

PAX CHRISTI AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

KIA TAU TE RANGIMARIE KI A TAATOU KATOA / WORKING FOR PEACE FOR ALL EVERYWHERE

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by Kevin McBride



Tēnā koutou katoa

It is two years ago that 51 people lost their lives and many more injured when a white supremacist committed mass murder and terrorised the city of Christchurch.

I ask myself the question: have we learnt any lessons from that dreadful day? On some days, I say yes - we have become kinder, we look to our vulnerable citizens and we also speak up when we see others abusing people because of their religion.

Yet, at the same time, we have not changed. Racism and bullying are still evident. When I say this, stories of racism and bullying are constantly being shown in the media. One could argue that as a society we are standing up to these issues and holding people to account; that, in the mainstream media, such instances would never have been reported and were ignored, thus allowing these injustices to continue.

At the beginning of October 2020, Pope Francis published his encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*. Within this letter, Francis expresses many images of what a world in fraternity and social friendship looks like and the challenges we need to take up to make it happen. On this day, as we reflect on the events of March 15th, 2019, reflect also on these words from Pope Francis: *"The world exists for everyone, because all of us were born with the same dignity. Differences of colour, religion, talent, place of birth or residence, and so many others, cannot be used to justify the privileges of some over the rights of all. As a community, we have an obligation to ensure that every person lives with dignity and has sufficient opportunities for his or her integral development."* (118, *Fratelli Tutti*)

I hope you enjoy reading this issue of the Pax Christi Aotearoa Newsletter. Within it there are two personal reflections of encounters with the Muslim community in Christchurch not long after the events on that day. These two reflections are examples of fraternity and social friendship that need to be held up as pointers or guides for all of us as we move forward to a better tomorrow.

Bridget Crisp rsm

A Heart Open to the Whole World

by Peter Cullinane

In chapter four of his encyclical letter *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis addresses very specific, modern issues under the heading: "A Heart Open to the Whole World", not the least of these being the plight of refugees and exiles. What we do about these issues is what makes us actors in the parable of the good Samaritan – either the pseudo religious people who pass by on the other side of the road, or the strangers who become brothers and sisters to those in need.

Well, if that was already the teaching of the Gospel, we can hardly be surprised. Rather, what surprises, is how we ever came to imagine that the gospel required us to turn away "from the world?" This reflection is about the journey back, and how that happened for some of us.

Our propensity to imagine material creation is somehow bad is as old as the human race. It shows up in the idea that salvation means exiting from "this world", and in ascetic practices based on wrong reasons for detaching from "the world". These negative attitudes towards material creation matter greatly because sooner or later they affect our attitudes to people. Christians have even tried to make a disjunction between Jesus and material creation. Elizabeth Johnson is not exaggerating when she says: "There has been heresy after heresy in the history of the Church which has denied the genuine humanity of God in the incarnation: there was no real human body, nor real soul, nor real human will, nor real human nature. It is as though God and humanity are somehow opposed to each other, or in competition with each other, so that a choice has to be made for one or the other." (*Consider Jesus*, 28).

If choosing God seemed to require distancing God from human nature even in regard to Jesus, perhaps we shouldn't be surprised that at least one nation in Europe has used its Christian faith as justification for closing its borders to desperate migrants.

We have come a long way. The vocation of every Christian is to bring to bear on all areas of life what our faith teaches concerning human dignity and the meaning of life; to accept the personal costs of doing so.

For many of us, the need to re-learn our faith involved the need for some un-learning. For this I do not blame our earliest teachers in the faith, who mostly were given no formation for their task. But nor do I regret the passing of an era which, although it bred great saints, also carried the virus of Jansenism with its impression that in order to honour God and grow in holiness we needed to put human nature down. Fortunately, these put-downs of human nature never became part of the Church's official teaching, nor even the teaching of its best theologians.

