closely connected, ethically, organisationally, geographically. A viable human security framework must engage the whole of government and the whole of society. Federal, State and Local government must join to formulate coherent policies that advance human security, in close consultation with and accountable to the wider community.

#### **SO, WHERE TO FROM HERE?**

Australia needs to think long and hard about the immense risks but also the remarkable opportunities before us.

Wholesale changes in policy direction and resource allocation should be regarded as a high priority. Nothing much will change without a substantial overhaul of our decision-making processes, in other words a wide-ranging institutional shift, easy to say, but hard to do. Change of this magnitude will not occur overnight or by accident. It will have to be accompanied and nurtured by a cultural shift.

#### ***For this we need a vibrant, mature and respectful national conversation.***

From where will leadership come? Not from our political class or the mainstream media, at least not to begin with. The initiative clearly lies with civil society.

First, we can turn our attention to those sections of the community, the many groups and organisations, adversely affected by our current security policies. These are not hard to identify.

They include Indigenous communities and their organisations, the development and overseas aid sector, journalists, whistle blowers and human rights advocates and lawyers, those working in such areas as poverty, homelessness, climate change, loss of biodiversity, public health, and threats to social cohesion.

We must also include in the conversation educational networks, trade unions, cooperatives, think tanks and research centres, as well as cultural and religious organisations. Each of these groups has something to contribute, but they cannot be viewed in isolation. The key to a vibrant human

security focussed conversation lies in connecting the concerns, priorities and insights of each of these groups and networks.

Human security discourse and practice become effective when we make connections across the boundaries of age, gender, faith, nationality, culture, status, occupational background, and importantly different areas of social engagement.

For this we need a multi-dimensional national conversation using a wide range of resources, formats and settings.

The conversation will have to be conducted in different languages, and not just in the spoken and written word. The visual and performing arts and even sport have an important part to play.

There are positive signs. Many of us feel frustrated by media hype, empty political noise, and uncaring institutions. We are looking for other openings.

At the front of mind in all of this must be the priceless contribution of our First Nations. Their wisdom can inspire and invigorate the national conversation.

A re-energised younger generation is deeply troubled by the ravages of climate change. Others are beavering away on civil liberties, animal rights, issues of war and peace, poverty, social inequality, the ethics of professional and public life.

We must build bridges between these different efforts and perspectives.

In time, it should be possible to lay the groundwork for community wide consultations which can in turn pave the way for local and then state-wide assemblies, and ideally culminate in some kind of national assembly, allowing for both face to face and online participation.

As we move forward, let us keep in mind that human security is not an end point. It is a pathway for re-thinking the profound insecurities of our age. It is a call to embark on a journey of renewal – ecological, economic and political no doubt – but also profoundly cultural and spiritual to give voice to the human spirit and take care of life together.

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# REDEMPTION THROUGH GENOCIDE

Barnett R. Rubin

The International Court of Justice ruled that Israel's Gaza campaign poses a plausible and urgent threat of genocide. Future historians of Jewish messianism may recount how in 2024 "redemption through sin" became "redemption through genocide," with unconditional U.S. support.

On February 24, Yaakov Godu, an anti-government demonstrator in Haifa, Israel, whose son Tom was killed by Hamas in Kibbutz Kissufim on October 7, [told a reporter from Haaretz](#) that members of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government are "deranged messianic envoys."

This is the government that President Biden treats as a friend and ally with whom the U.S. has a few differences. He and his envoys show no sign that they understand whom they are dealing with or what it would take to stop them from dragging the world into the conflagration that they and their apocalyptic Christian allies in the U.S. are praying for. Calling members of Netanyahu's cabinet "deranged" and "messianic" is not a figure of speech. Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich came out of Gush Emunim, a movement that, after 1967, preached that Jews must conquer and rule the Land of Israel (Palestine) from the River to the Sea to hasten the coming of the Messiah. Minister of National Security Itamar Ben-Gvir, who has been convicted of terrorism in Israeli courts, comes out of Meir Kahane's racist Kach Party. He lives in Kiryat Arba, a settlement that hosts a memorial to Baruch Goldstein, who murdered 29 Muslims at prayer in Hebron in 1994, and whose portrait Ben-Gvir displayed in his home until he entered politics.

These are not marginal figures. With no hindrance from Netanyahu, they are leading a movement to expel Palestinians from Gaza and settle it with Israelis. They are also overseeing the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians from the West Bank through pogroms, expulsions, and assassina-



tions.

The rabbis of the Talmud forbade trying to hasten the arrival of the messiah, but heretical movements have sought to force the redemption. Gershom Scholem, a historian who devoted his life to studying Jewish mysticism, [warned](#) that "The Jews have always had a fatal attraction to messianism," and "Zionism is no exception."<sup>1</sup> As early as the 1920s, Scholem compared the far-right Zionist predecessors of Netanyahu's Likud party to Sabbatai Zevi, who proclaimed himself the messiah in Smyrna (now Izmir, Turkey) in 1648. Scholem warned that these false messiahs "Infuse our youth with a spirit of new Sabbatianism, which must inevitably fail."

