

**“Justice and Peace shall kiss each other” (Psalm 85:10) - Biblical and Ecumenical perspectives**

**Presentation by The Rev. Inderjit Bhogal, The Methodist Church in Britain**

I greet you all in the Name of Christ, and wish upon you all the peace and blessings of God. I hope you are having a good and fruitful conference. It is a pleasure and an honour to share with you.

I am aware that you are all experienced peace activists with immense wisdom. I have learned much from many of you over the years. I am not going to say anything you don't already know, but, as I have been asked I am going to give you my own particular Biblical and Ecumenical perspectives on the theme of justice and peace, and church action.

**Introduction**

One day, early in my practice of ministry when I was 31, in a town called Wolverhampton, I joined a march against police violence and racism. Church leaders of all denominations, and leaders of other faiths had all urged devotees to boycott the march because it was expected to turn violent. I joined the march against the direction of my superiors. And at one point I found myself standing between armed police and young black men who were intent on “war” with the police.

I found myself stopping the young men by the words, “you throw one brick today and we’ve lost the battle. We want justice, not violence”.

Another day more recently, outside the court house in Leeds City centre, I found myself challenging the racist ideology of the British National Party while their leader was on trial for racist abuse and inciting hatred. Now as a faith leader I talked with the extremists for around two hours, and asked them to invite me to one of their meetings so that I could share my vision of an inclusive society. I am still waiting for the invitation.

I have found myself leading interfaith walks for peace in British cities.

I have walked for justice for refugees and those seeking sanctuary in Britain.

I am committed to non-violent action.

Where does this passion come from?

I'd like to share what I have to with you by putting my words into the context of my own story which embraces the kind of action I have just mentioned.

I will outline my own story and theology.

I will talk about my work with refugees, especially in City of sanctuary.

I will give you my reflections on the words “justice and peace shall kiss each other”.

I will briefly describe some of the work of Church Peace groups in the UK, including work on reconciliation.

I will close with a reflection on war and peace and some closing challenges.

**So, first a bit about myself.**

My parents left Panjab [India] in the dreadful, violent aftermath of the Indian Independence from Britain, and the India/Pakistan partition in 1947. As young teenagers they will have been advised by their parents to get

away from the inter-communal killing, rape and plunder. People living in Panjab at the time will have been in the middle of the refugee pathway.

It is a tragedy that a largely non-violent campaign for independence led by Mahatma Gandhi ended up in such a bloody partition.

My parents went to live in Kenya.

Then Kenya obtained independence from Britain in 1963/4, and my parents [still under the age of thirty, but with six children...and my mother was pregnant with number seven] decided to leave Kenya for Britain. First my father came to Britain to find work and somewhere to live. During this time my pregnant mother went to Tanzania [Tanganyika as it was then] and spent almost nine months there with her brood all under the age of fifteen, moving every two or three weeks between houses.

So my parents moved twice [in today's terms they would have been regarded as refugees] before they were thirty. They witnessed and shared great struggles for freedom and justice in India and Kenya. Both countries achieved what may be called justice, but in both contexts there were millions of casualties. Some twelve million people were displaced in the India/Pakistan partition, one of the biggest human convulsions of human history [Bhachu, 1985; Butalia, 1998].

I was born in Nairobi. I was eleven when Kenya achieved independence, and with my parents and family I left for Britain, via the nine month sojourn in Tanganyika.

My parents and brothers and sisters are all of the Sikh faith. Our home in Kenya was in a multi-faith neighbourhood and always close to the Sikh Temple.

The Sikh Temple was like a second home to me, my school and my playground.

My first home in Britain was in Dudley, West Midlands.

When we came to live there, there was no Sikh Temple nearby.

I started to attend the nearest place of worship. This happened to be a Methodist Church. I was made to feel welcome here. I started to read the New Testament, and was captivated by the story of Jesus Christ, particularly the way he spent time with those who were the most maligned and marginalised.

I was drawn more and more into the community of Christ in the Methodist Church.

I trained as a lay preacher and then for the Presbyterian Ministry.

I was ordained in 1980.