Against that background, stunning insights awaited us. We learned from Pope Paul VI that we are to love the world as we love our own bodies; from Karl Rahner, that "love for God and love for the world are in direct, not inverse, proportion"; from Chenu, Congar and other great French theologians that God has called us to be co-workers in the gradual organization of a universe in which we are meant to be "its demiurges and its conscience". And it was during the enthusiastic lectures of Bernard Haring that I first heard of "Schema XVII" which eventually became the Council's document that opened with the famous lines: "The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ."

We have come a long way. The vocation of every Christian is to bring to bear on all areas of life what our faith teaches concerning human dignity and the meaning of life; to accept the personal costs of doing so - cogently spelled out by Joan Chittister, (*The Time is Now*), and to be accountable in all the ways that citizens should be.

A Heart Open to the Whole World cont.

Often, what we learned subconsciously was harder to reach and remove than what we more consciously learned. Yet it is surely a sign of human nature's innate goodness that when the opportunity for better understanding came to us, we recognized its truth. It was as if we already knew the truth pre-consciously, and re-knew it when it was articulated for us. That was liberating, and became the sure-footing on which we could step out to embrace "the world".

Pope St John Paul II had already taught (World Peace Day, 2000) that nothing will change until we literally see each other as one family, brothers and sisters of all. Francis has been teaching that everything is connected (*Laudato Si*), and that everyone is connected (*Fratelli Tutti*). Devastating damage to the planet has taught us – what indigenous people always knew – that the spiritual, cultural, social, political, economic and ecological are inter-dependent. A post-Corvid "new order" will not be new so long as we continue to disregard their inter-dependence.

To open ourselves to all reality – to accept truth from whatever source and whatever the consequences – is how faith is different from ideology. Faith is open-ended, not limited to what can be reasonably expected. Ideology is agenda driven, which is why it can so blatantly turn a blind eye to what does not fit the agenda or match the slogan, limiting one's engagement with the world. Of course, Christians can be, and have been, guilty of this too.



The most spectacular manifestations of ideology today are those that involve disregard for the sciences, whether it is medical science's reasons for taking precautions against the spread of coronavirus, or what the sciences tell us concerning the status of a newly conceived human being, or what doctors and lawyers recommend for the protection of children suffering gender dysphoria etc. At some point, the difference between true and false no longer matters; say what you like to get what you want. Demagoguery still works. And it is counter-human, because only truth can set us free. And only the truly free can reach out to love the world and work for its enhancement.

Christian asceticism is about becoming gradually more free. The case for ascetic practices and detachment is not premised on any part of creation being bad, but on the premise that creation's present forms are passing, which is why we practise "letting go". Every involvement which helps to make the world a better place is a way of letting go of what was less. Growth in holiness does not run in parallel with this involvement, but in and through it. This asceticism embraces creation.

The everlasting worthwhileness of all creation, and the transitoriness of its present forms, are both affirmed in that same document of the Council: "All the good fruits of human nature, and all the good fruits of human enterprise, we shall find again, cleansed and transfigured." (GS 39) But that final transformation will be all God's doing, and gift. That is what Hearts Open to the World open themselves to.

Peter Cullinane is Bishop Emeritus of the Diocese of Palmerston North. Bishop Peter is currently the Co-President of Pax Christi Aotearoa New Zealand. This article was published in Tui Motu InterIslands February 2021. We have permission of the author to reprint this in our Newsletter.

Al-Noor Mosque Attack - Second Anniversary

by Sr. Dorothea OCD

Two years ago, on Thursday 4 April 2019, Sr Marietta, Sr Mareta, and I needed to go out to get passport photos in Addington, Christchurch as we have to keep them updated for identity purposes.

After we got our photos, we drove across to Riccarton, via Hagley Park. Suddenly we realised we were quite close to the fated Mosque where horrendously, 2 weeks earlier, 51 people were killed and many more injured while they were at prayer. The gold dome came into view. All the news we had heard and seen crashed in on us as we looked at that dome very differently as never before.