Scholem showed how the mystical-Kabbalistic concepts developed by Rabbi Isaac Luria of 16<sup>th</sup> century Safed, a center of Jewish scholarship and mysticism in Ottoman Palestine, provided a theological framework for messianism. Luria taught that during creation the light of the creator broke the vessels into which it had been placed, creating only a shattered world. Jews could bring redemption through "tikkun," the repair of those vessels, by keeping the commandments. The Sabbatians invented a darker version of tikkun, which required its believers to plumb the depths of evil to rescue the sparks of creation. Scholem called it "redemption through sin." Such desperate Messianic movements arose in the wake of calamities like the 1492 expulsion of the Jews from Spain and the 1648 massacres of Jews in Ukraine by the Cossacks of Bohdan Chmelnicki. The Holocaust, swiftly followed by the establishment of the

State of Israel, and then Israel's victory in the 1967 war, supercharged the messianic undercurrents of Zionism that Scholem had warned about.

In the wake of the 1967 war, Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook's teaching that the commandment to "conquer and settle" the Land of Israel was equal to all the other commandments inspired Gush Emunim. Fulfilling that commandment is the greatest tikkun and will hasten the footsteps of the Messiah. "The army of Israel," Kook taught, "is the army of Hashem [God]."<sup>2</sup>

While these messianists have some followers among American Jews, their most powerful supporters in the U.S. are White Evangelical Christian Zionists, who have become a hegemonic force in Donald Trump's Republican Party. They believe that the conquest and settlement of the land of Israel by the Jewish people will set off a world war, for which they pray as the precursor to the second coming of Christ.

In a 1980 [interview](#) in the *New York Review of Books*, Scholem compared Gush Emunim to the Sabbatians and warned, "In the seventeenth century, . . . the failure of Sabbatianism had only spiritual consequences. Today, the consequences of such messianism are also political." The messianic Zionist agenda, he said, "can only lead to disaster."

Shock at the atrocities of October 7, messianic beliefs, and unconditional U.S. financial and material support have combined to produce the apocalyptic cruelty of the current campaign in Gaza. For messianist Jews and apocalyptic Christians, the very existence of the Palestinian people has become an intolerable obstacle to the realization of the divine plan. As HaRav Kook taught, "We have absolutely no right to relinquish control over any piece of Eretz Yisrael." As for those non-Jews living in the land, HaRav Kook cites Deuteronomy 7:2: "Show them no mercy," which means, he explained, "Not to give them (gentiles) a place on the

Land." Only ending material support for the assault on Gaza and triggering new elections in Israel might have a chance to halt the juggernaut.

The International Court of Justice has ruled that Israel's Gaza campaign poses a plausible and urgent threat of genocide. Future historians of Jewish messianism and American failure may record that in 2024 redemption through sin became redemption through genocide, with

the unconditional support of the United States.

#### Notes

David Biale, *Gershom Scholem: Master of the Kabbalah* (Jewish Lives). Yale University Press: New Haven, 2018. Kindle Edition. Chapter on "A University in Jerusalem." Torat Eretz Yisrael: The Teachings of HaRav Tzvi Yehuda HaCohen Kook, based on the Hebrew "Sichot of HaRav Yehuda," compiled and edited by HaRav Shlomo Chaim

HaCohen Aviner, English Translation and Editing by Tzvi Fishman (Jerusalem :Torat Eretz Yisrael Publications, A Division of Ateret Cohanim,1991), pp. 299-300.

Op. cit. p. 181.

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## AIN'T NO ROOM FOR PEACE

Glenn Loughrey

### Mark 1:1-8

Today is the Second Sunday in Advent and our focus is on peace. What an appropriate idea to focus on in a world which is demonstrably not at peace. War, violence, conflict, and confrontation has broken out on every continent. It is broadcast to our screens, played on our radios and front page on our newspapers.

James Hillman in his book, *"A Terrible Love of War"* asserts that war is not an opposite state to "Peace" rather "Peace" is the brief interval before the next War. He goes further to state that war is normal, and humans need war to find meaning and purpose. He adds that belief and the Abrahamic faiths include the call for war within its language and mode of operation. In fact, we are addicted to war. Maybe we find this confronting. We can accept, perhaps, that this is true of the Old Testament but the New Testament is about love and the Prince of Peace. Surely, it is not about war and the language of war. Or is it? Perhaps we have recruited the language therein to mask the violence and love of war we harbour in our battle with evil, evildoers, and those unlike us.

In the recent debates around the referendum there was more emphasis on war and violence than on peace and reconciliation. Those who say they were for such values exhibited a love of violence. I spent most of my time in church communities and I can assure you the passion for violence was as real there as any-

where. The focus on how to defeat the enemy who somehow posed a threat to society was at the forefront of most conversations. Christians didn't seem to be any different to the aggression exhibited on our TV screens, radios or stages.