In the year 2000 I was appointed President of the British Methodist Church.

I will retire professionally in August 2018.

### **Now let me say a little about the heart of my theology, passion, practice and ministry**

I am a follower of Jesus Christ with roots in the Sikh faith, and try to walk faithfully in the footsteps of God.

I look for the footsteps of God through engagement, respectful conversation and dialogue and reflection with people of different faiths, beliefs, ideologies and political persuasions.

In terms of theology, I am open to wisdom and insights from all faith traditions. I hold within myself deep learning from the Sikh and Christian traditions. I value the teachings of the founder of the Sikh faith, Siri Guru Nanak Dev Ji. I am a follower of Jesus Christ with deep devotion.

I believe all people are made In the Image of God. This means each human being is a created equal, sacred, holy, special and unique, a child of God and to be treated as nothing less. Any violation of a human being is an assault on and a violation of the Image of God in that person.

I value the Methodist emphasis on the “Prevenient Grace” [John Wesley] of God, that all people have in them the grace of God and that no human being is completely deprived.

I read the Bible as a library in which there is a wrestling with the existence of differences. The wrestling centres on two covenants recorded in the opening chapters of Genesis where in Chapter 9 we read the universal covenant embracing all people, plants and all animals and creatures great and small; and the particular covenant with one man and his descendants in Genesis 12.

The Bible reflects the debate between these two covenants, one narrow and exclusive, and the other open and inclusive. The Abrahamic covenant features more prominently in the Bible than the Noahic covenant and is therefore strongly exclusivist, but God's call to inclusive relationship emerges here and there, as in the Books of Ruth and Jonah.

The strand which proclaims only Yahweh, only Jerusalem, only Israel [and in the New Testament “only Jesus”] is strong. But there is the wider strand too.

I don't like to single out verses in the Bible, but because it is important to discern here and there the wider vision, I like Amos 9:7 where we read the prophetic challenge to see that the way God relates to and saves Israel is the way God relates to and engages in the salvation history of all nations, including those that might be despised.

It is possible to read any scriptural text in an exclusivist way only, to proclaim a particular faith and people as God's preferred option. It creates a division of people as “us” and “them”. “Us” are people in our group and look like us, the chosen and holy ones, the inner circle, who have a place in heaven. “Them” are different to us, they don't look like us, they are not chosen or holy, they don't belong, and they only have no place in heaven. Mission is to make “them” accept “our” ways and to become like “us”. It is so sad that so often people define themselves by the fact that they are not like “them”, like the man in Jesus' story who with pride said to God in prayer, “I thank you that I am not like that sinner” [Luke 18:11].

All faiths have their bigots and extremists who interpret their scriptural texts only from exclusivist perspectives, seeing their own kind in superior ways, and ferment hatred of those who are not like them, those who are different, and foster violence against them. This has a deep history. It can be traced [Sacks, 2015] to the sibling rivalry of Isaac and Ishmael.

Some have interpreted scripture to say riches or good health are a sign of God's blessing, and poverty and bad health are a sign of God's punishment.

Religion is further co-opted by some to assign purity, cleanness and holiness to those who are like us and superior, to those scum of the earth who are impure, dirty and unholy...and castigated by God. They divide the world into clean and dirty people and realms, the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of the Devil.

It is important to read and interpret our sacred texts with care, and correctly, and with others, using interfaith dialogue as appropriate.

Conflict and violence and wars are between “us” and “them”, “our” world and “their” world. In this context it is important for all faiths to together develop the theology of the sacredness of “the other” [Sacks, 2015].

I like the way Jesus prioritised the poor, gave respect to people of different faiths, kept an open table where all were welcome, and ate with those who were shut out by religion and shunned by society.

The Holy Communion, for me, is not only a foretaste of the heavenly feast for all where God is host, but is a revelation of the world as God wants it to be, where all are welcome, belong and share equally together, and no one is excluded.

In the Sikh faith I see this in the Langar, the open community kitchen and table at every Sikh Gurdwara.

**Justice and Peace and immigration matters.**

I have focussed in ministry on challenging immigration policies and procedures that separate people like “sheep and goats”.