The Muslim man who leads prayers at the Mosque, saw us from the doorway and came down to greet us. We felt really drawn to go in, with his warm invitation, hardly believing what was happening. There was a sense of something wonderful to be able to pay our respects and personally express our love and concern. What an extremely rare privilege to be there! And not planned at all.

At the door, we were hailed by a welcoming group of people - Muslim men and women who warmly embraced us as we gave a quick explanation of who we were. We all gelled straight away. Courteously, we were asked to remove our shoes at the door, like Moses, which we did.

It was such a loving atmosphere. We told them that we had very much wanted to write a sympathy letter but could not find their address! But here we were to do that - in person - on the way to a passport appointment! Only God could have possibly arranged all those little details for this to happen.

We were overcome to think we should soon be standing in a place of such terror and bloodshed, which we have followed closely and prayed so much about. We had also watched by link the moving Hagley Park National Memorial Service with PM Jacinda Arden speaking and Yusuf Islam (Cat Stevens) singing - and thousands of people gathered to grieve together and support relatives and friends of the victims.



People crowded around us. It was peaceful and joyful. There were some lovely women too, who so enjoyed talking with us, and vice versa. A young lady poignantly told us her husband was killed and she was three months pregnant. Others spoke of accepting everything and talking forgiveness.

Attending Prayers

Their quiet serenity spoke volumes. By this time, we had entered the prayer room of the Mosque. A very moving moment. No words could describe what had happened there. Quite large and bare, but homely, and only a grey but warm lining on the floor before it would be carpeted properly. The podium was in place at the front for the speaker. This reminded us that the bus load of Bangladesh cricket team were impatient to arrive in time for the sermon that day to be preached from this podium. But they had several annoying hold-ups of a minute here and there along the way, which saved their lives. They arrived to see the most horrifying scenes unfold before their eyes.

As we moved further inside this room, still surrounded by happy, smiling, and peaceful people, I felt my tears running with the deepest sorrow, shock, and emotion of actually standing in this place. I thought I was dreaming! But realised I was not when I could not find my handkerchief. The smiling, kindly prayer leader - in his white robes and Muslim prayer cap noticed. He hastened to sit me down on a chair. He sat very close

Al-Noor Mosque Attack - Second Anniversary cont.

in front of me and ever so gently wiped my eyes with snowy white tissues. Then he asked me if I was okay? And we are supposed to be there to comfort them! It was a most tender, beautiful, unexpected gesture. I was thinking is this really happening? Fancy a Muslim man wiping tears from a Carmelite nun's face! I was dumbfounded and humbled and I felt silly that I had forgotten my hanky. I thanked him profusely.

It was now about 5.00pm, which signaled their prayer time. About seven men along with my solicitous 'carer' stood facing the front of the prayer room. Then the Imam began the haunting prayer chant which filled the room. Another friendly lady beside us, whom we had just met and was a Muslim convert translated the beautiful prayers for us.

A forever memory

We said good bye and walked down the short passage to the outside driveway where many more things were in store. There were some people there - a man, and a woman and a few others who asked if they could interview and film us. We asked what it was for and it turned out they were a Reuter's news team. That was overseas stuff so we complied - hoping it would be all 'offshore'. We were still feeling a bit dazed after such an emotional experience in the Mosque. They said our answers were perfect which seemed like another miracle in the circumstances.

Now we were concerned about the time and we walked quickly to the car, passing two policemen who were still standing patiently with rifles at the ready. We said a heartfelt thank you to them for their bravery on that fateful day, and also for their long vigils at the Mosque. They were very appreciative. Another thing was achieved which we had so wanted to say.

Sr Dorothea OCD is the Prioress of the Carmelite Monastery in Christchurch. This article has been reproduced with permission from the author. It appeared in The Common Good Newsletter (No 96, Lent 2021). A newspaper of the Christchurch Catholic Worker.