The church sees itself as an instrument of peace. We who make up the church pray for peace Sunday after Sunday. We have litanies and prayers for peace. We hold vigils to implore God to bring peace amongst us. Yet there is no peace, and we use words of violence in conversation, Bible Studies, and sermons to condemn those who do not believe, those whose lifestyles are not ours, those that have another world view. All the praying, it seems, is to no avail. War on both a world scale and in our personal relationships continues. In our society the need to focus on family violence reminds us war is alive and well regardless of people's faith, beliefs or hopes. Just as charity, love, begins at home, so does war. The violence partners, children and others experience here normalises violence and allows us to agree to war.

Maybe this calls us to think about why, after 2000+ years since the coming of Jesus, we are no nearer to peace on earth than the night he was born. The call to love our neighbour as ourselves hasn't worked. And we cannot simply say that it is because there is evil in the world, and we can't do anything about it.

Why? Thomas Merton suggests "*We are not at peace with others be-*

*cause we are not at peace with ourselves, and we are not at peace with ourselves because we are not at peace with God*". How is it possible that those who have grown up breathing the Christian ethos have failed to do so? This is not about those who go to church and identify as Christian, but the fact that the Western world is and remains embedded with Christian philosophies and morality from its very beginning. Yet we are unable to find peace with self, others, and God.

In today's readings we encounter John the Baptist and the call for repentance, individually and as a society. Yes, we individually must find peace with God but that must be as a part of a society so that it does also. The peace of everyone is needed to make peace in the world. Peace is not an ethereal personal experience. It is what we contribute to society and the world.

Thomas Merton writes again: "*Peace demands the most heroic labour and the most difficult sacrifice. It demands greater heroism than war. It demands greater fidelity to the truth and a much more perfect purity of conscience.*" John the Baptist suggests that when he calls all to repentance and reconciliation. It didn't happen then, and it isn't happening now. We seem to be blind to our complicity in the war in small things which leads to our complicity in the large things.

I am not sure if what Merton calls for is possible because peace is more than prayers, and blaming the other for the wars we are engaged

in, in our own lives and the life of the world. Prayer is an aspiration which Merton suggests takes much more than we are often ready to commit to, to bring about peace. John suggests the same. If you want the Messiah and a new world then you must repent, not just in words, but in a life differently lived.

In the recent Referendum we had the chance to do peace in our country. Pat Dodson comments: "..... *Australians hear the whispering in their heart and know it can only be silenced by coming to terms with the original owners of this beautiful and bounteous land. Many Australians of goodwill sense that a moment for national leadership has slipped past us and is gone.*"

The war continues without peace. Why? As Desmond Tutu said: *"There can be no future unless there is peace. There can be no peace unless there is reconciliation."* Repentance and forgiveness are the twins who power peace. Being prepared to face the fracture in relationships allows for the offer of the hand in forgiveness. Without it, violence remains.

1960's Anti-war activist and Catholic Priest Daniel Berrigan said that while people say *"Of course, let us have peace,"* (they add the caveat) ....., *"but at the same time let us have*

*normalcy, let us lose nothing, let our lives stand intact, let us know neither prison nor ill repute nor disruption of ties ... "* *There is no peace because there are no peacemakers. There are no makers of peace because the making of peace is at least as costly as the making of war – at least as exigent, at least as disruptive, at least as liable to bring disgrace and prison, and death in its wake."*

Peace is unproductive, production is fuelled by war. Economies struggle to survive without war or the threat of the war. The war economy is, like prisons, a reliable source of income and jobs. Nations need violence and death to find their identity in contrast to the other and to balance their books. The dead come back heroes and patriotic legends are made.

Peace provides none of that.

John Dear, another peace activist writes that *"The life of "peace" is both an inner journey toward a disarmed heart and a public journey toward a disarmed world. This difficult but beautiful journey gives infinite meaning and fulfilment to life itself because our lives become a gift for the whole human race. With peace as the beginning, middle, and end of life, life makes sense."*

Peace can not be welcomed through

prayer and the intervention of a benevolent God. Peace can only come when it is the central element in the lives of individuals and nations. While ever we are addicted to self-interest in all its shapes and forms, to greed and possessiveness, to demonising the unlike us, then there can be no peace.

To work for peace is something very few people are prepared to do seriously, without counting the cost. It is something the church and its members speak of but hesitate to make real. John the Baptist calls us to do a deep personal assessment and to change the way we live and be in our relationships with others despite the implications for ourselves.

John the Baptist and Jesus both attested to the consequences of peace making. One lost his head, and the other was nailed to a cross.

