



MISSION

ISSUE 2 2022

# CATALYST

Intelligent comment on faith and culture



## A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO WAR

### THE GOSPEL OF PEACE

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(in order of appearance)

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# CYCLES OF CHAOS AND VIOLENCE

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## **“I will be with you, whatever.”**

My first editor taught me there are only two occasions when you can begin an article with a quote. The first, if the queen swears in public; the second if you are quoting Jesus. Given that I worked on the sports desk at the time, the likelihood of quoting the Son of Man seemed improbable. Little did either of us imagine back then I would one day be editing a magazine providing ‘intelligent comment on faith and culture’.

I justify beginning this letter with a quote because ‘I will be with you, whatever’ sounds uncannily like a graphic-novel translation of Matthew 28:20, rendered by the King James’ Bible as “and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.” It almost made it into the speech bubble on the front page but was pipped by an allusion to another of Matthew’s quotations from the mouth of Jesus. The moral and spiritual implications of both quotes caused sleepless nights in the lead up to publication; I’ve no doubt they will continue to do so long after the ink’s dry.

I wonder can you recall the origin of the phrase, ‘I will be with you, whatever’? They are the six words then UK Prime Minister Tony Blair wrote to then US President George W Bush eight months before the Iraq invasion. Words from the pen of a committed Christian (Blair was confirmed in the Church of England in his second year at Oxford) to a fellow believer – (Bush was born again as an evangelical Christian in 1985 with the help of Billy Graham) that established Blair’s unqualified backing for

war well before UN weapons inspectors had completed their work.

I couldn’t sleep because I kept turning over in my mind the question, ‘what would the world look like now if these two committed Christians, at the time the developed world’s most influential politicians, had lived out a call to gospel peace, a call to overcome enemies through loving them in the way that God loved us when we were his enemies?’

Instead, soon after the September 11 attacks in 2001, Bush spoke of a “crusade” against his country’s enemies. His choice of language betraying a religious sense of mission. In his state of the union address two years later, he suggested his pre-emptive foreign policy doctrine was also divinely inspired, “This call of history has come to the right country. The liberty we prize is not America’s gift to the world, it is God’s gift to humanity.”

Vali Nasr, a professor of international affairs at Johns Hopkins University’s School of Advanced International Studies, told the Washington Post last year that America’s “vision was clouded by anger and revenge.” They smote right back. In doing so, they plunged themselves and the UK into a war and eventual occupation that would reshape the political map of the Middle East, distract from America’s parallel intervention in Afghanistan and provoke new cycles of chaos and violence.

Nick Megoran, author of *Warlike Christians in an Age of Violence* and contributor to this issue, argues that the evidence of the progressive revelation of Old Testament scripture and the

final revelation of the New Testament proves that, by inciting war rather than making peace, Christianity loses its role as the ‘salt of the earth’ (Matthew, again). Christianity becomes part of the world’s problems rather than their solution. In a violent world, Christians are called to make peace by overcoming violence in the love and power of God. Blair was with Bush, ‘whatever’. He didn’t even think to turn the other cheek.

I wonder if I could convince Blair to confront this subject for the ‘A Time I Changed My Mind’ feature? For this edition, it is enough to bring you Linda Ramsden’s story. Her journey from Christian Zionism to two-state advocacy evinces qualities all too absent from public life and challenges all our tightly held doctrines. And it is enough to publish Zoe Murton’s humility as she details the challenges of housing three of the world’s 89.3 million humans displaced by conflict. While photographer Chris Hoskins’ portraits of Ukrainian refugees remind us of what is lost when the ordinary is ripped apart by cycles of chaos and violence.

As the time comes for you to turn the page, I’ll finish with my memory of the first time I heard a Baptist minister preach. Zechariah was the subject and it is the closing lines of his song that ring in my ears now with the hope that our feet will be guided into the path of peace.

**Matty Fearon** was born in Abergavenny to Scouse Catholic parents. After a career in sports and news journalism that took in stints in Russia, India and across the UK, he made the inevitable move to the Christian charity sector in 2019. This is his second issue as *Mission Catalyst* editor.

# H A N D L E W I T H C A R E

**PIETER J. LALLEMAN RESPONDS TO “EXPERIMENTS IN IMAGINING OTHERS. ESSENTIAL ALTERNATIVE BIBLICAL INTERPRETATIONS” BY WALE HUDSON-ROBERTS, FEATURED IN ISSUE 1, 2022.**

I appreciate the attempt by the contributors to this issue of Mission Catalyst to decolonise Christian theology. Although the majority of world Christians are now non-whites, much theology is still old-style. In the case of Wale Hudson-Roberts’ article, however, I am not sure the attempt is successful.

It is not that I want to defend traditional interpretations of Scripture: I cringe when I see how lines like, “The rich man in his castle, the poor man at his gate, God made them high and lowly, and ordered their estate,” were part of the original hymn *All things bright and beautiful* (but omitted from *Songs of Fellowship*). And reading in Robert Warrior’s article<sup>1</sup> – cited by Hudson-Roberts – how Puritan preachers referred to Native Americans as ‘Canaanites’ makes my heart cry. I am also aware that there are problematic passages in the Old Testament when it comes to the conquest of Canaan by the Israelites.

The point for me is that Warrior’s article – and Hudson-Roberts follows him – argues not merely against certain interpretations of the scriptures, but against the grain of Scripture itself.

My suggestion is that we should handle the Old Testament better than has often been done. If we follow Warrior and Hudson-Roberts, we are likely to lose the entire Old Testament under the weight of criticism. This is because, as Warrior correctly shows, the conquest of Canaan is a theme not only in Exodus but also in Genesis. Indeed, it runs as a main theme through the first seven books of the Old Testament and reappears regularly in the rest of the book. Unless we handle its interpretation correctly, we might as well join Marcion of Sinope and discard the Hebrew Bible in its entirety. I would

argue that on the one hand we simply must accept that God wanted Israel to conquer Canaan at the expense of its existing inhabitants, as a judgment on their sins (Genesis 15:16); scholars confirm that these people were violent and depraved. On the other hand, we need to realise that we are in no way called to imitate this event. New Testament Christians need to recognise that we are simply not called to imitate the political and military practices of the Old Testament. The conquest of Canaan was strictly a one-off event, which is not

suggests that Native Americans can identify with the Canaanites. I pray they will receive grace to stop doing so. Does the following comparison work? When the message of Jesus reached north-west Europe, the inhabitants of these lands (Gauls, Kelts, Brits, Hibernians etc) were indigenous Gentiles. We are grateful that missionaries such as Columba, Augustine of Canterbury, Patrick and David did not consider them (our ancestors) as inferior and did not try to exterminate them. They rather took Jesus, Paul and the other apostles as their examples, generally treating the addressees of the gospel, the natives (our ancestors), with respect rather than imitating ancient Israel. In his letters Paul does speak negatively about the past of the newly converted Christians, and so should we about many aspects of the religion of our ancestors, but he still respects them as

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“ *The article argues not merely against certain interpretations of the scriptures, but against the grain of Scripture itself* ”

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repeated and should not be repeated.

