



Pax Scotia

Issue 52

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Holy Land in Crisis for Christians this Christmas

The Upper Room Mission in Jerusalem shares here their concerns for Christians in Palestine. As we enter the season of Advent, our thoughts traditionally turn to the Holy Land. Mary and Joseph experienced the violence of occupation. Today's occupation is achieved with 21st century weapons and an apartheid system. Here's reality for Christians

The Palestinian Christian community in Jerusalem and the West Bank has a heritage stretching back to the very origins of Christianity. Despite their small numbers, Palestinian Christians contribute uniquely to the social, cultural, and spiritual fabric of the Holy Land. However, this community faces significant challenges, including political, economic, and social pressures, leading to a steady decline in numbers over recent decades.

Palestinian Christians today make up approximately 1% of the population in Israel and the Palestinian Territories. Despite their dwindling numbers, they play a prominent role in education, healthcare, and charitable work, serving both Christian and non-Christian communities alike. However, the community faces a unique set of challenges that complicate their daily lives and prompt many to seek better opportunities abroad.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has long affected Palestinian Christians, particularly those in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. Movement restrictions, imposed through checkpoints, permits, and the separation barrier, limit access to holy sites, work opportunities, and essential services.

The Palestinian economy, especially in the West Bank, suffers from high unemployment, poverty, and limited economic growth due to occupation-related constraints. Palestinian Christians, like their Muslim neighbours, struggle to find job opportunities, which prompts many to emigrate in search of stability and a better future. The cost of living in Jerusalem is particularly high, making it difficult for young Christians to establish families and remain in the city.

Emigration remains one of the greatest challenges, with many young, educated Palestinian Christians leaving for the Americas, Europe, or Australia. This "brain drain" weakens local Christian institutions and results in a shrinking, aging Christian population.

Recognising the decline of the Christian community as an urgent issue, local churches, church related organisations, and international organisations have initiated various strategies to support Palestinian Christians and encourage them to remain in the land of their heritage.

- * Churches, particularly through ecumenical partnerships, provide essential social services, including education, healthcare, and housing assistance, aimed at reducing the pressures on the community

- * Local Christian leaders and international religious organisations continuously advocate for the right of Palestinian Christians to access holy sites, especially in Jerusalem.

- * Several international and local initiatives have focused on strengthening the Palestinian economy to reduce emigration. Programmes providing microloans, skill-building workshops, and job creation initiatives help Palestinian Christians gain economic stability. One of these initiatives is the Upper Room Mission in Jerusalem, an ecumenical, nonprofit, entirely voluntary organisation, dedicated to supporting the Christian youth of the Holy Land. Through grants, business coaching, and spiritual guidance, it empowers young people—particularly women—to start micro-projects, encouraging self-sustainability. Their programmes address challenges like economic instability, educational gaps, and emigration pressures, aiming to maintain a vibrant Christian community. Since its establishment 3 years ago, the Upper Room Mission (has assisted 30 participants to become successful entrepreneurs; supported 24 micro projects; increased the resilience of the Christian minority in Jerusalem to remain in the country; and contributed to achieving gender justice by economically empowering women. For more details on their vision and recent initiatives, visit <https://www.the-upperroom.org/>

Christian leaders worldwide have increasingly raised awareness of the struggles facing Palestinian Christians, fostering solidarity with Christians in Jerusalem and the West Bank, and so we invite you to visit the Holy Land and meet the living stones rather than the dead stones.

The Team of the URM:

Bassem Thabet

Tony Khashram

Rev. Fursan Zu'mot

<https://www.the-upperroom.org/>



Hyab Teklehaimanot Yohannes is a Lecturer and Researcher in Forced Migration and Decolonial Education with the UNESCO Chair for Refugee Integration through Education, Languages, and Arts at the University of Glasgow. Here he challenges us to reconsider 'Peace' & to seek it in hope...

Seeking Peace in the Genocidal World of the 21st Century

As I write this, colleagues, friends, and strangers bear, in their naked and defenceless bodies, the weight of apocalyptic, genocidal wars waged upon them in Gaza, Sudan, and other places. I watch in silence as on TV children scream from beneath the rubble, their cries for help unheard. Parents tremble as they gather the remains of their shattered children, placing each piece into a bin bag. Families are wiped out in an instant, communities devastated, and dead bodies left to rot in the open air. Entire villages are trapped in raging fires and starving, while fleeing people are haunted by death in deserts and at borders. These are just a few of the unimaginable acts of brutality that unfold before our eyes and the eyes of the entire world.