From my earliest days of life in the UK people of Asian backgrounds talked with me, because I was fluent in English, about their immigration concerns.

So I am familiar with immigration matters, policies and procedures. I am familiar with the fears, frustrations, and pains of people of all backgrounds around these.

I have determined to take simple steps to seek justice and mercy and humility in leadership, policy and procedure.

As a Methodist Minister, and Pastor, I have worked with others, especially in Churches, to critique and challenge policy and procedure where it has been unjust and discriminatory. I have supported many campaigns to challenge unjust deportations. In the 80's I supported people taking sanctuary in Churches. I chaired the Sanctuary Working Group of the British Council of Churches.

In March 1997 I walked from Sheffield where I live, to 10 Downing Street, with a letter to the Prime Minister asking that Asylum Seekers are not detained in conventional prisons alongside convicted criminals, and for a fairer deal for people seeking sanctuary.

As President of the Methodist Conference in Britain [2000-2001] I visited all the Detention Centres in Britain and Northern Ireland, following which I wrote a reflection entitled “Unlocking The Doors” [Bhogal, 2001]. I sent a copy to the Home Secretary.

In October 2005 I called a meeting, with Craig Barnett a Quaker colleague, to launch the City of Sanctuary initiative. In 2007 Sheffield was declared UKs first City of Sanctuary. When others asked how they could follow this idea, to assist, Craig and I wrote a short book entitled “Building a City of Sanctuary” [Barnett and Bhogal, 2010] with inspiring practical ideas.

There are now around 100 Cities/Towns/Villages/Schools/ Universities/ Gardens/Maternity Wards in Britain and Ireland working with the City of Sanctuary vision, to build cultures of welcome and hospitality, Cities we can be proud to live in. Visit the City of Sanctuary website for more details.

### **I'd like to tell you a little about the City of Sanctuary Story**

A City of Sanctuary recognition is granted to a City, or a Town, where local organisations like Tenants Associations, Businesses, places of Work, Worship Centres, Garden Allotments, Youth Organisations, University Unions, and so on, commit themselves to doing what they can to be more welcoming to refugees and people seeking asylum...those seeking sanctuary among us. They also work with their local government to develop a vision for their city or town, which is about building cultures of welcome and hospitality and sanctuary for those seeking sanctuary among them.

City of Sanctuary is ecumenical in the widest sense involving all denominations, all faiths and different political groups. It is supported by the ecumenical instrument Churches Together in Britain and Ireland.

The Bible contains the command to “love your neighbour as yourself”.

Yet this commandment is stated only once in Hebrew Scriptures [Leviticus 19:18].

On the other hand on no less than 36 times the Hebrew Scriptures challenge people to “love the stranger”. There is no other command repeated so often.

A neighbour is a bit like ourselves.

A stranger is someone very different.

The Bible challenges us to love the stranger, to see the image of God in those who are different.

The concept of Sanctuary is thousands of years old and rooted in the Bible.

The Hebrews enshrined Sanctuary into the legal codes of their new society when six Cities of Refuge were established according to the legislation set out in the Book of Numbers 35:6-34 [also Joshua 20:1-9; Deuteronomy 4:41-43].

These Cities were to give refuge, or sanctuary to anyone, including a foreigner, who was accused of manslaughter, to prevent the automatic use of revenge as a rough, ready and unfair route to justice, “until there is a trial before the congregation” [Numbers 35:12].

Cities of Refuge were about giving protection to vulnerable people whose lives were in danger.

**City of Sanctuary is a contemporary expression of the City of Refuge idea.**

It is not new in Britain. Sanctuary was available around a thousand years ago in Churches. They offered protection to debtors and criminals.

The concept of sanctuary began to re-emerge in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, first in El Salvador, as a form of protection from the activities of “death squads”.

From there it was taken up in the USA when churches gave sanctuary to Guatemalans and Salvadorians refused refuge.

There have been sanctuaries in Churches in Germany, Switzerland, Denmark and Sweden as well as in the UK.