As Baptists we are also well placed to acknowledge (again!) that God’s people today do not coincide with any given nation or people group. The idea, first of European Christians and then of their American descendants, that America was the Promised Land and should thus be conquered (and its original inhabitants murdered), is heretical, just as are nationalistic texts such as *Land of Hope and Glory*.

In sum, I want to keep the Old Testament as an authoritative part of our Bible, but read its historical parts as a record of ‘there and then’. What can help us to do so is the insight that Old Testament storytellers report many events without necessarily agreeing with them.

Warrior, followed by Hudson-Roberts,

equals, as we should.

Two additional comments: first, Hudson-Roberts refers to the destruction of Jericho and its livestock. In considering this and similar stories let us remember that Rahab and her family were saved because she put her trust in the God of Israel. It is obvious that this escape route was open to all those who acknowledged the Lord as God. This has implications for how we understand the stories.

Second, remember that God is as strict with Israel as he is with the foreign nations (if not stricter). Israel’s ultimate exile was his judgment because of the idolatry and social injustice of his people. God is more impartial than we often acknowledge. Describing ancient Israel as “a superior people chosen by God” misrepresents the Bible.

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<sup>1</sup>Available at [https://www.rmselca.org/sites/rmselca.org/files/media/canaanites\\_cowboys\\_and\\_indians.pdf](https://www.rmselca.org/sites/rmselca.org/files/media/canaanites_cowboys_and_indians.pdf)

# Hand grenades — in Easter eggs? —



AS WAR RAGES FROM UKRAINE TO ETHIOPIA, SOMALIA TO SYRIA, **NICK MEGORAN** CALLS OUT WARLIKE CHRISTIANS IN AN AGE OF VIOLENCE WITH THE CASE AGAINST WAR AND FOR GOSPEL PEACE

It's only five years since the publication of *Warlike Christians*, and yet never has it seemed so sadly necessary to restate the case for gospel peace. In the intervening time we've seen dozens of armed conflicts rage across the world – not least, the massive escalation of the Russo-Ukraine war from a low-level conflict in 2014 into the bloodiest conflict in Europe since the Second World War.

Fittingly, the book's cover photograph depicts a disturbing image from this war: a priest sprinkling 'holy water' on a balaclava-clad unit of

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“ *The whole life and teaching of Jesus and the apostles is utterly incompatible with warfare, and we are commanded to follow his example* ”

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Ukrainianultranationalist paramilitaries. The Ukraine Orthodox Church split from the Russian Orthodox Church in 2019 because of the war, a tragic example of nationalist passions trumping Christian unity. But one can hardly blame them.

Since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russian priests have blessed not only warriors but also ships, plane and all types of weaponry from Kalashnikov rifles to the Iskander ballistic missiles that have rained down on Ukraine.




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*“ The Christian Church, with minor exceptions, has been solidly on the side of violence for centuries, but it has normally been only the violence of soldiers ”*

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The Church has bought itself political influence in Russia by forming an unholy alliance with arch-nationalists and backing the war. This September Patriarch Kirill, head of the Church, told soldiers in a Sunday sermon that “sacrifice in the course of carrying out your military duty washes away all sins”.

In contrast to this blasphemy, a lone worshipper standing in front of a Moscow church in the early days of the invasion was arrested for simply holding up a sign with the biblical injunction, “Thou shalt not kill.” I suspect Jesus would have stood outside with her rather than inside with the weapon-blessing priests. The biblical vision of gospel peace has been deformed by churches in Russia and Ukraine, but not obliterated: its recovery by the worldwide church remains an urgent task for all of us who claim to be followers of the Prince the Peace.

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In April 2003, soon after the US and UK began an invasion of Iraq, the sale of an Easter basket in a New York Kmart store created something of a furore. The pretty pink-and-yellow baskets with colourful green-and-purple bows contained not chocolate bunnies but camouflaged soldiers with US flags, machine guns, sniper rifles, hand grenades, Bowie knives, ammunition, truncheons and handcuffs. The toys were withdrawn following an outcry by shoppers and Christian leaders. Bishop George Packard condemned them as being in ‘bad taste’ and questioned the message sent to Muslims by the mixing of a Christian holiday with images of war.