The Mystery of Our Lady in the Cenacle in unexpected places.

by *Mary Jackson Kay r.c.*

The Cenacle Sisters celebrate the Feast of Our Lady of the Retreat in the Cenacle between the Ascension and Pentecost.

Following the tragic event of the death of Jesus the disciples were thrown into grief and confusion. They were afraid. Then they had experiences beyond their understanding... Jesus rose from the dead and sought their company, sharing life and hospitality with them!

The next thing was Jesus said he was leaving them but said he would send the Spirit! He told them to return to the city and wait for the Spirit! What a mystery!

The disciples returned to Jerusalem and gathered in the Upper room, the Cenacle with Mary the Mother of Jesus. Again they were afraid and confused! In this safe place they began to share their stories and remember their adventures with Jesus. At times they fell silent and cried out to God in prayer. And in time the Spirit came and filled their hearts with hope and love and passion to begin again!

Following the tragic massacre in the AL-NUR Mosque and Linwood Islamic Centre in Christchurch on 15 March 2019 New Zealand was being shaken to its core.

I remember coming to the 5.30pm Mass the Saturday night and wondering if someone could burst into Church and start killing us. It was and is still a frightening thought that people of goodwill, gathered in prayer can be killed.

On the 30th of March the Cenacle Family gathered at Waikanae Cenacle to share and pray. Of course our sharing focused on the experiences of each of us and the challenges we are all facing following the massacre. As Cenacle Family we had a desire to do something practical. We began a book of messages of support and condolences to the Muslim Community in Aotearoa. We invited others to join us in the book project with us

The Mystery of Our Lady in the Cenacle in unexpected places cont.

Unexpectedly Anne Powell and I had occasion to visit Christchurch, so on the 15th of May 2019 we visited AL NUR Mosque taking our book and a gift to the Muslim Community.

As we approached the Mosque, the first shock culturally for us was to see two Police carrying semi-automatic weapons guarding the entrance. We approached them and said we had come to pay our respects and had a gift for the Community. The young woman Constable said to her companion, "Phillip you will take them in and introduce them."

As we followed Phillip into the grounds our hearts were beating rapidly. We felt afraid and out of our depth. Phillip knew who he was looking for and eventually a young man appeared and greeted us and thanked us for coming to support them. The young Muslim Leader put out his hands and said

"I am covered with earth as I have been planting some of the roses that have been left for us...I did not want them to die."



We took off our shoes; we were already wearing hijabs and followed our Guide into the Mosque.

"Here is where the gunman was greeted in peace, and the Greeter was shot." We both went numb then. As we walked into the hallway our Guide named others who had been shot and pointed to where they had fallen.

Then we entered the Men's prayer room, a much smaller space than we had imagined...we understood then that the men were trapped and were gunned down without mercy. Our Guide continued to point out where people had fallen, including himself. He was saved by those who fell on him. Our brave young Muslim Leader spoke only of forgiveness and compassion and the call to love.

Eventually we asked could we pray and he said he would take us to the Women's prayer room. We were given into the care of an older Muslim woman called Fatima, from Bosnia, who took us under her wing and shared her story with us. As we prayed with Fatima, we really felt the presence of Mary of the Upper Room urging us "These are all our brothers and sisters."

As it was the season of Ramadan gradually the room began to fill up with women and children from many places on earth. Each one came and greeted us and thanked us for coming. We were asked to stay and pray with them and break their fast with them at sundown and then share their food.

We heard many stories that would break your heart, yet their faith and trust in God, their deep compassion and mercy and indeed their joy was humbling to experience. We felt so blessed.

Their prayer rituals made solidarity tangible as they moved and prayed in the manner they knew so well... in unison. From their vulnerability these women and children reached out to us with generous hospitality, which created deep communion. We felt at one with them in their deep grief and their serene joy.