I find myself defeated by the apocalyptic scenes caused by deliberate genocidal wars each time I try to think and write about peace. I have read and heard of peace treaties and Sustainable Development Goals, but they seem to hold little weight when confronted with the reality of multiple genocides – a violence so extreme that resistance feels almost impossible or, at best, leads only to brutal crush or murder. This is especially true for those whose lives are reduced to the mere fact of waiting to die or, more accurately, to be murdered. This reality compels me to contemplate, perhaps without definitive or conclusive answers, what is this thing called peace in a genocidal world?

Peace, it appears to me is, in fact, an empty tautology – one that has lost its meaning, its content, and its very condition for existence, buried within an essence rooted in the matrices of coloniality and raciality. For if it is not, how do we reconcile its deployment as the rhetorical grammar of coloniality and raciality alongside genocidal wars? How is it possible to speak of plausible genocides as acts of 'self-defence' or measures of security? How easily can one be deceived into believing that violence is the sole source and path to peace? For now, these conundrums feel irreconcilable to me. Thus, I turn my attention to what peace might become if freed from these conundrums and conditions of impossibility.

In my humble opinion, peace must become 'Peace' or a growing freedom for relational, inter- and intra-human coexistence. Our task, I believe, is to imagine the conditions for its emergence and growth, even in the darkest times. We cannot afford to abandon the promise of Peace when it is not confined to empty tautologies. If liberated from its violent logics, Peace plays an irreplaceable role in creating irreducible relationality and coexistence. Yet, in these genocidal times, one can only hope. Hope is a testament to our refusal to abandon the pursuit of Peace as an ever-growing and emerging freedom. Hope for irreducible Peace is a seed that will grow in the future, but it must be planted in the present – even amidst the pain, death, and grief of today, as well as the raptures and sufferings of the past. Seeds live beyond death, and the hope for Peace, though

enduring, must still be retained. This growing of seeds begins with us, for if it does not, our hope turns to despair. We must begin nurturing the seeds of Peace that take root in the crux of our shared tears, grief, and joy. The light from the burning candles in vigils, however few or dim, brightens the spaces between faces and bodies, allowing us to meet one another's gaze, to call for Peace together, and to emerge as human communities bound by a fragile yet enduring hope. In moments of resignation, when the grammars and structures of peace reveal themselves as empty tautologies, we find the space to envision relation beneath the skin, beyond the borders, genders, and open wounds of our time. Peace, then, becomes not merely a mode of being in the world, but a relation of becoming-with-each-other and a knowing and building of a world irreducible to empty tautologies. Peace begins with an irreducible human-to-human relation, as Frantz Fanon so eloquently reminds us in *Black Skin, White Masks* (Penguin, 2021):

'Why not the simple attempt to touch the other, to feel the other, to explain the other to myself?'

For now, these are my unfinished and provisional reflections, offered as invitations to rethink the poetics of life and death yet to come. Until then, we cry our outcry for Peace amidst these genocidal times.

Hyab Teklehaimanot Yohannes



Just One Forgotten Conflict



Mathew Bonki is a Cameroonian Jesuit, living in the Glasgow Jesuit Community. In early November, Pope Francis asked that we remember countries at war, warning against becoming desensitised to global death and devastation. Here we learn the background to one such forgotten conflict...



Mathew Bonki

Pope Francis has repeatedly insisted that “every war is a defeat.” For those of us who have lived through the unfortunate experience of war, this rings so true. My country, Anglophone Cameroon, has been at war since 2016 – classified in a Norwegian Refugee Council Report in 2023 as among the top 10 most neglected crises around the globe. But our war is overshadowed by the numerous other conflicts currently rocking the world.

In Scotland, people are surprised when I talk about the situation because they have no idea it is happening.

For the origin of the war we must return to 1919 and the aftermath of World War I, when the German colony of Cameroon was partitioned between France and Britain under the mandate of the League of Nations. After World War II, these territories eventually became a Trust Territory of the United Nations. French Cameroon gained independence on 1 January 1960, becoming La République du Cameroun. In 1961, a referendum was conducted in British Cameroon, where English-speaking Cameroonians were given the choice either to join Nigeria or to join the newly independent Republic of Cameroon (the former French Cameroon). Unfortunately, the choice to become an autonomous state was not on the table.

The northern part of the British territory voted to join Nigeria, and the southern part voted to join La République du Cameroun, thus forming the Federal State of Cameroon which lasted from 1 October 1961 to 20 May 1972, when the “federation” was dismantled in total violation of the Foubam Constitution of July 1961. The modification of the 1961 constitution is viewed as an implicit attempt by La République du Cameroun to erase the identity of West Cameroon. Sadly, the “francophonisation” of state affairs marginalises the Anglophone heritage.