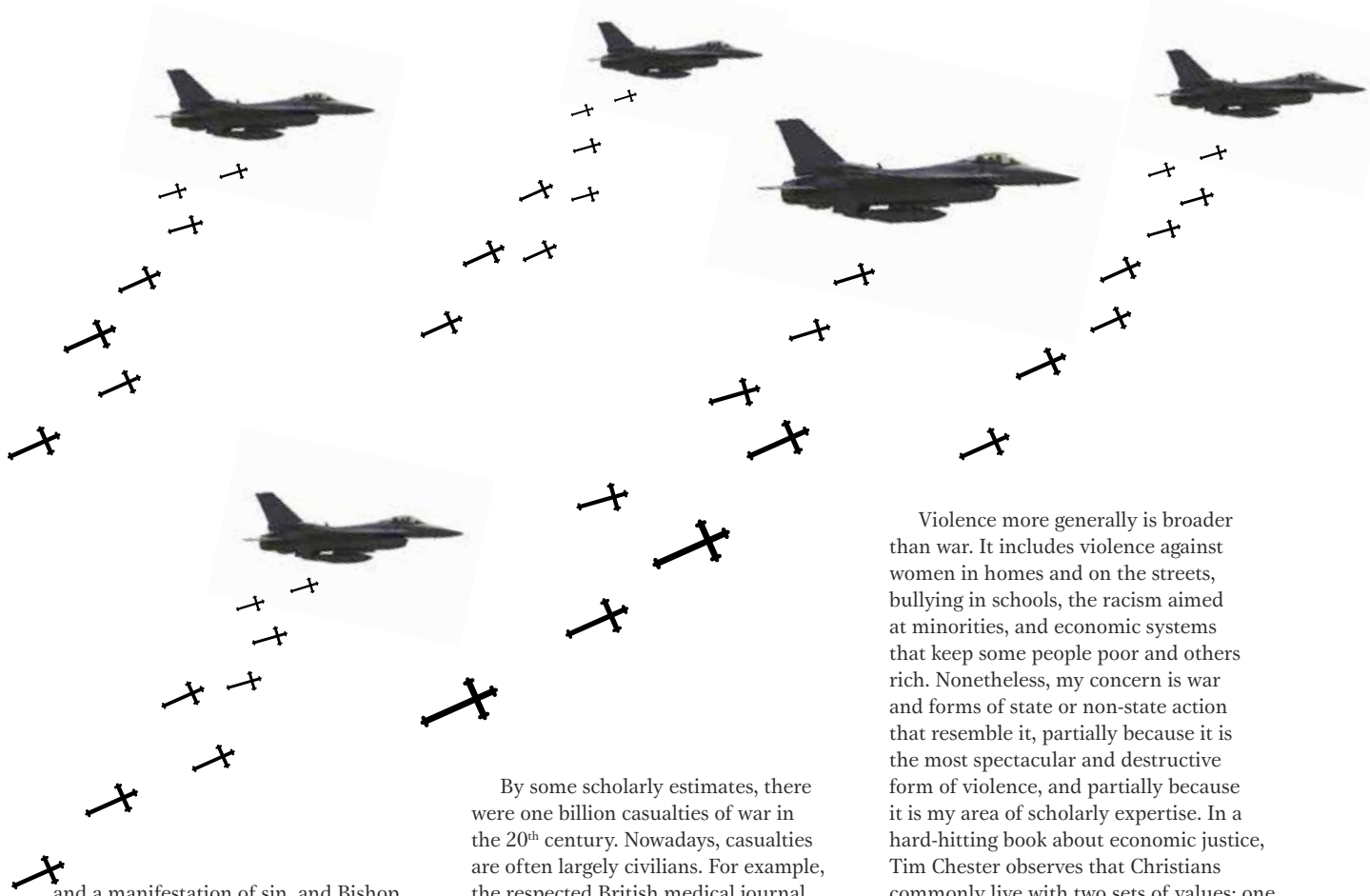
Most people would, I think, recognise the incongruity of such a striking symbol of violence being used to celebrate the resurrection of the Prince of Peace and the triumph of life over death. However,

Bishop Packard seemed to overlook an even greater contradiction. He was the man responsible for the spiritual care of Episcopalian members of the armed services. That is to say, he and his Church supported Christians taking on in real life the role that he condemned in a make-believe world!

The Iraq War threw up many such ironies. It was led by two world leaders, US President George W. Bush and UK Prime Minister Tony Blair, who were arguably the most devout Christians to have held those offices for many years. One of their chief opponents, Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz, was one of the most well-known Christian politicians in the Middle East. Some of the war’s most vocal critics were Christian leaders around the world, from the Pope and the Archbishop of Canterbury to former Archbishop of Cape Town, Desmond Tutu. Even Jim Winkler, at the time one of the leaders of George W. Bush’s own denomination, the United Methodist Church, opposed the planned invasion, saying that “war is incompatible with the teaching and example of Christ”. Having repeatedly been refused an audience with the President himself, Winkler led a delegation of American Christian leaders on a world tour to meet leaders from Tony Blair to Russian President Vladimir Putin in an attempt to persuade them to oppose the planned war.

But such disagreement is by no means confined to 21st century wars. Every ten years the bishops of the worldwide Anglican Church gather for the Lambeth Conference. Various conferences since 1930 have endorsed the statement that “war as a method of settling international disputes is incompatible with the teaching and example of our Lord Jesus Christ”. Yet, at the same time, as Dominican priest and theologian Herbert McCabe put it, its “cathedrals are stuffed with regimental flags and monuments to colonial wars. The Christian Church, with minor exceptions, has been solidly on the side of violence for centuries, but it has normally been only the violence of soldiers.”

The Christian Church’s position on war is clearly inconsistent, and this confusion inhibits its ability to speak meaningfully into the pressing issues of our day. My argument is simple. If we turn to the pages of the New Testament, we find no such inconsistency: in fact, the whole life and teaching of Jesus and the apostles is utterly incompatible with warfare, and we are commanded to follow his example. I follow Martyn Lloyd-Jones in the biblical understanding that war is a consequence



and a manifestation of sin, and Bishop George Bell in insisting that the Church's function in wartime is "at all costs to remain the Church", the trustee of the gospel of redemption. The Christian (and the Christian's) response to war is not to fight and kill those fighting and trying to kill us – scripture does not permit that – but simply to be the Church! Preach the gospel! This entails working creatively by the power of the Holy Spirit to make peace in the communities and world in which we live – a position I call 'gospel peace'.

The importance of this topic of how to deal with war is hard to overstate. As military historian John Keegan said in his 1998 BBC Reith Lectures, war is the chief "enemy of human life, well-being, happiness and optimism". It is the great scourge of our age: it undoes God's good creation; it destroys and deforms people made in his image; it prevents humans from relating to each other as he intended; it is the source of untold human suffering; it disproportionately affects those already most vulnerable, such as women, children, the elderly and the infirm; it inflicts mental and physical disabilities on combatants and non-combatants alike for decades after actual fighting has ceased; it sometimes produces enormous population displacements, wrenching families and communities apart; it creates poverty and inhibits attempts to develop sustainable livelihoods and a just distribution of wealth.

By some scholarly estimates, there were one billion casualties of war in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Nowadays, casualties are often largely civilians. For example, the respected British medical journal *The Lancet* suggested in 2006 that up to 600,000 people had died in Iraq following the US/UK invasion in 2003 as a result of medical facilities being degraded or rendered inadequate because of the war.