Daniel Berrigan continues: *"If you are going to follow Jesus, you better look good on wood."*

*Fr. Glenn Loughrey is a Wiradjuri man, Anglican priest artist and author. He has just been appointed "Project Lead - Indigenous Ministry in the Anglican Province of Victoria - Pilot Project"*

## ALEXIS NAVALNY

If you want, I'll talk to you I'll turn up the volume of mum, so to speak. The fact which rather sets me up as an exile in the Anti-Corruption Foundation people are atheists, and I was atheist myself. But now I am a me a lot in my activities, because much much easier. I think about fewer dilemmas in my life, because, in general, it is more or less clearly written what action to take in every situation. It's not always easy to follow this book, of course, but I am actually trying. And so, as I said, it's easier for me, probably than for many others, to engage in politics.... *"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied."* I've always thought that this particular commandment is more or less an instruction to activity. And so, while not really enjoying the place where I am, I have no regrets about coming back, or about what I am doing. It's fine, because I did the right thing.. On the contrary, I feel a real kind of satisfaction. Because at some difficult moment I did as required by the instructions, and did not betray the commandment.



about God and salvation. heartbreak to the maximum is that I am a Christian, ample for constant ridicule, because mostly once quite a militant believer, and that helps everything becomes things less. There are cause there is a book in



# AN OPEN LETTER FROM A SYRIAN ARAB PRIEST TO HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

Fr Elias Zahlaoui

The tenth anniversary of the cosmic war on Syria, my homeland, is in a couple of days. I would like, today, to ask you, personally, and the whole Catholic Church, everywhere, a question that is equally simple and grave:

Do you still believe today that Jesus Christ continues to exist in the Arab World?

I find, Holy Father, myself obliged to explain that all the generalities that you never cease to proclaim and repeat, and those that you place on the tongues of your representatives in international institutions, negate this belief.

My proof of this is based on all that the official newspaper of the Vatican, the *Osservatore Romano* publishes. All these texts, without exception, that are sometimes given exciting, even shocking, headings, offer proof of sorrowful, regular, and total absence of any stance towards the declared catastrophic policy against the Arab World, that is adopted by some international powers, at the head of which are the United States and some of its Arab and European 'valets'.

Is there anybody who dares say that he is ignorant of this policy of hegemony which knows no boundary, and which has continued for tens of years in a blatant challenge to every national and international legitimacy, and to every human and religious morality?

O how sorry I am to say that, in the absence of any condemnation from the Church towards this flood of successive catastrophes which afflict the Arab World, I find myself obliged—together with all the crushed people on the face of the earth—to ask God to bring down His just punishment on the perpetrators and agents of these catastrophes.

In fact, the church, which St Paul described as "the Pillar of Truth", and which represents Jesus Christ, indicates its constant inability to direct the least condemnation to the



miserable haughty (people), who have taken upon themselves to destroy God's creation, and to remove the Christian existence from the Arab World.

Holy Father,

I know that what I, the Catholic Priest, am saying is more than grave. But I hold onto my words, and present proofs for them.

Suffice it for me, first, to remind you of your traditional message on the "Inter-national Day of Peace", 2020. And suffice it also for me to remind you of your official address which you delivered, during your visit to the United Arab Emirates, between 3 – 5 of February, 2019.

I am even going further than that.

There are two sorrowful occurrences that I cannot overlook, especially that they relate primarily to Syria, my home country. The first of these, which stopped me a long while, is your first visit to the United States around the end of September, 2015. You were then in the heart of this 'Empire', which declares openly its resolution to destroy all the opponents of its policies of infernal domination on the world—including Syria, of course—in the name of "Freedom", "Democracy", and "Human Rights". You have delivered four addresses in front of the main civil and church representatives of this 'Empire', as well as in front of the United Nations General Assembly. I made sure that I read these addresses five times, so that I let no effect 'of the moment' to get a hold of my thinking. I am sorry to say that I have found in them nothing but words of praise and thanks, in addition to calls for more religious freedom and respect for nature and the environment.

For such words to issue forth from the representative of Jesus Christ, who died on the cross for the love of a humanity that suffers—today, more than at any bygone time—denigration, hunger, homelessness, and termination, is a matter that provokes pity and bitter questioning. As to the second occurrence, this concerns the political quest—which hid behind the famed humanistic excuses—in the letter you addressed to our President, through Cardinal Peter Turkson on June 28, 2019.

Holy Father, I find it difficult to believe that you were, at that time, ignorant of the fact that the "International Community", in whose name you always talk, and with whose policies you always align yourself, is but the 'American Empire' and its 'valets'. Were you, perchance, ignorant of the fact that the billions of the deserted humans, scattered on the face of the earth, and with whom, Jesus Christ identified himself totally and completely trying to stand in the face of this "International Community", itself, in order to achieve the minimum level of a dignified and just life?

This struggle is exactly what Syria—with our President, Dr Bashar Al Assad, at its head—confronts against an exceptionally unjust cosmic war, and against an economic siege that has no justification whatsoever. With this legendary resistance, Syria has become a role-model for survival.

Holy Father, at the end, let me express my sincere reaction towards the initiative that pushed you to send, on August 15, 2019, six thousand rosaries to the Syrian people. Of course, It is not for me to belittle the necessity of prayer in a time in which prayer has become the most primary and greatest necessity.

However, I ask you honestly if you believe that this style of yours, in addition to your insistent calls for prayer for peace in Syria and the world, compensates for your total and incomprehensible abstaining

from adopting any stance towards the torturers of peoples?

