

Commemorating the First World War: appropriate responses for peacemakers



As the BBC adds its saturation programming for the First World War centenary to the commemoration plans announced by the government I'm already feeling war weary.

How can we separate the mixed emotions that WW1 evokes in us - individually and collectively - from appropriate responses by peacemakers today? Since few will choose to stand completely aloof from local or national events I suggest that our overall attitude must be critical awareness.

Awareness first of all of our own seared consciences - appalled by the destruction of life and yet gruesomely fascinated, especially by that war. Who doesn't prefer an exhilarating marching tune - even while realising its siren deceit - to some worthy anti-war lament?

We know about lions led by donkeys, public opinion manipulated into frenzy by propaganda about the Hun, the victimisation of Belgium. This is the war which several generations have come to regard as pitiable, senseless and murderous. Yet we are even now being manipulated again. The government seems bent on a revisionist version and we suspect that this is to whip up support for the armed forces, to recruit amongst unemployed youth, and perpetuate the 'old lie' that war is useful, inevitable and conducted by 'heroes'.

We want to oppose any commemorative 'war fever' but we'll have to be discerning about how we express it. Even at this distance it is distressing to dwell on what happened, and for so many of us it is still a family story. There will be times when silence is the best way to respect that.

Critical discernment also applies to the array of cultural events and educational resources on offer. Some may be transforming. A hundred years disappear when the emotional force of a twenty-five-year-old Wilfred Owen or Vera Britain hits young people at a similarly tender age. Owen's observation that 'pure Christianity will not fit in with pure patriotism' convinced me at 17; it still does.

Exposing the truth will compel us to ask awkward questions, for example, of those planning local events. Why are we only remembering the British dead? Why are we using the pious language of sacrifice and pseudo-Christian ceremonial to disguise the reality of war? We may feel pride in an individual grandfather but, a hundred years later, what does national pride mean? Is it real - or healthy - in the 21st century? How many of today's conflicts have roots in post-WW1 treaties? What can we learn from this?

At St Paul's Cathedral recently American theologian Stanley Hauerwas suggested that we need new terminology to shake people's complacency. Suppose we spoke of the 'First World Slaughter' instead of 'First World War'?

How else can we creatively challenge the accepted narrative? We have fresh and mostly untold stories to tell - about the 1200 women who held a peace conference in The Hague in 1915, making proposals which were largely incorporated in the League of Nations; about the mutinies and industrial strikes... the Fellowship of Reconciliation, and especially about the conscientious objectors. The astonishing furore provoked in the popular press by the award of Heritage Lottery funding to the Peace Pledge Union revealed that division over patriotism and pacifism is as buoyant as ever.

And we can impart our own Catholic peace history, such as Ashley Beck describes in his article about Benedict XV. The tiny Guild of the Pope's Peace, founded in 1916, was an antecedent of British Pax Christi through Francis Meynell, a Catholic CO whose niece was one of the founders of PAX in 1936, and E.I. Watkin, its first president.

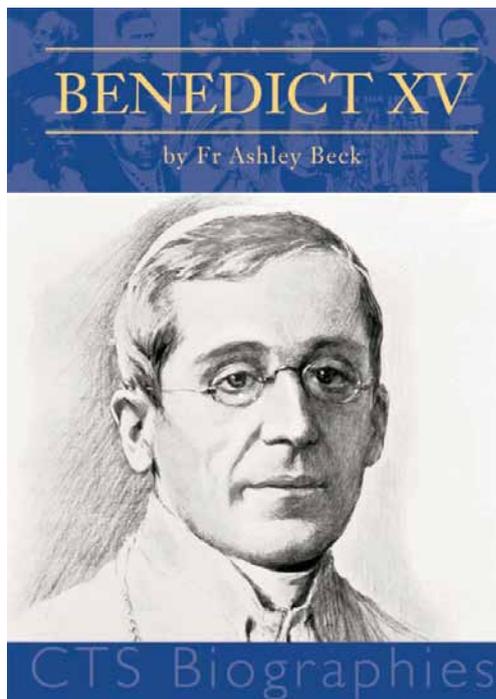
So, we approach the First World War anniversary hoping to carry out the most profound wish of that generation, especially of the soldiers, by our work to abolish war itself.

In our 'Penny catechism' contrition went together with a 'firm purpose of amendment' and a resolve, with the help of God, 'to begin a new life for the future'. A future without war should be our central objective for this centenary. Anything less will be a four-year indulgence in sentimental remembrance that leads nowhere.

