

*CND and the faith community - working for the cause of peace and disarmament*

*Contributed by Pat Gaffney, General Secretary of Pax Christi at CND 60 Anniversary Event, Portcullis House, Westminster 21 February 2018*

Last night there was a debate in the House of Lords on nuclear weapons and the Nuclear Weapon Ban Treaty in particular. Bishop Stephen Cottrell, Bishop of Chelmsford, well known in CND and peace circles spoke passionately:

*“The truth is that these weapons of mass destruction are also weapons of mass deception. They provide the illusion of security while actually making the world less secure than ever”*

He also referenced a post WWII speech on nuclear weapons, given by the then Bishop of Chelmsford, H A Wilson - long before CND came into being. After his speech Bishop Wilson said:

*“Nobody took the slightest notice. I sat down in dead silence and I was conscious that all the noble Lords considered that I had made an ass of myself. Well, probably I had, but the ass’s burden no longer included an uneasy conscience”.*

The ass’s burden has been carried by many, including CND and its members, many of whom are people of faith - forging from its origins a strong link between the two communities.

The first Chair in 1958 was Canon John Collins who expected a ‘*short, sharp, vigorous campaign*’... well not quite so short, here we are sixty years on!

Then in 1959 the establishment of a Christian Group of the Campaign, still going strong today as Christian CND.

Through the 60s-90s clergy of varying denominations took on roles and added their voice to the common cause of nuclear disarmament. The Church of Scotland, (Rev John Ainslie, Alan McDonald, as one-time Moderator) Anglicans (Bishop Tony Dumper, Canon Paul Oestreicher, Rev Sidney Hinkes, Rev David Platt. Roman Catholics, Bruce Kent, Archbishop Keith O’Brien, Bishop Thomas McMahon - with CND, providing a platform and a space for Church voices to come on board and bring the teachings and visions of the Gospel to the debate at the time.

Equally important is CND’s challenge to faith communities - especially since early 2000s, working more thoughtfully to engage those communities in political campaigning and advocacy. Around Trident Replacement campaigning resources and arguments were produced that wove the humanitarian, economic, moral and legal arguments about Trident and nuclear weapons into the existing traditions and teachings of people of Faith on matters of war and peace

Co-operative work has been undertaken with the likes of Pax Christi, FoR, Christian CND, Quakers, Muslim Council of Britain, Anglican Pacifists, Religions for Peace, the Buddhists, the Joint Public Issues Team - to bring nuclear issues and Trident in particular into the

agendas of Synods, Assemblies, Council and Conferences but more importantly **into** local churches, meetings, mosques through education and awareness raising projects. This has encouraged faith communities in their political advocacy, witness and nonviolent direct actions.

The *No Faith in Trident* tour in 2014 created opportunities for Quaker meetings churches and mosques to host debates with Bruce Kent.

The *Re-think Trident* campaign offered a channel for religious leaders to support moral and economic arguments of a primarily secular campaign.

The Mass CND Rally in March 2016 was a spur to Christian groups to gather in force after some years and to hear leaders from Methodist, Catholic, Anglican, Quaker and Muslim speak with one voice on a public platform of the immorality of nuclear weapons.

Since then other, complimentary initiatives have amplified the voice of faith leaders - conveying a desire for cooperation on nuclear issues, perhaps emboldened by earlier faith voices of the movement. These include

- 2015 statement of 26 UK faith leaders which stated: *Nuclear weapons violate the principle of dignity for every human being that is common to each of our faith traditions...*
- The acknowledgement the leadership of Pope Francis on nuclear issues, most especially his November 2017 statement where he drew the line under the policy of deterrence *“the threat as well as the very possession of nuclear weapons is to be condemned because they exist in the service of a mentality of fear... creating a false sense of security”* -
- The open call in December 2017 of faith leaders who affirmed the Nuclear Weapons Ban and challenged our Government to sign up to the Nuclear Weapon Ban Treaty and full circle to the debate last night in the Lords.

This relationship between CND and faith groups is a bit of a chicken and egg one: which came first? I don't think it matters. What is important is the recognition of the value and the distinct contribution of each... knowing when we can embolden and support one another to create a common call and voice which will rid our world of nuclear weapons.

Happy birthday CND. Thank you for continuing to spur us all into action!