

Pat Gaffney, General Secretary, Pax Christi

Presentation at Birmingham Diocesan Justice and Peace Commission Assembly

7th October 2006

Recently we received a letter at the office from a member, informing us that they would not renew their subscription of £18.00. According to this person, Pax Christi had been working for peace for more than sixty years - the state of the world was no better. We were, in their terms a 'failed organisation.' Anyone involved in education / health r corporate world, will be familiar this term and other choice words too: "fit for purpose"... 'resilient'... 'robust'... 'on target' and also aware that for almost anything we do today, we have to be able to show that we have 'measurable objectives'. If it cannot be measured - and measured in a certain way - it is of no value.

I wondered what the French co-founders of our movement would have made of this? The French Bishop Theas, who was imprisoned during WWII for speaking out against the persecution of the Jews and Madame Marthe Dortel Claudot, a French teacher who wanted to make a gesture of reconciliation towards the people of Germany after the war. I am sure they were not thinking of success or position or personal gain in their early moves for peace. They were simply trying to be faithful to the Gospel message that "Evil cannot overcome by evil. Evil can only be overcome by love."

This challenge from the former member has made me think about the works of war and violence and the works of peace and non-violence.

Works of war and violence

For many the trigger for much of what has happened in the world over the past five years began in 2001, on September 11. I have heard the immediate period following this event described as a 'teachable' moment, a 'transforming' moment - when the Western/Northern world had before it a chance to understand the relationship of the West to wider world. We were faced with choices: revenge and creation of a culture of violence and fear or understanding and the creation of a culture of non-violence and peace. What we have seen emerge is a period that is now described in these varying terms: A time of "war on terrorism", of "endless war", of the "long war", of the "world as a battlefield"

Paul Rogers, the academic and peace researcher from the Department of Peace Studies at Bradford University, wrote in February 2006 of the United States stated need to develop a much greater ability to target 'presumed' adversaries wherever they might be located and whatever the circumstances. Quoting Ryan Henry, principal deputy under-secretary of defence for policy: *"US forces in all probability will be engaged somewhere in the*

world in the next decade where they're currently not engaged. But I can tell you with no resolution at all where that might be, when that might be, or how it might be”.

Looking at the Ministry of Defence website and the Defence Vision for the UK we see something similar. A vision that seeks to: strengthen international peace and stability, provide a strategy that matches new threats and instabilities . “ We face new challenges and unpredictable new conditions. Our strategy must evolve to reflect these new realities”

What are some of the consequences and costs of this so-called ‘war on terror’?

- Iraq body count put the death toll in Iraq at between 43,000 - 48,000
- 90,000 Iraqi’s have been detained for up to four years and we have seen torture and rendition become an every more horrific feature of war.
- In Lebanon 1,300 were killed in that short 33 day war
- In Israel 43 were killed in the same war.
- In this year alone, 438 Palestine and 15 Israeli’s have been killed in the on-going conflict

The UK, after the United States, is the second largest military spender (c.£29bn), (c.£490) per capita. This is six times what we spend of overseas aid (£4.5 billion) 200 times what is dedicated to preventing violent conflict.

One programme, under review is the replacement of the Trident nuclear system. The renewal estimates run between £25 billion and £75 billion. It is a defence programme that will tie us ever closer to the US via Mutual Defence Agreement. It is a system of defence that operates on fear and threat. It is a massively expensive and violent insurance policy for the UK against an unknown threat some fifty years into the future.

The UK also likes to brag about its share of the global arms market. In recent years the UK has consistently sold arms to Israel. In 2005, the UK government licensed the export of arms worth £22.5 million to Israel, more than twice the amount in 2004. This in spite of the UN stating that Israel “violates humanitarian law”. And the traffic is not one-way... The UK spends millions of pounds each year on 'battle-tested' arms from Israeli companies, for example the 2,000 cluster shells that were used in the battle for Basra in 2003. Major Israeli arms companies exhibited at the UK’s Farnborough arms fair in July, even while Lebanon was being bombed.