Is it not time for the Catholic Church to sever every relation it has with the policies of the 'American Empire' in order to reconnect with the kingdom of God?

O how it befits the Christians of the world, and not just the Christian and Muslim faithful in Syria, to intensify prayer, so that the Catholic Church

be guided to Lord Jesus Christ, and to the tortured people of the earth with whom He identified himself?

If, in the near future, you made a visit to Crucified Syria, would you not open the way to this hoped for guidance?

Holy Father, I hope that you see in this wish of mine, not only the hope of a Priest from Syria, but also, and especially so, the hope of the Cruci-

fied peoples of the earth.

Please accept my love and respect.

March 13, 2020

*Father Elias Zahlawi has ministered in Damascus since the 1960s and, since 1975, at the Church of Our Lady of Damascus. Syrian-born, he studied in Jerusalem and founded the now famous Damascus 'Choir of Joy' in 1977*

## AN OPPORTUNITY FOR PARLIAMENTARIANS TO WORK FOR PEACE IN SYRIA

Feb 9, 2024 Susan Dirgham

*If wars can be started with lies, peace can be started with truth," Julian Assange:*

**P**etition EN5846 to the House of Representatives calls on the Australian government to suspend Australia's 'autonomous sanctions' on Syria. A considered, conscientious response to the petition could have major implications for Australia's foreign and defence policies.

The US-led unilateral coercive sanctions on Syria are causing enormous suffering to the people of Syria. Furthermore, they prevent the country from rebuilding after more than a decade of war and its resultant destruction.

A [UN Human Rights Council report](#) indicates that unilateral sanctions on Syria violate the Syrian people's human rights and are, thus, illegal.

When Australia was on the Human Rights Council from 2018 to 2020, a Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) post noted: 'Australia's inaugural membership reflects ... the Australian Government's commitment to speak honestly and consistently for the advancement of human rights internationally.'

Despite this avowed commitment to the advancement of human rights, Australia's sanctions on Syria could be interpreted as an act of war on a country and a people that do not threaten us.

In justifying government sanctions on Syria, DFAT [states](#): 'Since 2011, Australia has imposed autonomous sanctions in relation to Syria to re-

flect Australia's grave concern at the Syrian regime's deeply disturbing and unacceptable use of violence against its people'

However, events in Syria in 2011 – the first year of the so-called Arab Spring – remain deeply contested. An objective analysis, I contend, points to DFAT's response being, at best, credulous and ill-informed, and, at worst, ideologically motivated.

Firstly, casualty figures for 2011 point to Syrian security forces coming under deadly attack that year. The [Syrian Observatory for Human Rights](#) (SOHR), a group supportive of the militarised opposition, reported that 3,138 'pro-government forces' were killed in 2011 compared with 619 'anti-government forces' (Ref: [Casualties of the Syrian civil war](#), Wikipedia).

Secondly, credible testimonies – including those of Syrian Australians; the late Dutch Jesuit priest [Rev. Fr. Frans van der Lugt](#), then living in Syria; and US academic [Joshua Landis](#) – indicate that acts of terror and sectarian violence were being perpetrated by anti-government 'armed gangs' and [snipers](#) from the start of the 'Arab Spring'.

I [was in Damascus](#) a month after



violence erupted there and saw Syrian TV reports showing grieving widows and children at the funerals of police and soldiers. Locals told me about the random violence that sowed fear in people's hearts. I heard women at the hairdressers accuse Lebanese politicians of smuggling weapons into Syria.

Back in Australia, I interviewed [Samir](#), a Syrian Australian who told me about the murder of three farmers, one of them his uncle, on their way to a market in Damascus. This was barely a month into the 'Arab Spring'. Similar acts of terror, mostly against people from minority religions, were recounted by other Syrian Australians I spoke to.

The Rev van der Lugt, based in the Syrian city of Homs, [wrote](#), 'From the beginning, I have seen armed demonstrators ... and they were the first to start shooting at the police. Very often, the violence of the security services is a response to the brutal violence of the armed insurgents.' Joshua Landis [reported](#) the killing of nine Syrian soldiers on 10 April 2011, three or four weeks into the 'Arab Spring'. A few days later, on his website Syria Comment, Landis referenced remarks by prominent opposition figures who said they had been asked 'to facilitate the distribution of money and weapons to young demonstrators'. It was suggested that the money came from a "major Arab Gulf country".

On the same post, Landis also reported that Syrian government security forces were ordered not to use their weapons unless fired on first.



The situation was very complicated; Syria clearly had enemies prepared to use violent, covert means to undermine its secular state institutions, and sectarian hatred was deliberately being stirred up.

In late 2011, there were huge [rallies](#) in cities across Syria which brought men and women of the different faiths together in support of reform, peace and security, and against foreign interference and a militarised opposition. Surely a position most Australians would support?

It seems as though the DFAT officers responsible for recommending the sanctions regime uncritically accepted the position of Washington and London. They chose to ignore evidence that the violence in Syria was a campaign of terrorism supported by outside forces and directed at the Syrian authorities and innocent civilians.