We spent four hours with the women and children where time seemed to stand still. We left with hearts full of gratitude for the gift of hope we had been blessed with. It truly was an experience of the Upper room, the Cenacle and an even deeper invitation into the heart of God, the generous hospitality of the Trinity.

The Mystery of Our Lady in the Cenacle in unexpected places cont.

Peace is More than Non-Violence

by Kevin McBride

We received a letter of gratitude from the Mosque which is both an inspiration and a challenge:
"Your donation to Victims of March 15 at AL-Nur Mosque is very much appreciated. It is very sobering and comforting for our Community that Public of New Zealand do really care about the minorities. We are broken hearted, but we are not broken. We are alive. We are determined to not let anyone divide us. God defend our free land, God defend New Zealand."

This experience remains vivid and an ongoing challenge. Since the massacre there are countless stories of great heroism, grief, anguish, kindness and compassion being expressed.

Now in this time of the covid-19 Pandemic the call to reach out and support one another has become more urgent to live this in our neighbourhoods and on a global scale.

Sr Mary Jackson Kay rc is a Cenacle Sister residing in Wellington. Sr Mary Jackson kindly wrote this reflective experience for this edition of the Pax Christi Newsletter.

Over recent years, Pax Christi International has been developing a vision of peace as non-violence. Partly, this seems to have arisen from meetings between Pax Christi representatives and the Pontifical Commission for Justice and Peace which began in 2016.

Pax Christi Aotearoa-New Zealand was not represented at those meetings and so was unable to bring to them a perspective that comes from a land where colonisation and its effects are being challenged, and where the indigenous people are offering a different vision of peace. This vision is rooted in their own long traditions and their experience of the taking over of their lands and attacks on their culture and identity.

Europe, where the Pax Christi movement arose at the end of World War II, and its overseas outreach in nations developed from five centuries of colonisation, has its own history of violence which has been particularly prominent over the last 120 years, bringing the world to the brink of destruction with the development of nuclear weapons. The transformation of the colonised nations from self-sufficient indigenous homelands to sources of European wealth, or rather, perhaps, the personalised wealth of rapacious individuals, colours our history in ways which demand something more than merely the avoidance of violence.

Some years ago, I was part of a delegation to a peace conference in New Caledonia, called to address tensions, often violent, between largely French settlers (Caldoches) and indigenous Kanaks. At one point, one of the Caldoches, perhaps peeved by a perceived "holier than thou" approach by delegates from New Zealand and Australia, pointed out angrily that it was "all very well for you whose wars are over, who have established your hegemony, to stand judgement on our struggles here." Since then, I have been very careful about standing in judgment of the antagonists in struggles which in so many ways duplicate the process whereby



Peace is More than Non-Violence cont.

New Zealand came into being, from which it now maintains a lauded role in working for peace across the world.

