



# Pax Scotia

## Issue 42

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## Why Religious Experience Matters for Peace

*William Storrar is the Director of the Center of Theological Inquiry in Princeton, New Jersey, and an Honorary Professor in the School of Divinity, University of Edinburgh. He will lead and facilitate the colloquium hosted by the Scottish Bishops Conference Interreligious Dialogue Committee (see P4 for details).*

My only encounter with Hans Küng was accidental. I arrived at New College on the Mound in Edinburgh to park my car there as a staff member. I was planning to walk up to the university's McEwen Hall later to hear a public lecture by this famous Catholic theologian. As I pulled into the New College courtyard, the Dean was standing there in some distress. Seeing me, he cried out, "The taxi hasn't turned up! Can you take Professor Küng back to his hotel to rest before his evening lecture?" And so it was that I found myself driving Hans Küng through the Edinburgh city traffic, giving me fifteen uninterrupted minutes in the company of this global public intellectual. I still treasure the book he inscribed for me as he left the car, grateful for the lift I had unexpectedly given him. But what I remember most was the personal story he told me *en route*.

After he became a controversial figure, Küng said, invitations to speak poured in from around the world. After accepting many of them, he realised he no longer had time to think about the deeper questions he should be wrestling with as a theologian. And so, he resolved never to be away from his study at home for more than a week to ensure the uninterrupted time he needed to do fresh thinking. From that life of more disciplined reflection came Hans Küng's initiative to foster

global interreligious understanding. And from that initiative came perhaps his most famous dictum:

*"No peace among the nations without peace among the religions. No peace among the religions without dialogue among the religions. No dialogue among the religions without investigation of the foundation of the religions."*

I tell that story here and repeat Küng's prophetic words because they remind us why the initiative of the Scottish Bishops Interreligious Dialogue Committee to hold a colloquium on the place of religious experience in interfaith dialogue is so important. By taking the time of this 24-hour gathering at the Conforti Institute in Coatbridge away from our busy lives to investigate this particular foundation of the religions – the personal and communal spirituality experienced in all religions – our dialogue across faith traditions will be more informed, thoughtful, and attentive to our differences and so better able to make common cause for peace. I speak from experience. It was only after I heard a university colleague speaking movingly on the radio of how their Islamic faith had brought spiritual comfort and strength after a family bereavement that I had deeper insight into the matters of common concern between us as Christian and Muslim scholars. That pastoral insight into someone's personal religious experience of coping with bereavement, common to us all, continues to inform my work now as the director of an international center for interreligious scholarship - no dialogue among the religions in our conflict-ridden world without experiencing grief together, a grief given meaning by our religious traditions.

We are therefore especially privileged to have the opportunity to explore the conference theme with a global leader in the field of interreligious dialogue, Fr. Paulin Batairwa Kubuya, sx from the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue in Rome, along with expert colleagues working locally in interreligious dialogue in Scotland. And I will comment on the impact of the increasingly secular context of our religious lives in a changing Scottish society, as well as inviting our speakers to reflect personally on the place of religious experience in their own life and work. I do hope you will join us to renew that vital connection between religious experience and peacemaking. *William Storrar*



**Jim  
Wykes,  
CRIN**

*The following article was written using an interview with Jaysley Beck's mother by the BBC and CRIN's research. For more information please see the CRIN website or contact [Jim@CRIN.org](mailto:Jim@CRIN.org)*

## Too young to be a soldier

***Jim Patrick Wyke is Coordinator (National Security and Children's Rights) of Child Rights International Network (CRIN). He is deeply concerned that not only are children of 16 recruited into the UK armed forces, but that abuse of young people is not addressed and can lead to tragic outcomes. This is not pleasant reading..***

Jaysley Beck was 16 years old when she joined the Army. She attended a careers day at school and went home full of enthusiasm for joining up. Jaysley was one of 3,000 under-18s who join the armed forces every year. Of those, 90% who join are boys, 80% join the army and 45% per cent join the infantry. The UK recruits for the military at 16, which is the youngest recruitment age in Europe, the youngest in NATO, and one of just 15 countries to recruit from 16.

Jaysley was sent to the Army Foundation College in Harrogate, the army's only training establishment for 16-year-olds. She found it hard and challenging, but her family thought she was happy.

For the past ten years, Ofsted has given AFCH the highest possible grade for welfare. What is not in Ofsted's reports is that the Armed Forces are the only employer exempt from the Education and Skills Act. The Army has no requirement to provide GCSE resits to recruits and academic instruction consists of a few hours a week of basic maths, English and IT skills. Ofsted has no legal requirement to inspect AFCH, instead, they are invited there by the Army, who also design the inspection regimen.