I have [written](#) previously about the decades-long history the US has of undermining Syrian sovereignty through covert means, at times [conspiring with the UK](#) to do this. In 1957, the CIA and Britain's MI6 planned border incidents and assassinations to bring down a Syrian government they considered to be too close to the Soviet Union, and thus inimical to US and UK interests.

In 2012 or '13 at a meeting with a young DFAT officer, I asked the officer where she got her information about Syria from. "Al-Jazeera," she replied. Apparently, she was unaware of Al-Jazeera's strong anti-Syrian bias stemming from [Qatar's commitment](#) to the insurgency in Syria and marked by Al-Jazeera's promotion of the late Egyptian cleric [Yusef al-Qaradawi](#), an unequivocal supporter of the 'revolution' and militant Muslim Brotherhood forces in Syria.

A couple of months after the start of the 'Arab Spring' in Syria, Al-Jazeera reporter Ali Hashem [witnessed](#) 'tens of gunmen crossing the borders' with Syria – 'clear evidence that the Syrian revolution was becoming militarised'. However, his seniors at Al Jazeera didn't allow him to report this. Hashem writes, it 'didn't fit the narrative of a clean and peaceful uprising'.

### **When there is so much suffering in the world, why should we care about Syria?**

It should be a great concern that the US-led sanctions on Syria are based on falsehoods that have been uncritically accepted by successive Australian governments. The lies are repeated, amplified and embellished by the mainstream media.

The mainstream narrative on Syria, whether from the government or the media, has infantilised us and prevented well-informed dissent. From [Wikileaks cables](#) we know that Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was advised in February 2012 that Al-Qaeda was on the side of the US in Syria, yet such an astounding revelation has yet to lead to a change of course in our foreign policy.

Eight years later, veteran *ABC* presenter Phillip Adams [expressed admiration](#) for a Syrian 'rebel', clearly knowing nothing of the ideology of insurgents or of the impact their acts of terror had on the lives of ordinary Syrians.

Sadly, we have been encouraged to be conformists and to uncritically accept a carefully crafted media narrative. This is a dangerous position for us to be in when the world around us is changing dramatically and irrevocably.

The uncritical acceptance of falsehoods regarding Syria has led Australia to give implied support to the foreign-sponsored jihadist 'revolution', something that utterly contradicts the government's professed support for democracy and human rights.

A culture of rewarding conformity and suppressing dissent inevitably leads to cynicism, apathy or, worst of all, the embracing of extremist positions, as exemplified by the tragic case of [Jake Bilardi](#), who grew up in Craigieburn, Victoria, and met his death as a suicide bomber in Iraq.

Conventional wisdom encourages us to ignore the views of Syrians who oppose the 'revolution'; thus, we may find ourselves adopting an unconscious imperial arrogance and mercilessness reminiscent of colonial times. Meanwhile, our government follows the US in implementing poli-

cies that condemn generations of Syrians to impoverishment and perpetual conflict.

Petition EN5846 asks the House of Representatives to set up a Friends of Syria Parliamentary group to reassess the sanctions and investigate whether they violate the human rights of the Syrian people.

The role of a non-partisan Friends of Syria group would be to research, raise questions, and, ideally, reveal truths that engender honest, in-depth discussion and debate that eventually lead to an ethical, honourable and independent foreign policy.

The Australian government's current policy on Syria implicitly supports the US illegal occupation of one-third of Syria's territory, including its oil producing region and some of its richest agricultural land. The US looting of Syria's resources further condemns the Syrian people to increasing poverty and severe hardship.

Petition EN5846 also requests the Friends of Syria group to support an open investigation into two alleged chemical weapons attacks in Syria, one in Ghouta, Damascus, on 21/08/2013; the other in Douma, Damascus, on 7/04/2018.

In the West, these attacks have been attributed to Syrian government forces. This is despite the fact that there is solid evidence showing that these two incidents were, in fact, more likely sophisticated false flag operations aimed at providing a pretext for direct western military intervention in Syria.

The mass media's consistent anti-Syrian bias has led to many Australians having a deep-seated antipathy to the so-called Assad regime, which prevents us from being open to the views of Syrian women, religious minorities and Sunni Muslims who oppose foreign interference, choosing instead to support the Syrian Arab Army's defence of the secular state and the freedoms it offers.

Let's hope our parliamentarians access a range of unbiased analyses and reliable information which enables them to put themselves in the shoes of Syrians who did not consent to the terror of insurgents and the proxy war in their country.

One influential Australian [‘expert’ on Syria](#) is David Kilcullen, a person with an extensive military background. In Iraq, he was a senior advisor to General David Petraeus, who later came to direct the CIA. Kilcullen also spent time in Washington as an advisor to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, who had called for the making of [‘a new Middle East’](#).

Kilcullen presents as a knowledgeable, likeable ‘expert’. But he is not paid to put himself in the shoes of women in Syria or express empathy for Syrians under attack from terrorists. If such ‘experts’ and other mainstream commentators on Syria don’t, should we make an effort to give Syrian women’s views and life struggles our attention?