Weapons of choice in many fields of war today are cluster munitions and landmines. Cluster bombs have a ‘footprint’ of 1 sq Km and an estimated 1 million were ‘sown’ in Lebanon this summer and will create daily casualties for years to come. Remember that

Afghanistan, at war for almost thirty years, is one of the most 'contaminated' countries when it comes to landmines - and these are now also killing British service personnel.

These are just some of the 'measurable' costs of warfare, the things that we can put figures that illustrate some of the 'robust' and 'resilient' feature of the 'war on terror'. Throughout the world the most dominant voices we hear is of leaders who justify acts of violence, war or military intervention in words such as these. *"We cannot do nothing - we must do something"....o "Some people will have to suffer so that we can create peace and security for all".... or "We must be firm and show resolve Our faith, our culture, our land.... are under threat.. or "It is a price worth paying"*. These words and phrases penetrate our culture - they justify and reinforce the narrative of redemptive violence.

Such statistics, such words of motivation and direction tell us little about the enormous damage done to human relations as a result of these acts of violence.. and the untold damage done to the real possibility of creating peace with human security.

A Jewish contact writing of the recent war between Lebanon and Israel said *"Listening to the political rhetoric of this war reminds me of a sports tournament. We beat them by however many points, or they beat us by however many points. But it is not points we are talking about and there is no trophy. The points are human beings with families and loved ones fleeing their daily lives, sometimes succeeding and sometimes not."*

Some other 'out-puts' or consequences of violence and war include the break-up of families, the sowing of seeds of hatred and revenge in younger people, the creation of new enemies and fears, the deep trauma caused by those who inflict and those who receive violence and so on. Martin Luther King was right when he said *"Wars are poor chisels for carving out peaceful tomorrows"*.

Tools for peacemaking

So what kinds of tools, what kind of skills, do we need if we are to transform this culture of violence, warfare, fear and revenge? I would like to draw on some of my experiences in Pax Christi

Peacemaking as sharing a vision and practice

Recently two sets of unexpected visitors came to our office. Three men from Iraq, Muslims, and a young woman who was working in Croatia for Pax Christi Germany. They wanted to speak with us about their vision of peace in their respective countries and share some of the frustrations of their peace-work. Our Iraqi friends, who were taking a great risk in the work they had chosen, were trying to set up people to people links with those involved in education and conflict resolution. They wanted to talk about developing skills that help the 'occupied' speak with the 'occupier' in a challenging but non-violent way.

Our Croatian peace-worker wanted to discuss ways in which young Christians and Muslims can be helped to be critical of the media when it tries to stir up hatred, stereotype those who are different and in the minority, who so often become the scapegoats for all the ills within the community.

Both wanted to talk about ways of working with a generation of young people who have known nothing but war and unrest. They know many young people who believe in other types of relationships where violence and war are not inevitable. But they said they needed the encouragement and examples, stories, models and support that will give them hope in their own work to build peaceful tomorrows. I have heard similar comments over the years, from partners in Northern Ireland and Israel-Palestine - where ordinary people are working across barriers, standing up to injustice, building bridges and healing broken lives.

Peacemaking as empowerment and solidarity

On two occasions this year I have heard the press and media almost deliberately misrepresent and undermine the work of contemporary peacemakers

The first is my friend Norman Kember, held hostage in Iraq for 118 days. Norman was in Iraq with Christian Peacemaker Teams, a group which has had a presence in that country since 2002. CPT have monitored been monitoring human rights abuse of Iraqi detainees; making contact with groups in civil society who work to prevent the collapse of that country; relaying information that military action is reinforcing rather than resolving a situation of great violence. They believe that being with people in times of conflict is an important witness.