In 2005 I began to wonder, could Sheffield where I was living, become recognised as a “City of Sanctuary” for people seeking asylum and refugees?

Many people are familiar with the idea of a “Fairtrade City”, in which a wide range of community groups and organisations make a commitment to using and selling fair-trade goods. In a similar way, a City of sanctuary, we imagined would be a place where significant numbers of schools, community groups, faith groups and cultural organisations, as well as local government, were committed to offering hospitality and support to refugees and those seeking sanctuary in their communities.

Working towards City of Sanctuary in Sheffield we felt would represent a positive common goal and aspiration for a wide variety of organisations, groups and individuals.

Just as Fairtrade City, it could embody an explicit set of goals for the local organisations that signed up to the initiative, and a commitment to broaden support for the idea in order to gradually influence the culture of the city as a whole.

In the contemporary expression of Cities of Refuge, the City of Sanctuary moves the idea towards a vision where local communities and organisations work together to counter and challenge hostility, and create cultures of welcome and hospitality and safety for all residents, but especially the most vulnerable residents.

**How can we help all people to be at home, be welcome, have hospitality, be safe and have sanctuary right where they are?**

Today 65 million people worldwide are uprooted in their own countries or are seeking refuge and sanctuary elsewhere. According to a report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees this is unprecedented in human history, and 90% of refugees today are from countries in or close to war and conflict. War creates refugees. The only long term solution to the current refugee crisis is the cessation of war and killing.

Two young Syrian refugees in Britain said to me that the only thing that can be called justice in Syria is to “stop the killings”.

Mostly uprooted people take the easiest journey and are in refugee camps in some of the poorest countries of the world.

There are refugees, of course, who take longer and more difficult journeys, risking life and costing huge amounts of money. We know stories of people holding the undersides of planes to make their journey; many

travel on crowded creaking old Boats; others travel in air tight containers on trucks. Many thousands perish on the way.

There are those, particularly women and children, who get trapped in the scandalous Human Trafficking trade. They get here and then disappear, are enslaved, in the sex trade.

**Migration is a crucial issue of this century.**

The next twenty/thirty years will see huge movements of people as a result of environmental degradation, climate change, famine, war and persecution.

How we relate to each other, and in particular to people seeking sanctuary and safety will be central to humanity and the challenges to build justice and peace. How we treat those who are in greatest need for safety will be the measure by which we shall judge personal, national and international morality and spirituality.

When people are deprived of their homes, their families, and familiar surroundings, they will be grateful for welcome, hospitality and compassionate concern in their new environments.

Consider working to make your city, town, village, church, school, university, club, place of work a Sanctuary committed to building cultures of welcome and hospitality, especially for those in greatest need and danger.

I am particularly keen to encourage churches to become churches of sanctuary, places of genuine hospitality and welcome for the most vulnerable people in society.

From 24 June 2018 the Sunday at the end of Refugee Week will be marked as an annual Sanctuary Sunday. I hope you will observe this.

The Biblical dream of justice and peace holds a promise that all people shall have sanctuary, "sit under their own Vines and under their own Fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid" [Micah 4:4; 1 Kings 4:25; 2 Kings 18:31].

**So, let us explore briefly the Psalmists view that Justice and Peace shall kiss each other.**

The purpose of God is not partition, or separation or segregation of people. It is to bring people together, to embrace. This is what "kiss" means here. There is warmth, mutuality and relationship.

A kiss normally involves two sides, and some familiarity with each other, a closeness that brings them to be able to see each other.

What does justice look like?

What does peace look like?

What journey or steps brings them together?

There are some clues in Psalm 85.

Let's take a look at Psalm 85.

It is generally accepted in scholarship that it is written in the context of movement of people represented by exile. It recalls the return from exile.

The people have gone into captivity. They have spent some time in captivity. And now they are back. These are words of a travelling, wandering, weary, migrant people.

There are three clear sections in the psalm, outlining three movements in a liturgy of worship and prayer. It begins with thanks for a particular land and ends up embracing the whole earth.

Verses 1-3 recalls God who is "favourable", who "restores" people, and "forgives sin". So there is an element of **thankfulness** upon return to home land.