In February 2016, when Kilcullen was to appear on the [ABC’s Q&A panel](#), I was given permission (after some lobbying) to ask him a question via Skype. At the last minute, I learnt there had been an unprecedented technical problem at the ABC studio which meant I couldn’t ask my [question](#) a rather simple one:

*Syrian women have the same basic freedoms and equalities as Australian women.*

*Like the Eid festivals, Christmas and Easter are public holidays in Syria.*

*Education is free there.*

*The Syrian government and army are dominated by Sunni Muslims which reflects the demographic make up of Syria.*

*But the United States supports insurgents fighting the secular Syrian Army. What is more, the US has been involved in covert action in Syria since 1949, when the CIA helped orchestrate a military coup in Damascus.*

*What can justify a war against Syria?*

On a visit to Damascus in 2019, I sought the views of Syrian women. I am hoping the simple, heartfelt [message](#) I received from Syrian MP Madam Janset Kazan is heard in Canberra.

Petition EN5846 provides an opportunity for our parliamentarians to get involved in perhaps the most important decision-making a country can make: When and whom to go to war against?

At present, the Prime Minister can take Australia to war without any discussion in Parliament or even in Cabinet. It is hoped this petition can encourage the involvement of members of parliament in robust, public

discussions on war and related matters.

The petition presents a plausible case for Australia to desist from providing support for any belligerent and ill-founded foreign policy adventures of our key strategic allies.

In regard to Syria, our allies’ war on that country continues to cause immense suffering to the people of Syria, while Australia’s compliance with the foreign and defence policies of the US and the UK and our imposition of sanctions and dissemination of falsehoods, or at best distortions, compromise our integrity on many levels.

As Julian Assange said: “If wars can be started with lies, peace can be started with truth.”

Julian Assange is in prison for exposing government wrongdoing, working for peace, and protesting against empire. May Julian be released and may peace activism and vigorous public debates about war become integral parts of mainstream Australia.

*Susan Dirgham is an English as a Second Language Teacher. She taught at the British Council in Damascus for 2 years. Her classes at AMES Australia have included Syrians on humanitarian visas.*

## BLESSING TO ALL THE WOMEN IN PAX CHRISTI INTERNATIONAL Wamũyũ Wachira

Today, I pray with the Psalmist of 139, I thank God for each one of you, who are wonderfully made.

**You are a blessing to Pax Christi International and to all you touch in our world.**

**Thank you for giving your all-in creating cultures of peace wherever you are.**

Each one of you brings to this movement your special, unique, irreplaceable gifts.

Each day you go about your service unnoticed like a gentle breeze that soothes as it moves.

You **heal wounds** of other women, children, men and youth.

You **lovingly listen** to stories both of hope and despair of people that you accompany in your families and communities in all their forms.

You **embrace** the lonely, the refugees, the migrants and internally

displaced.

You **give shelter** to the homeless and abandoned.

You are **the nonviolent voice** amid violent echoes.

You are **the greatest advocate** for those who are denied justice and their rights to life and freedom.

You are **the instrument of peace** in our violent and unfeeling world.

You are **the beacon and anchor of hope** for the broken-hearted and the wandering spirit.

You continue to weave **the tapestry of life** of our great movement.

You form part of **the heartbeat of this movement** ensuring its health and growth.

**Shine** you great women that have continued the dream of Marthe Dorcel-Claudot.

**Stand** and be counted you women of substance.

**Speak** with that unique, nonviolent voice that you are renowned for.

**Walk** tall as you teach and live this new way – the way of nonviolence.

**Bloom, our great peacemakers, bloom where you are planted.**

For God will always be there with you, holding your hand and lifting you up when life is hard.

May God **light your path and give you that peace** that no one can take away from you.

Our Lord says, “Peace! I leave you.

My peace I give to you! Go bear fruits, fruits that will abide and know that I am always with you until the end of times”.

**I Celebrate you! I pray for you! May God be gracious to you and bless you.**

*Sister Wamũyũ Wachira – Co-president, Pax Christi International  
8th March 2024*