Violence more generally is broader than war. It includes violence against women in homes and on the streets, bullying in schools, the racism aimed at minorities, and economic systems that keep some people poor and others rich. Nonetheless, my concern is war and forms of state or non-state action that resemble it, partially because it is the most spectacular and destructive form of violence, and partially because it is my area of scholarly expertise. In a hard-hitting book about economic justice, Tim Chester observes that Christians commonly live with two sets of values: one that they espouse in church and another that they demonstrate by how they actually use their money. We have done exactly the same with relation to war and peace. It is said that during the Crusades,

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*“ War is the great scourge of our age: it undoes God's good creation; it destroys and deforms people made in his image ”*

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A belief system that is unable to speak practically to war is irrelevant to this age. Yet in ignoring plain biblical teaching and allowing our thinking to be influenced by culture more than Scripture, we have oftentimes done more to excite war than promote peace. As Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. asked, "What more pathetically reveals the irrelevancy of the Church in present-day world affairs than its witness regarding war? In a world gone mad with arms build-ups, chauvinistic passions, and imperialistic exploitation, the Church has either endorsed these activities or remained appallingly silent." He concluded, "A weary world, desperately pleading for peace, has often found the Church morally sanctioning war." We have become part of the problem rather than the solution.

mercenaries held their swords above the water when they were being baptised so that they didn't have to make them subject to God's rule. In professing to worship the Prince of Peace, and on Sunday morning singing, "Crown Him the Lord of peace, / whose power a sceptre sways / from pole to pole, that wars may cease, / and all be prayer and praise," yet allowing ourselves to endorse the possibility of Christian participation in, preparation for, and even celebration of war during the week, we have effectively done the same.

The old adage that Christians don't tell lies but they sing them could not be more clearly demonstrated. It is time that we took Scripture seriously and started to preach and practice "the gospel of peace" (Acts 10:36; Ephesians 6:15), which, I believe, is the only hope for humankind.



# WHEN PRAYER IS YOUR ONLY WEAPON

Twenty-four hours behind enemy lines in Afghanistan with a military chaplain

*BAPTIST MINISTER COLE MAYNARD OPENS UP ABOUT HIS UNEXPECTED CALLING TO A MINISTRY THAT CALLS YOU OUT OF CHURCH, PUTS YOU INTO A UNIFORM AND MAKES YOU A TARGET*

**O**n 17 February 2003 I said goodbye to my two sons, Ross, then aged 13, and Wesley, aged 11, kissed my wife, and leaving the quarter in Colchester, climbed into my brother's car. The mood was sombre. I was going to war. Saying goodbye to Fiona and the boys was the hardest thing I have ever done, as all our intelligence reports indicated that we were in for a brutal battle with many casualties forecast. Call it pre-war nerves or a sense of foreboding, but I knew that as a PARA chaplain I was going to be in the midst of the fighting. There was a good chance I could be one of those not coming home.

Saying goodbye to your family, under those circumstances, is extremely difficult; assuring them that you would be all right but, in your heart, believing otherwise. When I arrived at Hyderabad Barracks I turned to my brother, *'If I don't come back, Trev, take care of Fiona and the boys for me!'* Then, I clambered out of the vehicle, collected my Bergen and boarded the coach.

What type of ministry calls you out of church and puts you into a uniform that becomes a target? That has no limit in liability, calling you into battle without offering you a weapon for personal defence or security?

I hadn't always been without a weapon. I joined the Royal Air Force as a young lad determined to find adventure and see the world. I served in the RAF for four years and while at RAF Laarbruch in Germany

*“ I held a short service around the burnt-out hulk of one of our tanks in which the trooper had died, in the company of the scent of burnt rubber and scorched earth ”*

came back to faith having witnessed the real and demonstrable faith of two other airman. I knelt by my bed one night and gave my life back to God, and he gave me a ministry amongst those servicemen, that resulted in a general call to ministry. I explored this formerly with my unit chaplains who gave me their prayerful support and being *'Church of Scotland and Free Church'* chaplains, it led to me going to Glasgow to study theology for three years.

During those formative years in Germany, I belonged to a lively house group and we saw several airman come to faith, and four of us who left RAF Laarbruch went into full time Christian work, two into the Baptist ministry. Fifteen years later, and in my second church, a home-mission church in Birmingham, my *'Super'* suggested I consider a Territorial Army commission. However, I dismissed his missive as the ramblings of the deranged. God was blessing my current ministry and returning to uniform just wasn't on my agenda.

However, when God sows a seed, he will

not allow it to remain dormant. He kept on whispering in my ear and stirring my heart and then my wife's, who was even more against the notion of military service with all its upheaval and uncertainty. He did this via encounters with those who had served in this role, and by a growing sense of call to this significant and distinct group of people.

I believe military chaplaincy is a call within a call to ministry. It comes out of a definite call to the church, evolving to minister to this new parish, both on the frontline and behind it. It is such a unique and privileged role, where you share in the sufferings and deprivations of your parish. So, the relationship between member and minister becomes a tight bond of shared experiences, good, bad, and sometimes terrifying! You wear their skin and put yourself with them in situations where others might try to perforate it.

In 2003 3 PARA were moving into line to protect the right flank of *16 Air Assault Brigade* at a point aptly called *'Dagger & Bayonet'*. I was sitting in the back of an





ambulance when I heard the driver and commander chuckling. I poked my head through the small hatch into the driver's cabin and enquired what they were laughing at.

"Oh, the enemy are firing at us!" they replied. I looked out of the windscreen to see tracer rounds heading in our direction. Then the radio crackled and one of our Milan vehicle commanders shouted, "A T55 tank on our left, permission to engage! Over." For what seemed like an age, nothing but static followed. The commander continued with a renewed sense of urgency: 'A T55 on our left, permission to engage, over. Its turret is traversing, over! Can we fire?'

I sat in that unarmoured ambulance and a little voice in my head screamed 'Engage, ENGAGE!' Then a Milan missile roared past our left side and a 50mm heavy machine gun opened up. Our convoy stopped, exposed and silhouetted on the raised road across the desert sands of the Iraqi wilderness. "There's another tank on our left!" Another Milan missile roared past; more guns entered the fray. I poked my head back into the driver's section: 'Shouldn't we take cover?' but my words echoed around an empty cab.