Verses 4-7 are a prayer of a struggling people asking God to “restore” and to “revive” us again, and **interceding** for God’s “steadfast love”.

Verses 8-13 are an **affirmation and promise** of God’s renewal and restoration of all creation, a universal climax to a process that started with a kiss. This affirmation speaks of “abundant” life, the “fullness” of life [John 10:10] and the wholeness of shalom. These words foresee a comprehensive completeness envisaged also in Revelations 22:1-2 [the healing of the nations], and Romans 8:21 [all creation is set free from bondage]. The hope here goes beyond what appears to be humanly impossible.

It is this third section where we read “justice and peace will kiss each other”. The section begins with the leader of worship saying, “Let us hear the word of God, the word of God is peace” [verse 8].

The question then is, how will God speak, how will we hear the word of God?

The answer given in the affirmation that follows [verses 10-13] is that the word of God will be made flesh, made real in our midst.

In John’s Gospel we read precisely this: “the word became flesh and dwelt in our midst”, pitched a tent among us, took sanctuary among us.

The Psalmist affirms that when the word of God is made flesh we will see and know and feel this as warmly as a kiss.

This happens when grace and truth and justice and peace are incarnated and take flesh in our midst, and whenever this happens something of the renewal of all creation takes place.

“Steadfast love and faithfulness meet;

Justice and peace kiss;

Faithfulness springs up from earth;

Righteousness looks down from the sky;

The land yields its increase;

Righteousness goes before God, making a pathway for God’s footsteps” [Psalm 85:10-13].

The elements that make the steps of God’s path are clearly stated here:

- Steadfast love. The Hebrew word translated here as “steadfast love” is also translated as grace, and mercy. This brings to my mind the Wesleyan doctrine of “Prevenient Grace” which declares that no human being is without the grace of God, or “that of God” as stated by Quakers
- Faithfulness, also translated as truth
- Righteousness, also translated as justice. This is not a righteousness that requires appeasement for the peace of God, rather it is the pathway for the peace of God, a warmth that draws peace in
- Peace, the Shalom of God

These elements also reveal the character and heart of God.

God is steadfast love [grace and mercy], God is faithful [and truth], God is Justice [and righteousness], God is peace.

The challenge here to us is to personify, to incarnate, make real, make visible grace, and truth, and justice, and peace in such ways that they leave tracks, a pathway that is a revelation of the pathway of God that others can follow.

Justice is the voice of God, the forerunner, the herald that proclaims and prepares the way of God and God’s peace.

Justice is declared by Isaiah 28:16-17 as the “foundation” laid by God for the world envisaged by God. Here “justice is the line, and righteousness the plummet” for the new order.

God is not interested in the worship of those who practice or tolerate injustice, but longs for the day when “justice will roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever flowing stream [Amos 5:24; Isaiah 58:6-7].

Justice here is not legal codes, does not stand alone. In Micah 6:8 for example justice is held in harmony with mercy and humility. None of these can be separated [Ateek, 1999].

The word of God is declared most clearly, for all to hear.

C. S. Song has a wonderful book entitled “Tracing the Foot Steps of God”. The whole text reflects on how we discern the presence and footsteps of God.

But people are not only to hear of justice and peace, but to feel justice and peace as warmly and meaningfully as a kiss.

Do Justice.

Do mercy.

Do peace.

Do grace.

Do truth.

Don't just talk about it or express it as a sentiment.

Enflesh it.

“The word became flesh among us”, giving a physical expression to the face of God, touched the earth, and left footprints in the dust.

As Rabindranath Tagore wrote [Gitanjali, Song 11]:

“Leave this chanting and singing and telling of beads! Whom dost thou worship in this lonely dark corner of a temple with all doors shut? Open thine eyes and see thy God is not before thee! He is there where the tiller is tilling the hard ground and where the pathmaker is breaking stones. He is with them in Sun and shower, and His garment is covered with dust. Put off thy holy mantle and even like Him come down on the dusty soil!

Our Master Himself has joyfully taken upon Him the bonds of creation; He is bound with us all forever.