After some time, Jaysley's family said she became unhappy in the army. She was being pursued for

a relationship by numerous men. On a night out, an officer is said to have sexually assaulted her by putting his hands between her legs and grabbing her by the neck. She had to hide in a bathroom to escape.

The Ministry of Defence released figures showing 47 victims of sexual crimes within the armed forces were under the age of 18 in 2021, 22 of these at AFCH, where at least three members of staff were suspects. In January of 2023, one of these suspects, Cpl Bartram, would be convicted of multiple counts of sexual abuse of 16 and 17-year-old recruits, all female.

On the night of her assault, Jaysley slept in her car, afraid that if she went to bed her attacker would come into her room. She told a female friend to stay on the phone while she fell asleep. If her friend heard anything, she could call for help. Jaysley's sexual assault was reported to her superiors and resulted in the perpetrator receiving a minor sanction.

*Girls under 18 in the armed forces are ten times as likely to experience sexual harassment as their colleagues over-18. In 2020 nearly half of girls at AFCH said they had experienced bullying, harassment, or discrimination while there.*

Over time Jaysley confided more to her family. One man in particular, her immediate superior, was sending her up to 3,500 texts a month. During this time Jaysley was in a relationship with a married non-commissioned senior officer who would frequently turn up to her room drunk.

In September 2023, CRIN discovered that North Yorkshire Police had investigated 13 reports of sexual violence at AFCH between 2022 and 2023. Nine rapes, two sexual assaults and two acts of voyeurism. We have asked the Ministry of Defence to confirm this and state how many victims were under-18 but they have refused to do so.

Jaysley's family could tell she was struggling. Her mother stated that she just wanted to take her daughter home, but the military doesn't work like that. Jaysley was now over 18 and at Larkhill Barracks, she had signed a four-year contract with the Army.

*On December 16th, 2021, Jaysley took her own life. She was 19 years old. An inquest is being held into her death. In an interview with the BBC, Jaysley's mother said she had a presence that would light up a room. Her sister said that Jaysley was beautiful, kind and a lovely person.*

Sixteen years old is too young to be a soldier. Please write to your MPs and parliamentary candidates, asking them to support raising the minimum age for military recruitment to 18.

*Jim Patrick Wykes*

CRIN

\* The CRIN website:

<https://home.crin.org/>

**CRIN is a creative human rights organisation focused on children's rights. It challenges the status quo, believing that the norms that dictate children and young people's place in society need radical change. It campaigns for a genuine shift in how governments and societies view and treat under-18s and encourages people to think critically about the world.**



# Pilgrims of Hope - Pope Francis encourages hope for peace

*The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons entered into force on January 22, 2021. Could the third anniversary be a cause for hope and change? Delia Chatoor, who has followed the progress of the TPNW in person, reflects on Pope Francis's theme for the 2025 Jubilee Year: "Pilgrims of Hope". Delia says there are grounds for hope that we can start work on in 2024...*

The Vatican recently announced that the motto of Jubilee Year 2025 is "**Pilgrims of Hope**" and there is a great need to embrace this as we welcome 2024. In his annual address to members of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See in early January, Pope Francis stated that the focus of his reflection would be "on peace, at a moment in history when it is increasingly threatened, weakened and in part lost." This definitely brings to the fore the importance of the international community encouraging the virtue of HOPE.

Pope Francis stressed that God "never abandons His people and constantly keeps open the doors to His kingdom." The Jubilee can, therefore, be the appropriate time "when swords are beaten into ploughshares, a time when one nation will no longer lift up sword against another, nor learn war anymore." (Isaiah 2:4)

Our reality, however, is that 2024 has dawned with the continued threat posed by the presence of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction. Could a crisis lead to a nuclear episode - or could we be witness to the total dismantling of the non-proliferation regime? In the face of global challenges, namely, lack of food, continued threats to the environment, inequitable healthcare and uncertainties facing the international economy, the world does not seem to be in a comfortable position. Yet billions are still being allocated to the modernisation of weapon systems, increased production and failure to uphold established international norms and regulations.

**Pope Francis has, therefore, once again recommended the setting up of a global fund which would, among other things, energise mechanisms to eliminate hunger and enhance the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.**

At the second Meeting of the States Party to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons at the end of 2023, delegates were reminded that no nuclear war could be won while the impact of the detonation of the bombs at Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 was still being felt. Equally disconcerting has been the failure to effect adequate compensation to the many who suffered, and are still suffering, from the many nuclear tests.