We scrambled around in the darkness, pushing past boxes of bandages and tubes, expecting any minute for the sides of our vehicle to dissolve in the heat of an 88mm hell. The doors eventually give to our frantic pushes, and we tumbled out into the night, stumbling down the embankment to where the rest of the convoy shelter. On both sides of me paratroopers hid behind

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*“ You wear the soldiers’ skin and put yourself with them in situations where others might try to perforate it ”*

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their weapons, scanning the inky blackness for any movement or threat. We lay there in the dark, illuminated only by the burning hulk of a tank to my left and the occasional flash of a weapon being fired. I lay there in the dust, with no weapon to hide behind, no immediate function except the one of presence. I was totally exposed, totally vulnerable, so I hid in prayer.

The next day found me sitting in a field praying with a soldier who wanted to commit his life back to Christ, as shells for our artillery whistled overhead. Then I began preparations for a field service the following day, but before I, could get into this, I was summoned to recover the body of a trooper who had been killed the day before. While looking for his remains, I ended up burying an enemy soldier and praying for him and his family with the soldiers who helped me commit his body to the earth. I then held a short service around the burnt-out hulk of one of our tanks, in which the trooper had died. In the company of his colleagues, we prayed for his family, his squadron and his platoon to the scent of burnt rubber and scorched earth. Just 20 hours in the life of this military chaplain.

As a military chaplain, your exposure

continues when you are out of the line of fire. When at home, you field questions and comments from those in the church who consider your ministry, like the battle for Arnhem, 'a bridge too far'. Yet again you hunker down into your trench with others who wear the uniform and learn to bear these sentiments as you do the other attacks. In the end, it is the remote, isolating nature of this calling that brings the greatest rewards of bonding you with those who serve on the frontline Like the final episode of that iconic series *Band of Brothers*, where a German general addresses his defeated troops, and in so doing speaks equally to both sides of the conflict,

"Men, it's been a long war. It's been a tough war. You've fought bravely, proudly for your country... You've found in one another a bond that exists only in combat, among brothers. You've shared foxholes, held each other in dire moments. You've seen death and suffered together. I'm proud to have served with each and every one of you."

Perhaps that collective suffering is the single most cogent part of serving as a military chaplain. It is a tough road, but if Christ calls you to it, you turn to the right, salute and march off the square.

# CLEARING THE FOG OF WAR

Chris Hoskins travelled out to the Polish-Ukraine border with a BMS reporting team back in May to document churches' responses to the refugee crisis. In the days before Russian troops invaded on February 24th, the people of Chelm, which lies on the main Kyiv-Warsaw road, met in a church building that looks remarkably like so many Baptist church buildings across the world.

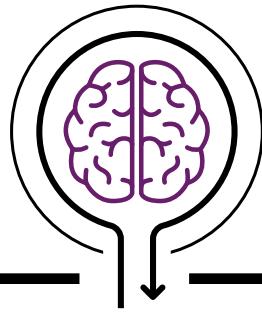
They met, they worshipped, they sang, they prayed. They didn't know that three days later, they were going to be housing 400 refugees within the first 48 hours of shelling.











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## A TIME I CHANGED MY MIND

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# WHEN FOUNDATIONS FALL APART

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*IN OUR AGE OF ENTRENCHED BINARY BELIEFS, LINDA RAMSDEN'S  
JOURNEY FROM THE CRADLE OF NORTH AMERICAN CHRISTIAN ZIONISM  
TO LOBBYING GOVERNMENTS FOR A PALESTINIAN TWO-STATE SOLUTION  
OFFERS A LESSON TO US ALL*

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I was born on a small farm in Minnesota. It was very community minded; everybody went to church of one sort or another. And I happened to go to the Evangelical Lutheran church. It was a Swedish community; most of the people there were direct descendants of Swedes who'd settled the land and then built a church. It was an important part of my life: church every Sunday, confirmation; church organist. I was really – I mean really – involved in church.

Things changed a bit when I went to university. I went to the big city. And that's where I was thrown into this new reality. I had been transported from knowing everyone to knowing no one. I started looking around to find identity.

First, I joined a sorority, which is like a girl's private club. I did visit some churches on Sundays, but nothing really stuck. Then, incredibly, at the fraternity right across the street they started having Bible studies. It was the wildest fraternity on campus, why were they having Bible studies? So I went. I listened to this man speaking; he had been part of the Campus Crusade for Christ, but had broken away and was doing something more independent. And as he spoke, he was reading from the book of John, the first chapter. "I am the way and the truth and

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*“ I was impressionable, released from the security of my homespun community. I needed something to hang my identity on, and Christian Zionism was the hook ”*

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the life.”

He brought the Bible alive to me in a way that I really hadn't known growing up. And so I kept going back with a whole group from our sorority and the fraternity. A few of us started spending even more time with this Bible teacher. He was uncovering biblical prophecies and explaining them. Truth be told, what he was preaching (though I didn't know it at the time) was Christian Zionism. And we just thought, "Wow, this is amazing." Then he took us to a centre in Ohio, which had been set up by a man who had been second-in-command at Campus Crusade for Christ but had broken away because of his Christian Zionist theology. Hal Lindsay, a prolific and prominent American Christian Zionist of the Seventies and Eighties, whose books included *The Late Great Planet Earth*, *Satan is Alive and Well on Planet Earth* and *The 1980s: Countdown to Armageddon*, was a frequent visitor to the centre.

I sat at Lindsay's feet, absolutely enthralled by what he was saying. He was teaching at the Pentagon at this time, was friendly with Ronald Reagan and had a real influence on American foreign policy. Essentially, that centre was the hive for Christian Zionism on the American continent. You see, when I commit to something I really put my whole heart into it. Here I was, a young impressionable girl, released from the security of my homespun community. I needed something to hang my identity on, and Christian Zionism was the hook.

I ended up going to live at the centre in Ohio. I was taken on as a member of staff and it was there that I met Richard, the man who would become my husband. He was an English public-school-educated, very formal Anglican, but religion hadn't yet touched his soul. Richard had metaphorically hitched a ride to Ohio with a group of young Englishmen who would all go on to become Anglican vicars. It was

a great community. This was the same time that a lot of people were becoming hippies, getting into drugs, joining communes and choosing alternative lifestyles.

