

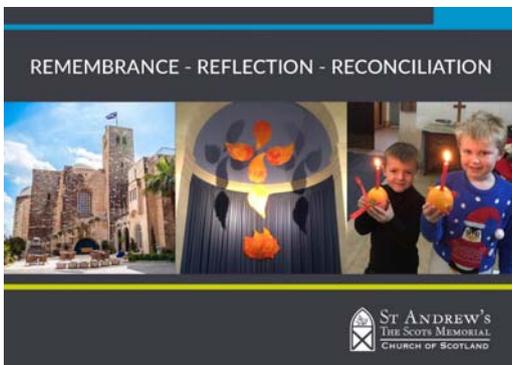
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John McCulloch - Israel November 2019

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Remembrance. Reflection. Reconciliation

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God. (St Matthew 5:9)

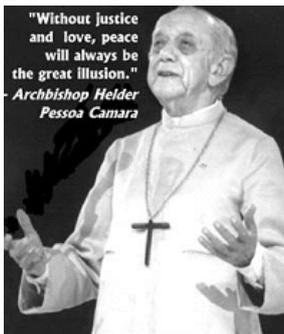


On Remembrance Sunday, the St Andrew's Scots Memorial Church was full to capacity, as we prayed, sang and stood in silence, in remembrance of all casualties of wars, past and present.

St Andrew's Scots Memorial Church, as its name clearly indicates, was built as a memorial to those who lost their lives in the WWI across Palestine, which had been under Ottoman rule for hundreds of years.

The words Remembrance-Reflection-Reconciliation, underpin both the church's roots, and its present vision to work for reconciliation within the intractable and unresolved conflict here in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (from now on IOPT).

But can reconciliation come about without justice?



The united congregation of St Andrew's Jerusalem & Tiberias, with the generous support and commitment of The World Mission Council and Church of Scotland as a whole, is partnering with Israeli, Jewish, Palestinian and international organisations across IOPT, with the hope of contributing (albeit in a small way), to a just peace here in the land where our God was incarnated into human history.

My colleague Rev Kate McDonald has just written an excellent report about some of our partners (mostly in Gaza & the Galilee) which I would highly commend to you. The context in the Galilee (where Christ spent most of his ministry) is different to Jerusalem and the south, but no less important. At a time when Christianity is a minority presence in IOPT, it is essential that the candle of hope and justice is not extinguished, at a time when across much of the wider Middle East, Christianity is being driven out.

A considerable part of The Church of Scotland's mission here, is to move across the ideological, political and social divides; with a hope of supporting and standing with all those who are working for a different world. Doing this as a church, and not just another NGO, profoundly marks what we do and how we do it. It also opens many doors in a society which is highly religious, and therefore very different to the secular societies typical of modern-day Europe.

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Remembrance Sunday is always a time, when the structural injustice of our world, past and present, comes into the foreground.

We have just marked the 101st anniversary of WWI, and the world has not learnt the ways of peace. When the 5 permanent members of the UN Security Council (China, Russia, UK, France, USA) also happen to be the five biggest arms dealers, we have a structural problem. Even if no weapon were ever fired, the multi trillion dollar arms industry constitutes structural sin, as it diverts colossal sums of money into weapons of war, rather than addressing many of the causes that lead to war, in a world where millions of people starve and die of a lack of clean water and preventable diseases. The arms trade also ensures the flourishing of structural economic injustice. In a world where the richest 300 have more money than the poorest 3 Billion people, something is seriously wrong. Christ embodied radical non-violence, in his care for the poor, his call to love our enemies, and responding in forgiveness and non-violence to those who crucified him, thus teaching us a better way. He calls his followers to do the same, and to not be custodians of the unjust systems of violence which perpetuate war and economic injustice.

Erica Chenoweth & Maria J. Stephen have shown how the methodologies of violence and war are actually far less successful in resolving conflict than nonviolent means, and yet our world is still addicted to violence, and we so often believe that it is the only possible response. They argue:

The most striking finding is that between 1900 and 2006, nonviolent resistance campaigns were nearly twice as likely to achieve full or partial successes as their violent counterparts.¹

I am indebted to Father John Dear for his witness of faith and non-violence, and his writings (which I cite below). It was John Dear who convinced me to shift in my position from the Just War Theory, which was embraced by most of Christian Church post-Constantine. This departed radically from the teachings and example of Jesus and the early church, who were persecuted under Nero, and embraced the bold nonviolence of Jesus who refused to engage the empire through the methodology of violence.