The Secretary-General of the United Nations has, in his own way, been at the vanguard of the initiation of "**A New Agenda for Peace**" which was launched on 20<sup>th</sup> July 2023. One of the key actions to address strategic risks and geopolitical divisions is

**Delia Chatoor, Pax Christi Scotland's ear to the UN & member of the Caribbean Climate Change Network based in Trinidad and Tobago**



the elimination of nuclear weapons. He has proposed that this is possible through the building up of "**a stronger collective security machinery.**"

The call is for all systems within the international community, including civil society, to be engaged fully in the pursuit of peace. Technological developments must also be part of the processes but not as harbingers of death and destruction through the unethical use of artificial intelligence. And Pope Francis in that address to the members of the Diplomatic Corps urged that "the development of artificial intelligence remains at the service of men and women, fostering and not obstructing - especially in the case of young people - interpersonal relations, a healthy spirit of fraternity, critical thinking and a capacity for discernment".

Increased spending on the development of autonomous and AI weapons is certainly an additional concern, and the environment in which we live may not seem one which embraces positivity - but the negative distractions should not deter us. We can utilise all our God-given talents and resources and, guided by the Holy Spirit, effect conversion and transformation in the hearts of world and civil society leaders to ensure the survival of God's creation. This is achievable through keeping before us the reality, as Pope Francis reminded, that "*the availability of weapons encourages their use and increases their production.*"

**The swords of war can and will be turned into ploughshares as prophesied by Isaiah. We can make it happen.**

*Delia Chatoor*

## Our website

Blogs, podcasts, past and future events – these are all on our Pax Christi Scotland website. All newsletters are archived there. You can pay your annual membership fee on the Membership page and make donations. Please explore and share:

<https://www.paxchristiscotland.org>

Continued thanks to webmaster Chris Boles of Caledonian Websites:

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You can also make regular donations on our 'donate' page or by standing order - thank you.

Membership fees are £10 for waged, £5 for unwaged.

Explore the website for all our activities:

<https://www.paxchristiscotland.org>

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## YouTube Channel

You can find recordings of all our events at:

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Pax Scotia December-January 2023-24 Issue 41



# *It's Good to Talk: Invitation to a colloquium encouraging dialogue*

With the situation in the Middle East becoming ever more unstable, and the Ukraine-Russia conflict continuing, we hear voices from around the world urging ceasefires, peace talks - any kind of dialogue that will save innocent lives.

Antonio Guterres, the United Nations Secretary General, has urged nations to put out the fire, but some world leaders seem to be seizing the opportunity to either pursue long-standing grievances or to create a place for themselves in history.

Pope Francis, of course, has long advocated dialogue as the way forward between faiths and nations. He and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Ahmed el-Tayeb, signed a Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together on February 4 2019 during a Global Conference in Abu Dhabi.

It said (read in full at <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2019-02/pope-francis-uae-declaration-with-al-azhar-grand-imam.html>) 'this Declaration may be an appeal to every upright conscience that rejects deplorable violence and blind extremism; an appeal to those who cherish the values of tolerance and fraternity that are promoted and encouraged by religions'.

Pax Christi Scotland believes there is such a huge need at this moment to reiterate that appeal, which is why we are so grateful to the Scottish Bishops Conference Interreligious Dialogue Committee for hosting a colloquium at the Conforti Centre in Coatbridge, Lanarkshire, which will help us to consider the values of tolerance and fraternity, to walk in the shoes of those of other faiths, and to explore ***'The role of "religious experience" in interreligious dialogue'***.

It is the Interreligious Dialogue Committee's annual residential colloquium and it takes place from Friday 23rd February to Saturday 24th February 2024. You can book a place by going to their website at <https://www.interreligiousdialogue.org.uk/colloquium/>

The event will be led and facilitated by Rev. Professor Will Storrar the Director of the Centre for Theological Inquiry, Princeton, USA, with Xaverian Missionary Fr. Paulin Batairwa Kubuya, sx.

Residential cost per person is £75, which includes your Friday evening meal, single room accommodation with en-suite bathroom and shower facilities and Saturday breakfast and lunch. For non-residential participants the cost is £30. To reserve your place email Interfaith Officer Joe Sikora: [joseph.sikora@bcos.org.uk](mailto:joseph.sikora@bcos.org.uk). Payment is by cash or card on arrival.



Left:  
Rev. Professor Will Storrar

Right:  
Fr. Paulin Batairwa Kubuya, sx