## Book Review

# AN AMERICAN PROMETHEUS THE TRIUMPH AND TRAGEDY OF J. ROBERT OPPENHEIMER

By Kai Bird and Martin J Sherwin

**Reviewed by Harry Kerr**

### **An American Prometheus: The Triumph and Tragedy of J. Robert Oppenheimer**

By Kai Bird and Martin J Sherwin

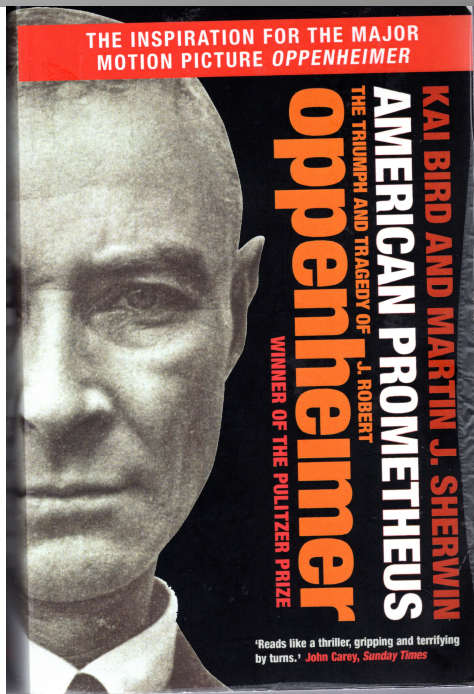
*Atlantic Books, London 2008*

Readings \$36.00, Dymocks \$33

Booktopia \$31.50

This book is a detailed and carefully researched account of the life of Robert Oppenheimer and of his role in the development of the atomic bomb which was dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945. It is much more than that. It gives us a close up view of the operation of the power politics, of the inner workings of empire, the lengths to which the military industrial complex will go to fulfil their aims. It also offers us a disturbing picture of the power of ideology to shape a nation and dehumanise its institutions. If you watched the film "Oppenheimer" and struggled with the intensity of detail you will see why. This book spells out the complexity of the issues and human interactions involved in the development of The Bomb.

Robert Oppenheimer was a brilliant physicist who worked with other brilliant scientists to unlock the secrets of the atom and its potential for humanity. They could not avoid been caught up in the realities of war. A special city was created at Los Alamos in the New Mexico desert to develop and evaluate an atomic explosion. When this happened the objective of a long scientific search was achieved. However the objective of the US government and the military was to use this achievement to create a weapon of mass destruction which could offer the US and its allies military dominance and a quick victory in the war against Germany and Japan. Government and military were driven by the conviction that Germany was



also working on a possible atomic bomb. It was vital to get in first.

The war with Germany ended before the bomb was fully developed. It was now seen as a means to end the war with Japan quickly and to save allied lives. In the space of a few weeks the atomic bomb was developed and tested and dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki with consequences that we know. Since 1945 it has been revealed that in purely military terms this massive use of atomic power with its destructiveness and unprecedented wasting of human life was unnecessary to end the war. Japan was on the point of surrender. The myth of the bomb saving thousands of allied lives turns out to be the Big Lie paid for by 250000 Japanese lives. The Bomb was aimed not at Japan but at the Soviet Union which the US saw to be the real enemy and its chief rival in the post war world despite the sacrificial contribution of the Russian people to the defeat of Germany. Ideology had triumphed and this explains much of what followed

in the Oppenheimer story.

The use of the bomb and the demonstration of the possibilities of atomic power brought home to Oppenheimer and his colleagues who urged government to promote controls for the use of atomic weapons nationally and internationally. The Truman administration however was determined to assert US dominance by proceeding to the next stage, the development of the much more powerful Hydrogen bomb to assert its dominance over the Soviet Union. It became clear that this was driven by the growing anti-communist ideology which climaxed in the crusades of Senator Joseph McCarthy. Oppenheimer opposed the H Bomb and pressed for the control and regulation of the potential of the atom. This was opposed by both Administration and military. Forces within government now saw Oppenheimer as a threat to be destroyed.

He was called before the Atomic Energy Personnel Security hearing Board which was loaded against him which sought to prove links with the Communist party and so with agents of the Soviet Union. His security clearance was withdrawn which meant he was unemployable by government. The US was now unrestrained in its nuclear policy which became part of its national identity behind which Australia is happy to hide.

Oppenheimer was a complex personality as were his interactions with his colleagues, his family and with power figures and institution. This brief review cannot do him justice.. The book is worth reading as it takes us into a key figure at the heart of recent history. It also gives us insight into that unique concentration of power, the United States of America with which we continue to grapple.



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### 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 (Secretary): 07 3711

3273 [pamnair@hotmail.com](mailto:pamnair@hotmail.com)

## VICTORIA

Contact:

Sister Catriona Devlin OSB

[catriona3171@gmail.com](mailto:catriona3171@gmail.com)

0419 109 830

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

**Contact:**

**02 9550 3845**

**0411 450 953**



## PEACE RALLIES

**MELBOURNE/NAARM,  
Walk for Justice and Peace  
Speaking Up for Refugees**

10:30am - 12:30pm.

Meet at Parliament Gardens,  
Spring Street

**Free Palestine Rally**

2 pm State Library

(and every Sunday at 2 pm)

**CANBERRA,  
NGUNNAWAL COUNTRY:**

Palm Sunday rally

**Justice for Refugees,  
permanent visas now**

From 1pm. - Garema Place

**SYDNEY, GADIGAL COUNTRY**

Palm Sunday rally: .

**Peace not war,**

**Permanent visas for all refugees**

From 2pm

Belmore Park, near Central Station

**BRISBANE/MEEANJIN,**

Palm Sunday

**Rally for Peace and Refugees**

King George Square

From 3pm.

## ANZAC DAY 2024

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LAMENT, REPENTANCE  
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11 am.**

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Pray for suffering victims

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