Father John Dear, denouncing systemic injustice in his book *God of Peace: Towards a Theology of non-violence* writes:

We are accustomed to recognising violence when it is inflicted by weapons. But the violence of our world occurs on many levels, from the violence within us, to interpersonal and societal violence, to the global structural violence of war, nuclear weapons, environmental destruction, hunger, sexism,

¹ Erica Chenoweth & Maria J. Stephen, *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 28.

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racism, homelessness, abortion, torture, the death penalty, and the rampant poverty that leaves over 1 billion people in misery(...)

The first level of violence includes the over-arching global, structured injustice which institutionalises the worldwide oppression of poverty, systematically accumulate the worlds resources in the hands of a small minority of rich people, and forces the vast majority of humanity to suffer starvation, misery and degradation (...)

Although the USA has only 5% of the world population, it consumes nearly 60% of the worlds resources.. Twenty percent of the world's population controls 80% of the world's goods, and 60% just get by. As Gandhi said "poverty is the worst form of violence ".(...) Francis of Assisi long ago summed up the link between war and greed: "If we want to own possessions, we must also have weapons "

(...) Because the first-world elite hoards the world's goods, it needs an elaborate and lethal weapons system to protect through violence the goods it has stolen from the rest of the world. (...)

But as Catholic social teaching has long taught, economic structures and systems which maintain the lifestyle of the first world's wealthy already kill the poor in the world. As the II Vatican Council declared "The arms race is an utterly treacherous trap for humanity, and one which injures the poor to an intolerable degree. The arms race is to be condemned unreservedly". Paul VI wrote: "it is itself an act of aggression, which amounts to a crime, for even when they are not used, by their cost alone, armaments kill the poor by causing them to starve". In other words, the bomb has already gone off in a world of the poor. Poverty and militarism are inextricably linked.²



In the week leading up to Remembrance Sunday, I took a high-ranking Israeli general who had been instrumental during the Oslo Accords, and some other Jewish Israeli friends to visit Hebron.

Although they knew about the situation, some of them had never been there. They were shocked, saddened and angry at what they saw; and deeply critical of the Occupation which is a barrier to peace and justice, and a blight on a Nation that claims to be the only democracy in the Middle East.

On our way back to Jerusalem, we stopped by at the Tent of Nations, and sat in the area of the Olive Grove Chapel, which had been consecrated by the Very Rev John Chalmers some weeks ago, when Rev Alastair Bennet had presided at the first ever communion service there.

As we celebrated the sacrament of Holy Communion amongst the threatened olive groves, we prayed for a day when all injustice and violence would end, and God's reign of peace would take root in our hearts and our world.

Remembrance is about not forgetting all those who have died (and continue to die) in conflicts across the world. But it should also encourage us to denounce the structural injustice of violence, and to work for a better world.

² John Dear, *The God of Peace: Toward a Theology of Nonviolence* (Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 1994), 6-7.

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Prayer

God of compassion, who came into our world in the frailty of human form, breathe your hope and grace over our troubled world.

You came into our world to heal and restore, and you keep coming again and again, bringing the promise of renewal and hope. Help us to hear your voice calling us back to your heart of love. Open our eyes, that we may see your world and each other as you see us.

We thank you that you are a God who is acquainted with suffering, who knows what it is like to sit under the olive trees, as the moon rises over the silvery darkness of night. In the final hours before you climbed the hill of suffering for our salvation, you prayed amidst the olive trees. In the places threatened by violence and darkness, the power of your love broke through, bringing forgiveness and new life.

Teach us the ways of peace, we pray; and rid our hearts of all hatred and violence that lead to war.

Make us hungry and thirsty for justice.

Help us to see the other as made in your image.

Break down the walls of fear and separation, and plant seeds of hope and rebirth in the places of despair; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

John McCulloch



John Chalmers with Daoud Nasser at Tent of Nations Olive Grove Chapel