While held captive, Norman, and the others held with him, were treated with respect and dignity. Less than twelve hours after his release, before he had even arrived back in the UK, Norman was being belittled and criticized. The possible harm which might have been caused to the military personnel who helped his release became the story. Ordinary people should not be getting in the way of the work of the military. On his arrival in London Norman did thank those who rescued him, and acknowledged their bravery but he also held to his belief that the war with Iraq is wrong, that military solutions do not work. The CPT work, of establishing relationships with local people, building confidence between differing groups, accompanying those who search for loved ones in prisons, this model of peace-work, '*getting in the way*' as CPT call it, are at best misunderstood and at worst forgotten.

Then in August I heard a radio programme where my friend Mairead Maguire, co-founder of the Peace People in Northern Ireland was being interviewed. It was the occasion of the 30th anniversary of Peace People. Again, the efforts of ordinary people were belittled. "What did you achieve", the interviewer asked (another 'failing organisation thought).

But Mairead was ready. "What did the men of violence achieve", she said, "3000 deaths!" Mairead knows from lived experience that violence has created only further violence. She says, *"Our hospitals of full of men in wheelchairs, people half-blinded, permanently wounded. There has to be another way to solve problems. The price of war is too high"*. The work of Peace People and other groups such as Corrymeela, Cornerstone, Restoration Ministries, know that it is by investing in ordinary people, working with them to own their dark history in order to move beyond it, creating safe space for people who see themselves as enemies to come together as vulnerable human beings. It is work of faithful persistence, work that recognises that the human person is not condemned to a downward spiral of violence and brutality. This is peace-work in the lived reality of violence.

These friends, and many others like them, know that their work is long-term, there are no quick fixes here. They remind us that peacemaking has a lot to do with patience and persistence, not letting go of a vision of a community which will not be overcome or destroyed by fear, violence, hatred but which will transform fear, violence and hatred through building justice, trust and truth. And this takes me to another model of peace-work which I believe reminds us of the need to put faith into action.

Peacemaking as speaking up and out

In face of so much 'bad news', in our world and in our church, what 'good news' should people of faith be proclaiming? Speaking recently at a gathering for people involved in social activism, the US peace and justice worker Jim Wallis addressed this theme, saying that in the face of 'bad religion' we need good and better' religion. *"Good religion pulls our best - our hunger for justice, for peace, for connection - and our lives mean something in the world,"* Wallis said. *"Bad religion pulls our worst stuff - our fears, our divisions, our hatreds, our selfishness"*. Surely the work of peacemaking, through the examples I have described, fits the bill here.

Another encouraging example of 'good religion' is the work being undertaken in Scotland, by the Scottish Church leaders and others. In April of this year, Cardinal Keith O'Brien of Edinburgh gave an Easter homily on the replacement of Trident. It said: *"we demand that these weapons of mass destruction be replaced, but not with more weapons. Rather, replace Trident with projects that bring life to the poor..."*and he went on to quote Pope Benedict's World Peace Day message where nuclear weapons and nuclear weapons states were called baneful and fallacious.

Then, at a recent Pax Christi seminar on Trident, the former Canadian Senator and Diplomat, Douglas Roche, also a Catholic said, *"The Trident decision will be a signal to the world whether the government is serious about its commitments or just playing with words to strike an agreeable posture in international meetings... It is the proper work of religion to expose falsehoods, particularly when they impact on the lives of the people in*

the mammoth way that nuclear weapons do. Thus Cardinal Keith Patrick O'Brien of Edinburgh should be commended for speaking out so clearly against the Trident replacement." Trident is one issue among many, but an urgent one and one which calls for our attention and action, and we hope that our own Catholic Bishops' Conference will feel able to make a statement before too long.

Don't be put off

I appreciate that some of this may seem overwhelming.... and this image here, of trying to straddle day to day life and at the same time do something about the war machine, reflects how we feel most of the time! But we must be encouraged by the examples of people I have spoken of today to go on and do what we can and make peace-work part of our ordinary life in whatever way is appropriate to the context in which we each find ourselves! It is tempting, and too easy, to take the line" we need to wait for a good political leader, or inspirational campaigner or church leader and follow". We are the ones we have been waiting for...!