Come out of thy meditations and leave aside thy flowers and incense! What harm is there if thy clothes become tattered and stained? Meet Him and stand by in toil and in sweat of thy brow.”

“If you have an idea you have to incarnate it” [Ray Davey in a personal conversation with me. See also Davey, 1993].

Incarnation requires taking a clues from Gods methodology, in other words, earthed action, close to the grass roots. Alongside people, especially those who feel most maligned and marginalised and hurt. There are countless numbers of ways in which people of God are pursuing the challenges of justice and peace locally.

I have shared the idea of sanctuary, and how it has been incarnated.

**Let us briefly explore the Incarnation of Justice and Peace in ecumenical church initiatives.**

What other examples can I give you from the ecumenical work of churches in the UK?

The **Joint Public Issues Team** [JPIT] is sponsored by the Church of Scotland, the Baptist Union, the United Reformed Church and the Methodist Church, and represents Churches working together for justice and peace.

JPIT supports local ecumenical action much of which is centred on Food Banks and work with refugees at the street level.

From time to time JPIT resource and promote positive engagement with international justice and peace initiatives. One recent example of this, with support from Quakers also has been encouraging church members to support the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. The text of the Treaty is agreed by 122 governments reflecting the will of hundreds of thousands of people across the world. We have been putting pressure on the UK government to sign the Treaty also.

**The World Council of Churches Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme** in Israel and Palestine providing presence, prayer, observation and witness on the ground is supported by many individuals of all denominations who volunteer and support nonviolent ways for peacemaking.

There is a **Network of Church Peace Organisations** [NCPO] in Britain. It includes Peace Groups of Anglicans, Baptists, Catholics, Methodists, Quakers and United Reformed Church. Pat Gaffney is the current Chair. There are Mennonite groups. The Roman Catholic Church has a very good National Justice & Peace Network. They hold an annual conference and an extensive rolling programme of events and actions, and engage with people of different denominations.

The NCPO had existed more in name for a while, until a gathering at Corrymeela Centre in Northern Ireland 2013. Since then the Network has met for an annual conference. The last one was in April 2018 with an agreement to meet at least every two years in order to keep in touch and build the network. I would like to think it will be ecumenical in the widest sense.

**The Fellowship of Reconciliation** [FOR] plays an excellent uniting and coordinating role in the UK, and help to organise the gatherings of the NCPO.

FOR has also helped to provide worship and prayer resources for worship leaders to use in connection with the annual International Peace Day in September. This year this resource has been coordinated by the ecumenical **Joint Churches Public Issues Team** [JPIT].

I would also like us to consider calling ourselves Justice and Peace Groups. This is certainly the approach in the Roman Catholic Church with encouragement from Pope John XXIII who has written [in the encyclical *Pacem in Terris*], "If you want peace, work for justice".

FOR, the Anglican Pacifist Group and the Methodist Peace Fellowship have a historic close relationship are exploring how we work together in the future. Church Peace Groups in Britain want to work together to equip people to be peacemakers and to:

- Inspire people to mobilise and take action
- Help people feel a sense of community or common goal
- Equip people to put pressure on policy makers for peace, and raise the profile of nonviolence
- Uphold witness of peacemakers especially during militaristic centenary time
- Build up momentum for justice and peace
- Address the feeling of being powerless, and the deep desire to do something
- There is a particular concern to engage with peace in the context of Brexit

**Reconciliation is an important theme in peacemaking in ecumenical circles.**

Coventry Cathedral has a dedicated ministry of reconciliation. The Coventry Cross of Nails is a well- known symbol of forgiveness and reconciliation.

The ministry of reconciliation is stressed by the Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby.

Jan Scott has chaired the community for reconciliation work based in Barnes Close Birmingham.

Reconciliation has particularly been stressed by the Corrymeela Community in Northern Ireland working across catholic and Protestant communities.

Reconciliation has been and remains at the core of the work of Corrymeela. It was integral to the thinking of Ray Davey the founder of Corrymeela. He constantly reminded us that “sooner or later the penny has to drop that if we Christians don’t speak about reconciliation, we have nothing to say”.