The immediate cause of the current war in former British Southern Cameroon can be traced to October 2016 when teachers and lawyers, frustrated by this systematic marginalisation and the erosion of Anglophone educational and legal values, launched peaceful protests which were met with

violent repression by the Cameroonian government. The disproportionate use of brutal military force escalated to a full-blown civil war. The “Amba boys” (separatist fighters), fighting for their rights, are dubbed “terrorists” by the current government in Yaoundé. Killings include the Ngaruh massacre in northwestern Cameroon on 14 February 2020, when 21 civilians, including 13 children, were murdered by Cameroonian soldiers and armed Fulani militia.

For the past seven years, it has been proven beyond doubt that a political problem being solved by military means has been a sheer failure.

This civil war is the stark consequence of marginalisation and poor governance. The economy is paralysed. Over 6,000 Cameroonians have died in the conflict and over 800,000 have been displaced, of whom 70,000 are refugees in neighbouring Nigeria, according to the International Crisis Group.

Innocent children have been smashed with the barrel of the gun, annihilating bright futures. Schools are dysfunctional or have closed. According to the International Crisis Group, 700,000 children’s education has been affected. The Government is not ready to listen to the grievances of Anglophone Cameroon, despite numerous initiatives proposed from within and outside Cameroon by the Church and by the Swiss and Canadians.

We need an inclusive dialogue in which all the stakeholders discuss a potential future form of government. This is about saving lives. The people must be given the opportunity to declare what future they would prefer. Cameroonians, the Church and the international community must work together with the government for a solution.

“Every war is always a defeat” because people are dying!

We are reaping these bitter fruits today because brute force has been preferred over dialogue or mediation and no one knows this brutality is happening because the civil war is not news in the Global North - yet people are in dire need of peace and healing.

Mathew Bonki

Our website

Blogs, podcasts, the book project, 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:

<https://www.caledonianwebsites.com/>

Membership Reminder

Please pay **in November** on the **membership page of our website**, or, if you pay by online banking, please give your name to identify your payment.

If you wish to pay by cheque, send to the address below, cheques payable to Pax Christi Scotland.

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

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

Explore the website for all our activities:

<https://www.paxchristiscotland.org>

Where to find Pax Christi Scotland:

<http://www.paxchristiscotland.org>

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YouTube Channel

You can find recordings of all our events at:

<https://www.youtube.com/>

[@paxchristiscotland](https://www.youtube.com/@paxchristiscotland)

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Click on the word 'Subscribed' and you will be informed whenever a new recording is posted.

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Next date for the book project: December 9

The Catholic Nonviolence initiative published ***Advancing Nonviolence and Just Peace within the Church and the World*** in 2020. The text, the result of a global consultation with activists, organisers, Church leaders, social scientists, and theologians, explores how the Church can return to the tradition of Gospel nonviolence and, in doing so, enrich the world.

Pax Christ Scotland launched our online monthly reading group in November to study this inspirational text, led by Anna Blackman. The recording of that first meeting is now on our website (<https://www.paxchristiscotland.org/book-project/>). You will be able to access all Anna's notes, etc. at that link. The next meeting is on December 9 at 7pm.

How to sign up for the course:

Step 1: Register with <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/pax-christi-scotland-tickets-1041817703797?aff=oddtcreator>

Step 2: Eventbrite will send you the link to the Zoom meeting. Sign up for each of the seven events or singly. All the information is also on our website (<https://www.paxchristiscotland.org>)

There is a link on our website for the book:

https://www.amazon.co.uk/Advancing-nonviolence-peace-Christi-International-ebook/dp/B08WNFBT8Y/ref=tmm_kin_swatch_0?_encoding=UTF8&qid=&sr=

Amazon have a **Kindle** version for £12.99. The paperback is £24.87. You can also find the paperback at https://www.thegreatbritishbookshop.co.uk/products/advancing-nonviolence-and-just-peace?srsId=AfmBOorH-Id-o7pWk3Nx-E8WeedjpSV6AgmE3BYK-G4z_Gq0kQ0Xq6GRM for £20.50 + p&p

See you on December 9!

Another VIP Diary Date

Pax Christi Scotland's AGM will take place at the Conforti Institute in Coatbridge from Friday 6th December at 6.30pm to Saturday 7th December at 3.30pm.

The AGM business will take place on the Saturday morning (all details and documents will be sent by email) and at 11.30am we will welcome guest speaker, peace activist **Hyab Teklehaimanot Yohannes** (see page 2).

The cost for those of us who are staying overnight in a single en-suite room with dinner/bed/breakfast & lunch is £60. For non-residential attendance including supper and lunch on Friday and Saturday it is just £15. These prices are possible with generous subsidies by the Xaverians (our chaplains) and Pax Christi Scotland. We are most grateful to the Xaverians, as always.

To book, please email Anna Sweeney, Director of Finance and Administration for Xaverian Missionaries Conforti. (anna.sweeney@xavs.org). And the address at Conforti is:

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