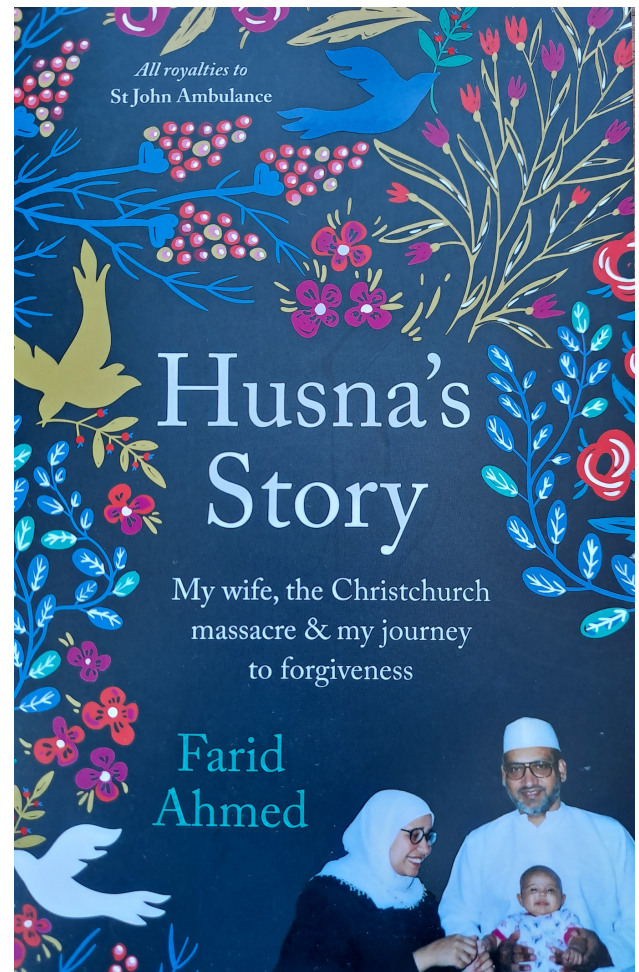
That experience has been part of the call I feel to develop concepts of peace from the soil into which my ancestors transplanted my family more than 150 years ago rather than to transplant a fully-grown concept of “non-violence” into the soil of a land that doesn’t need any more introduced species. That call has been intensified since my reading “New Treaty, New Traditions”, the work of Professor Carwyn Jones, Professor of Law at Victoria University of Wellington. Carwyn Jones traces his origins to Ngati Kahungunu and Te Aitanga-a-Mahaki and has written intensively on issues relating to Maori legal issues, the Treaty of Waitangi and constitutional law.

In “New Treaty, New Traditions”, Carwyn Jones considers the relationship between five Maori ethical principles and the development of law in New Zealand. I have found that reflection on those principles could give us a relevant base for the practice of peace in Aotearoa, a base that is rooted in the soil and traditions of the land, bringing about the peace that was sought by Tangata Whenua when they put their signatures and support to He Wakaputanga o Nga Rangatira o Nu Tireni in 1835 and Te Tiriti o Waitangi in 1840.

By studying, understanding and practising these five principles, we in Pax Christi Aotearoa could realign ourselves with the wairua of this land and practice peace in ways which more truly bring about the decolonisation which is so necessary to address the underlying malaise of our land and others in our region.

Of course we must cooperate wherever possible and appropriate with the world-wide membership of Pax Christi International, but, as my Caldoche friend reminded me, we cannot do that with full confidence and assurance until we have established the relationships with the land and people of Aotearoa which enable us to find true peace within our hearts.

Recommended Reading



Husna's Story: My wife, the Christchurch massacre & my journey to forgiveness by Farid Ahmed with Kimberley Davis. Published by Allan & Unwin, Auckland. 2020. ISBN: 978 1 98854 748 0

This is a beautiful and powerful story of a man who witnessed and survived the Christchurch mosque attack on 15 March 2019. This attack claimed 51 lives, including that of Farid's wife, Husna Ahmed.

The story shares Farid's love and memories of Husna. It becomes clear to the reader that Husna was not only Farid's wife and soulmate but teacher and guide to Farid's journey of forgiveness, love and peace. A message that Farid has taken to the world.

"When hate destroys peace, love restores it. To hate is to suffer. It is in our own best interests to avoid suffering, to instead choose to love. We choose love so that we might know peace, and so that the world might know it by extension.

Peace is not just a job for our leaders. It is a job for each and everyone of us." (pg. 269)

DIARY DATES

March 22nd	World Water Day.
March 24th	Anniversary of the Assassination of Arch- bishop Oscar Romero.
April 4th	Easter Sunday
April 22nd	Earth Day



PEACE

PAX CHRISTI AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

Pax Christi is an independent Catholic social justice organisation. We work hard to address issues of peace and justice at a local, regional and global level.

If you want to know more about Pax Christi, to join meetings, or to set up group meetings in your area, please contact paxchristiaotearoa@gmail.com or ring 09 377 5541 / 021 729944

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Nikki Zalewski*