Reconciliation is rooted in the stories of faith, and the gift of faith communities is to place greater value on reconciliation, and to uphold and proclaim a vision of reconciliation in our world.

From beginning to its conclusion, the Bible records and reflects Gods continuing reconciling work in the history of a people on a journey, constantly desiring nothing less than a restoration and renewal of the relationship with God, within their own being and relationships, and ultimately the renewal of all creation.

There is a claim in the New Testament that this journey reaches a climax in the decisive revelation of God in Jesus Christ, following which God’s work of reconciliation moves to a new level towards renewing and building a “new heaven and a new earth” realising the fullest potential of all creation.

By placing the crucifixion of Christ at the centre of Gods work of reconciliation, the New Testament writers insist that reconciliation comes at a cost, even to God.

There is an inseparable link between reconciliation and the stories of creation, crucifixion and the consummation of all creation. Reconciliation is not an event in this theology, though particular events reveal and illuminate the breadth of reconciliation. God has made reconciliation and calls us to share in this work [2 Corinthians 5:18-19]. God is engaged in a never ending, costly pilgrimage and relationship embracing all creation – in which we are constantly called to participate..

This theology lifts reconciliation above the level and limit of being a time-tabled project of any one individual, organisation or nation. It reveals endless pitfalls, set-backs, frustrations and enormous costs, commitments and sacrifices involved. It requires repentance, forgiveness, the willingness to change, to restore and renew relationships, and to live with more grace and generosity without giving up.

Within this breadth of reconciliation, we are all called to make and play our part, and to value the contribution others make however small.

The use of the term reconciliation by people who profess faith and by those who profess no religious faith is a significant twenty first century phenomenon.

In practice then, reconciliation is an on- going, endless pilgrimage and process, and not a project with a timed and measureable destination. Reconciliation is not simply a matter of achieving integration by assimilation and erosion of differences. It is not about one culture subsuming the others.

Reconciliation requires holding and healing each other through remembering, sharing stories of hurt, arriving at repentance, forgiveness, and a commitment to living with more grace and generosity. It embraces economic, ecumenical and environmental justice.

Reconciliation is demanding, and requires costly commitment, including making sectarianism, racism, oppression and bigotry utterly unacceptable.

We can dare to hope for and dream of a different society, a decent society where all people can be safe, flourish and have equal opportunity, and enjoy the fullness of life; where different parties agree to be in an open and honest relationship in which they can share openly and honestly in what are undoubtedly difficult conversations; where there is not an already agreed final outcome because engaging and embracing differences has unpredictable and surprising results that shift the horizons and widen the horizons.

A reconciled society will not be one without differences and disagreements but it will be one where division is not destructive because there is a shared commitment to the enhancement of life for all.

We are engaged in a costly pilgrimage and process of reconciliation and we do not have an option to refrain from it.

The Dalai Lama said during a visit to Northern Ireland recently:

“Reconciliation. We have no alternative or option. Violence is suicide.”

Britain has marked the centenary of World War dating from 1914, and many subsequent war dates. As we come towards the close of the centenary of the War to end war, we must acknowledge that what we have now is a state of war without end. It is important to strengthen peacemaking, and nonviolence as the way to resolve conflict, and it is important to uphold a century of the success of nonviolence led by Mahatma Gandhi, the Rev Dr Martin Luther King, Archbishop Oscar Romero, and others.

### **Reflections on War and Peace**

I do not support war as a way to resolve conflict. I am committed to supporting and upholding non-violent means to resolve any conflict. I see war as an out of date, ill informed, outmoded and unaffordable way to resolve conflict. War harms and obliterates life and the right to life, and cannot restore the right to life. Millions are killed in war. Millions are injured. War costs trillions of dollars. Think of how much time is involved in war making, and how much it costs to train people for war. What a waste. The violence of war in the interest of peace is a contradiction. War uses the very means it opposes. No war has ended violence. War as a strategy has failed.

Jesus called on his followers to “love your neighbour as yourself” and also to “love your enemy”.