About 30 of us lived in a group, and hundreds would turn up for conferences. There was a real dynamism to the centre: as well as the Bible studies, as well as the Christian Zionism, there was a big focus on arts and culture. We truly believed we were the last generation, that the end times were imminent – and there was little to challenge that theology. Hal Lindsay was telling us things that he didn't put in his books; he was very specific about these being the last days. It was thrilling. We lived in this prospect of the glory and the peace descending; there was a tremendous sense of excitement at what was to come.

But Richard's visa was expiring. He invited me to England, and we got engaged. The deal was we would stay for two years and then head back to the centre, to be there for the last days. As those two years ticked on, Richard developed a desire to live on a kibbutz in Israel, where we would wait for the return of Christ. And then I had a baby, and I didn't want to live in a kibbutz with a baby. Richard suggested we go to California, where Hal Lindsay was now based. I told him that if we were going anywhere, it was back to the Midwest. Instead, we stayed in England – and we're still here, all these years later. I don't think I would've had the courage to leave America and come and live in England at the age of 23 had I known it was going to be forever.

We settled in Fetcham and joined a small evangelical church. They weren't so interested in the end times, but they were interested in saving souls to live in eternal glory, which was close enough for us. One day I was in nearby Cobham and I saw a girl wearing a Jesus t-shirt. I grabbed her to find out more, and she told me all about Cobham Christian Fellowship. This had been founded by Gerald Coates, who co-organised the first March for Jesus in London in 1987 and founded the Pioneer Network. We really threw ourselves into that world, until the time a few years later when my father-in-law died and we moved to Sussex to look after the family farm.

There we joined the local Anglican church, which just so happened to be sponsoring an overseas priest to attend the Lambeth Conference, who just so happened to be a Palestinian Christian from Nablus. Reverend Bilal stayed in the village for a few days and opened my eyes

to a whole new world and way of seeing. It was the late Eighties, during the First Intifada. He told us the story of the Nakba, also known as the Palestinian Catastrophe – the name given to the destruction of Palestinian society and homeland in 1948. He told us that Palestinian Christians still lived there. Now, all I knew from my time steeped in Christian Zionism at the centre in Ohio was that all Palestinians were terrorists. During this visitor's time

Garth Hewitt, the Anglican priest, songwriter, social activist and founder of the Amos Trust. Reverend Hewitt had a deep interest in and connection with the work of peacemakers in the region. He opened my eyes further, and told me that he felt God was really at work within me. I was reading everything I could get my hands on and spending a lot of time in tears, because with each new revelation I was seeing anew the error of my ways.

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*“ Reverend Bilal stayed in the village for a few days and opened my eyes to a whole new world and new way of seeing ”*

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in the village, I had the opportunity to meet with him four times, and each time I was just drinking up what he had to say. I was really pushing and challenging him, because at first nothing he was saying made any sense to me. When he left, I told him that I would never forget him and we began corresponding.

Some years later, our 25th wedding anniversary was coming up. My mother-in-law said we needed a holiday and that she would pay for us to go to Madeira. And my husband said, “Very kind of you. I don't want to go to Madeira. I want to go to the Holy Land.” We had never been there before. We had a friend leading a pilgrimage group of mainly young people; we'd be the oldies. As we prepared for the trip, one friend from the church told us to really pray about what would happen when we went – to pray that God would speak really powerfully to us in that place.

Revered Bilal was very much on my mind. Would we be able to meet again? We were staying in Bethlehem because it was so cheap there and it was all the youth group could afford. Reading the guidebook on the way over, it was full of warnings against visiting the Arab places, such as Hebron and Bethlehem. Apparently they were dirty, unsafe and full of pickpockets. I was thinking, “What have we done?” And then we got there. We had a tour, and it was amazing. I was crying every day. We had the most fascinating guide, who knew the Bible better than any teacher I had ever met. And on the penultimate day, I discovered he was a Muslim. And so, at the end of that eight-day tour, I felt like the whole foundation of my life had fallen apart. I came back to England and I thought, “I have to take this situation with the Palestinians seriously.”

I managed to get in touch with Reverend

I started organising and leading cultural and spiritual tours to the region, and during one of the tours, in late September 2000, the Second Intifada kicked off. We were staying in Bethlehem, in a hotel overlooking Rachel's tomb. We could see the young Palestinians throwing stones and we could see the Israeli army firing guns in retaliation. It was a chaotic tour, but we made it back home. All my upcoming tours were cancelled, but I felt compelled to return, to go back with people who wanted to stand in solidarity with the Palestinians and Israelis working for a just peace.

I became involved with Reverend Hewitt's Rediscovering Palestine organisation, which was set up to counteract the all-expenses-paid trips that the Israeli tourist board was funding for ministers and church leaders. I had encountered Jeff Halper's work on just peace in the region by then; he was living in Israel and so I started including him in the trips. And all this was going on right the way through the Second Intifada. Jeff would go on to co-found the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHN) in 1997. They wanted to set up a UK-based support group and I was asked to lead it. And that was how, three decades after sitting at the feet of America's leading Christian Zionist, I came to be leading an organisation founded to resist Israel's occupation and to work for a just peace.

And Reverend Bilal – did we meet again? Not on my first trip. But a couple of years later we hired a car, drove around Galilee and found him. He was married with three children. He keeps a very low profile, and we haven't stayed in touch. But one of the bishops from Jerusalem that I've come to know quite well over the years lets me know how he is doing – the man who shook my whole foundations.



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# UNSETTLING THE WORD

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## 'Treat the foreigner residing among you as your native-born' Leviticus 19:34

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*CONTINUING OUR SERIES OF BIBLICAL EXPERIMENTATION IN  
DECENTRING SCRIPTURE, ZOE MURTON EXPLORES LIVING OUT A  
COUNTER-CULTURAL COMMAND*

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**T**hroughout the Bible, we're told to love the stranger and foreigner – but how does that work when they're living in our house? When they use that last egg we'd been eyeing up for lunch, or break our specially engraved tin-opener (true story – a bizarre yet treasured wedding gift)?

This is the question we've been living with since June, when three Ukrainian refugees moved into our home. Like most Brits, we'd watched in horror as Russian tanks rolled across Ukraine's border. The UK government swiftly launched the Homes for Ukraine scheme, recruiting hosts for those fleeing the conflict. We had plenty of spare space, so it seemed a no-brainer to me. After a little persuasion, my husband nervously agreed.