One hundred years ago, and then in the context of World War Two, many Christians were prepared to support war in the belief that it was part of advancing the Kingdom of God. People of different faiths have been prepared to see war as divinely sanctioned.

God is God of all nations and cares for all people and desires nothing less than the “fullness of life” for all. All people are made in the Image of God. The Kingdom of God knows no boundaries, and transcends all borders. No adherents of any World Faith can rightly claim God to be on their side alone. There is no such thing as a Holy War or a Humanitarian War.

Sadly, war is and has been prevalent in many parts of the world. It represents a failure in human relationships, and in our capacity for dialogue. Astronomical sums of money are invested in the war structures and machines, even in our times of recession and austerity, while millions are hungry, homeless and refugees.

The primary form of violence and cause of conflict, and the biggest killer is poverty. Divert money and investment from war to the ending of poverty.

In my own modest way I am working for, and long for a world of fair trade, where we shall “learn war no more”, stop the Arms Trade and escalation, and turn weapons into instruments of healing.

### **I want to say a little about Justice and Peace and Interfaith dialogue**

The purpose of God is to bring people and all creation together into a wholesome union, not to separate or divide. God is a God of life. God does not require anyone to terrorise, torture or trouble anyone who is different in any way.

Many of the conflicts around the world today reflect uprisings from groups protesting at economic inequalities. Prominent among them are young people who further feel isolated and alienated from the benefits of belonging. One challenge for us all is to tackle the alienation of young people. So many of them find a sense of belonging in the culture of gangs who find solace in drugs or meaning in violent extremism and violent crime.

There is a serious rise in crime youth crime involving knives and guns at the street level. It is essential to find ways to engage with and listen to young people who feel alienated, and to build intergenerational interaction and belonging in community.

I am committed to achieving racial justice, and building relationships of respect and trust between people of different faiths.

When I was training as a lay preacher [1973] age 20, I helped to form Britain's first interfaith group in Wolverhampton, aiming to build respectful relationships and dialogue between people of different faiths. Today there are over 300 local interfaith groups. Such work is as urgent and important as ever in the current environments of religious bigotry. Faith communities are a valuable resource to build justice and peace. We have the concepts and ideas to build justice and peace. Again, in interfaith dialogue we can develop the theology of justice and peace. Young people can bring wisdom to the interfaith table. This is where we want them, showing us how to live and love. We have lost enough of them through violence.

I would like to see an interfaith network of peace organisations, and stronger and more engaged international cooperation. The closest we come to this at the national level is the Interfaith Network UK based in London

In all this it is important to work together ecumenically, internationally, and in interfaith cooperation.

### **Closing remarks**

We live in a world of wars without end and in which it is hard work to raise the voice of peace.

We must maintain the witness and voice for justice and peace.

We must incarnate our values of forgiveness, mercy, justice and peace, and the appeal of our values will grow.

- We must work for equality and fairness for all, and build a more ethical world financially. Make poverty history
- We must raise our voices and action against racial and religious bigotry and hatred. Make racism history
- We must focus more on climate change and environmental degradation.
- We must educate people for non-violence and peace, beginning in schools
- We must strengthen the call for disarmament, nuclear and conventional
- We must rediscover and strengthen the prophetic tradition, and preach Christ and his message of the Kingdom of God
- We must promote forgiveness, sharing of memories, justice and peace
- We must preach love with more passion and clarity
- We must develop the theology and practice of nonviolence, and a commitment to "learn war no more"

I want to conclude with a thought from Olauda Equiano. In all that we do, he asks, "What does it profit anyone if you do not learn from life what it is to "act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God."

### ***Prayer for Peace***

*God bless us with a holy anger  
that rages against injustice, hatred, terrorising war and violence, and sheds tears for those who are hurt or killed;  
that refuses to hide in despair, or to accept easy answers, and bland platitudes of politics.  
Bless us with a wholesome thirst for righteousness, justice and peace,  
and the conviction that we can make the world a better place  
without resorting to killing machinations or machines.  
Teach us the art of forgiveness and reconciliation, and how to restore respect and confidence in relationships.*

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## **Websites**

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