The biblical imperative to show love and hospitality to the foreigner is clear. Deuteronomy 10:18 tells us, "He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing." Leviticus 19:34 goes further, presenting the counter-cultural command, **"The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the Lord your God."** In the parable of the sheep and the goats, Jesus gives an often-overlooked example of how his followers should care for others: "I was a stranger and you invited me in" (Matthew 25:35).

Before long, a charity had matched

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*“ I want to model for our children a loving attitude to others, showing them how our faith translates into everyday life ”*

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us with a Ukrainian family: Oxsana, aged 32, Tetyana, aged 11, and Juliana, just six months' old. There have been plenty of joys, and naturally a few challenges. And if I'm honest, the experience has left me with more questions than answers.

It has been a joy to see Tetyana thrive in her new school – asking excitedly at pick-up time if her new friend could come for a play date; showing me her first-ever attempt at baking cinnamon rolls; becoming more confident every day in speaking English.

It has been a joy to connect with Oxsana, with conversations ranging from the pros and cons of confessing our sins to a priest (they are Greek Catholic Christians) to less elevated reflections on the contents of a baby's nappy when it starts eating solids.

And it has been an absolute joy to see the outpouring of generosity from our local church community. A retired English teacher has been faithfully giving Oxsana free English lessons. A lady in our home group became legendary for sourcing items our guests needed, from a hairdryer for Oxsana to a pair of size 5 rollerblades for Tetyana. Our minister held a barbecue for us all in his garden. It made me think of the early Church in Acts 4:34, where "there

was no needy person among them" because the believers shared their possessions so wholeheartedly. Many non-Christians in our community have been hugely generous with their time and resources, too.

Communication has been challenging but not impossible. We've used a translation app called SayHi: speak into your phone in one language, and it repeats the message in the other language. The accuracy often leaves much to be desired, but it's been invaluable in helping us limp over the language barrier.

The first three or four weeks were an administrative marathon. There was a raft of paperwork to complete: applications for school admissions, benefits payments, residence cards, GP registration and so on. On one of those record-breaking hot days in July, I found myself driving our three guests to an appointment half an hour away, in a car containing my two pre-schoolers and a malfunctioning air conditioning system.

My husband found the drain on my time challenging, and worried that our own children were suffering because of our guests. This gave me real pause for thought. I eventually concluded that, while I wouldn't put our children through serious

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*The Good Samaritan by Jacopo Bassano, 1562*

discomfort, there was a greater good at stake. And importantly, I want to model for our children a loving attitude to others, showing them how our faith translates into everyday life.

The main challenge of hosting refugees has been its impact on my husband. He's found the experience much harder than I have. To give one example, Ukrainian children tend to go to bed later than their British counterparts, and after a long day's work, he didn't relish eating dinner with Juliana testing her vocal chords in the high chair. I've struggled to find the balance between caring for my spouse's needs and honouring God's command to love the foreigner as ourselves. I'm not sure I have the answers, but in practice we're simply trying to communicate well and take decisions together.

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*“ There have been plenty of joys, and naturally a few challenges. And if I'm honest, the experience has left me with more questions than answers ”*

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Another big question we've wrestled with is why we individually, and our society as a whole, have not done more for other displaced groups. There are still thousands of refugees from countries such as Syria and Afghanistan stuck in limbo in UK hotels. Surely they would love to receive the same welcome and support offered to Ukrainians. While there is no scheme like Homes for Ukraine in their case, charities such as Refugees at Home are actively seeking hosts for them.

These foreigners are already “residing among us”– but are we treating them as our native-born? Are we only willing to love the foreigner if it doesn't disturb our comfort zones too much?

These are questions we'll continue to pray about after our current guests move on and our spare room is empty once again...

*\* Names have been changed to protect anonymity*



# SHELF AWARENESS

## The books that formed us

*RACHEL CONWAY-DOEL TAKES US THROUGH THE MICRO-LIBRARY THAT HAS INFORMED SEASONS AND RHYTHMS OF HER LIFE*

Two years ago, I was living on a canal boat. Water and small spaces are not conducive to storing books – so I figured the few I have left must have some significance in my life. These are largely them. They've been formative throughout different seasons of my journey in different ways. They've helped me become secure in who I am in Christ and as a whole person. Several Bibles feature – they've envisioned my faith as a small child through Bible stories, helped me start to understand the connection between the Bible and life, or been the victim of an enthusiastic young Christian stuffing the pages with orders of services and notes (that's the Study Bible without the spine).

The one book that is missing (loaned out to a friend, perhaps?), *Toxic Charity* by Robert Lupton, massively challenged my thinking around how to help 'the other', in sensitive and edifying ways.

Some books I didn't expect... a teaching manual for sailing represents the journey I have made in my confidence to enable others to thrive and the connection I've enjoyed with nature. *Culture Map*, although by no means perfect, helped me understand the innate differences of the world around us. *The Panic Years* helped me realise I am not alone in a weird phase of life. *Invisible Women* was one of the few books I almost gave up on several times, as it was so upsetting to read of the embedded injustices towards 50 per cent of the population.

There's a long list of books that I feel I 'should' read – largely theological and more diverse authors. But my grandfather was a bookbinder and books have always been a 'joyful' thing in our family - so the



concept of 'should' sits uncomfortably. Instead, I have found space for some diverse reflection in other mediums, such as music and TV. We all have different

'reading' and 'reflection' styles and different seasons, so perhaps our shelves are broader, more diverse and less guilt-inducing than we think.

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# BRINGING PEACE TO THE LEAST

## The violence of the Church's silence

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*REGULAR COLUMNIST NATALIA-NANA LESTER-BUSH DRAWS INSPIRATION FROM JESUS CHRIST'S REFUSAL TO KEEP THE PEACE AS SHE CALLS OUT DISCORD ON OUR VERY DOORSTEPS*



**T**he prophet Isaiah foretold that the coming Messiah would be called, among other things, Prince of Peace. You know that; you probably sing that in church. But what does it even tell us about Jesus? And what does it mean to be an example for peace in 2022?

Like Nick Megoran, I agree that the evidence of the New Testament (and, I'd argue, also the First, or Old, Testament) is that followers of the Christ shouldn't engage in violence. I see the plethora of examples and instructions for Christians to bring people together in peace and community, even – or especially – when there is discord and difference. In such conflicting, challenging times, this both inspires and saddens me, as I see how far the Church is from opposing violence and bringing peace across God's creation and on our very doorsteps.

As a person of colour (like Jesus), my thoughts about violence take me not only to the brutality experienced by people with skin like mine and my mum's in so many countries, but also to the very streets I walk to work, where violence is frequently inflicted on innocent people of colour. Too often, this is by the very people paid to protect those citizens as they go to work, or home to their families, or even to study in school. And the silence of the Church deafens – as a popular protest saying goes, "Silence is violence."

I also think about the two women

killed every week by their current or former romantic partner, and about how church sermons on gender relations focus on adultery or abstinence (or of course homosexuality) when every Sunday another woman's body is in the morgue due to violence from a man she loved. I reflect on how Jesus treated women as equals in His everyday life and ministry, including Mary as she sat at His feet soaking up His post-dinner teachings, and the woman caught (or likely framed) in an adulterous relationship. Instead of judging her behaviour, Jesus uses His silent words in the sand and His simple yet direct words about hypocrisy to shake his peers and Pharisees into stopping their violent plans. And how when He meets an excluded woman of colour getting water in the Middle Eastern midday sun, He doesn't reject her as His religious and social rules tell Him to. Instead, He engages her in a theological conversation resulting in her becoming the first evangelist, telling others that she has met the Messiah, who to her was indeed a Prince of Peace. What would it look like if the Church, like Jesus, set a social example of equal respect and full inclusion for women and people of colour – gender equality which made our society safer for 'the least'?

It's doubtful that Jesus felt constant peace as He was harangued by opponents and rejected by His peers and fellow religious teachers. But His behaviour is

consistent and clear that being the Prince of Peace was not about 'keeping the peace', as in English politeness or avoiding conflict and mess. He called out His students, teachers and peers alike. He challenged others and made them feel discomfort, confronting them with the truth so they could grow and change (hopefully!). If He had kept the peace more, it's highly likely that He wouldn't have been executed for faithfully and sacrificially disrupting the peace of the status quo. But He set an example that to be a Prince of Peace is to work for a deeper peace, a peace won by challenging systems of exclusion and oppression that leave many mistreated for their gender, colour, economic situation or disability.

What would it mean for us today to spend our money and our votes and our time in support of companies, policies and practices that bring peace to others – peace to the least, like Jesus does?

I wonder especially what bringing peace into our attitudes and relationships with people who are different from us would look like. As a start, I think it could mean that there'd be many Christians registering to welcome non-Ukrainian asylum seekers into our homes and for us to extend that same loving welcome to refugees with more melanin and thicker accents, whose wars are farther away. And for Christians to be a force for change so that people of colour, women and all outside of the status quo can have peace in their day-to-day lives.

# GOSPEL PEACE

The potent emotions fomented on battlefields cannot help but spill over into the mouths of hawks and doves, Christians and atheists, and on to the pages of Bible commentaries, theological discourses and magazines such as this one in your hands. The following resources offer the chance to engage at the frontline of the debate on the morality of war and the place of gospel peace in the life of Christian faith.



## READ

### WARLIKE CHRISTIANS IN AN AGE OF VIOLENCE

Nick Megoran

If Nick's cover piece whetted your appetite for an engagement with the countercultural case for the laying down of arms, then dive in deep with the full-length version. Published in 2017, it is not a political theology, nor is it a proposal for government action. It is both a heart cry and a biblical case for the Church to be the church in living out the gospel of peace.

### PONDER CHRISTIAN SOLDIERS

Christianity Today

"Where was—where is—the God who let me experience war? I am without him. He is not here." Journalist Annalaura Montgomery Chuang uses this quote from an army chaplain as the starting point for a foundational series exploring how the gospel offers hope to souls wounded by combat. Whether you consider the terms Christian and soldier to be nearly

synonymous or oxymoronic when placed side-by-side, this series' exploration of new research on combat trauma opens us up to a better understanding of war's assault on the human soul. It reminds us too that war is irreducibly personal. A must read.

<https://bit.ly/christiansoldiers>

### IN DEFENCE OF WAR

Nigel Biggar (OUP)

In this 2013 book Biggar, an Anglican priest, theologian and Regius Professor of Moral and Pastoral Theology at the University of Oxford, asserts that belligerency can be morally justified, even while tragic and morally flawed. Recovering the early Christian tradition of reflection running from Augustine to Grotius, he argues in favour of aggressive war in punishment of grave injustice; that morality can justify military intervention; and that love and the doctrine of double effect can survive combat.

## WATCH

### A HIDDEN LIFE

Terrence Malick's quietly devastating 2019 film depicts the life of Austria's Franz Jägerstätter, a conscientious objector during World War II who was put to death at age 36 for undermining military actions and repeatedly refusing to declare an oath of allegiance to the Nazis, and was later declared a martyr and beatified by the Catholic Church. Jägerstätter's last recorded words were, "I am completely bound in inner union with the Lord."

### HITCHENS V. HITCHENS: FAITH, POLITICS, AND WAR

Christopher Hitchens was one of the four 'horsemen of the New Atheism', well known for his colourful anti-theistic polemical writing and speaking. In contrast, his journalist brother Peter is an adult convert to Christianity. In this classic public debate from 2008, the brothers debate the Iraq war, the case for God and respond to questions from the 1,400-strong audience.

<https://bit.ly/godwardebate>

## LISTEN

### IN OUR TIME: JUST WAR

In this episode of the long-running BBC Radio 4 series, Melvyn Bragg is joined by two eminent historians to wrestle with the question, "Is the Christian idea of the 'just war' simply a way of justifying aggression or is it a moral position to take?" An insightful bitesize audio treat tracing the theological roots of the argument to the 5th century and St Augustine.

<https://bbc.in/3gAjw7i>

### THE CHRISTIAN AND WAR

Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones

In this sermon on Romans 13:1-7 from his series on "The Christian and the State", the famed and not-forgotten Welsh evangelical minister continues to draw out the implications of this passage by asking the question: "What is the Christian position on fighting in war?" Lloyd-Jones leaves no stone unturned as he examines the best arguments of pacifists and offers extensive critique of the position.

<https://bit.ly/mljsermonwar>

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