Valerie Flessati

"I went on musing why it was thought better and higher to love one's country than one's county, or town, or village, or house. Perhaps because it was larger.

But then it would be still better to love one's continent, and best of all to love one's planet." Rose Macaulay, *The Towers of Trebizond*.



The centenary of the outbreak of the Great War next year gives Pax Christi an opportunity to help others reflect about the developments in Catholic teaching about war and peace sparked off by the war. A good starting point is the most neglected pope of the twentieth century, Benedict XV. His resolute opposition to the war made him a lone voice among world leaders, who largely ignored him; he was also an embarrassment to local bishops determined to be patriotic. He is neglected now because European Catholics found his message unsettling and he remains today a disturbing figure for many.

He issued many messages for the fighting to stop from the very beginning of his pontificate. Diplomatically the most important was the 'Peace Note', launched in the summer of 1917. By this time nations were weary: the Tsar had fallen in Russia, there was a new Emperor of Austria-Hungary, there had been serious mutinies in the French army and in Germany the Reichstag had passed a peace resolution. Benedict rooted much of his peace-making in Catholic devotional life and his note, sometimes known by its opening words in French, *Dès le début*, was sent to the powers on the feast of the Assumption. It begins:

"Since the beginning of our pontificate, in the midst of the horrors of the terrible war which has burst upon Europe, we have considered three things among others: to maintain an absolute impartiality towards all belligerents, as becomes him who is the common father, and who loves all his children with an equal affection; to endeavour continually to do the utmost good to all without distinctions of persons, nationality or religion, in accordance not only with the universal law of charity, but also with the supreme spiritual duty laid upon us by Christ; and finally, as is demanded by our pacific mission, to omit nothing, as far as is in our power lies, to contribute to hasten the end of this calamity by trying to bring the peoples and their leaders to more moderate resolutions in the discussion of means that will secure a "just and lasting peace". He proposed that the rule of law be restored and that the moral force of right replace the material force of arms.

This needed to be done in three stages: first, fighting should be suspended; second, there should be a reduction in armaments 'according to rules and guarantees to be established to the extent necessary and sufficient for the maintenance of public order in each State'; third, there should be international arbitration over disputed questions and occupied territories were to be restored; he also provided for the free movement of peoples and common rights over the seas. Demands for reparations and indemnities should be renounced.

In spite of the timing the pope's initiative failed and was rejected. Lloyd George's government in Britain did not even give the Holy Father the common courtesy of a reply. President Woodrow Wilson was very hostile: 'What does he want to butt in for?' was his reported reaction, although he later used some of the provisions (without acknowledgement) in his famous 'Fourteen points' the following January. Worse still than the reaction of governments was the lack of support from Catholic bishops, particularly in England - the following year Cardinal Bourne actually attacked some of the pope's proposals in a sermon in Kensington.

Benedict saw his note as part of the 'supreme spiritual duty' laid on him by Christ. His denunciations of modern warfare prefigure similar calls by his successors: he was a truly prophetic figure. As we approach the war's centenary we should read his words anew and acknowledge with penitence the lack of support he received.

Fr Ashley Beck. Assistant Priest of St Edmund's parish in Beckenham and Lecturer in Pastoral Ministry at St Mary's University College, Twickenham.

The challenging Road to Peace since World War One

To do or not to do, that is the question." Do we let the mainstream commemorate the terrible tragedy of the Great War with militaristic displays and exhortations to remember the heroes who sacrificed their lives for their country? Or do we create our own exhibition to complement the powerful Establishment but showing a different angle of how young men were sacrificed to the fallacy that war can end war.

Tavistock Peace Action Group chose to create an exhibition of about 20 panels to highlight the appalling mistake of the War and what has happened since to encourage peace between countries. We wanted to concentrate on the other side, the antiwar movement, the conscientious objectors and those who spoke out. There will be a about the 117 men of Tavistock who died in the War. Following that we wanted to show how the Road to Peace has been difficult but worthwhile with the creation of international organisations and treaties. Then there are the blocks on the Road to Peace like nuclear weapons, vetoes in the security council and the myriad of wars since and how ordinary people can be involved in making things better for the future. There will be a timeline with events along the Road.

Topics may include

- Harry Patch, "War is the calculated and condoned slaughter of human beings"
- I Vow to Thee my Country: a call to War
- Resistance to war and conscientious objectors
- Rudyard Kipling, 'If any question why we died, tell them that our fathers lied'
- Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori, Wilfred Owen and The Old Lie
- Chemical warfare leading to the Chemical Weapons Convention
- Depleted Uranium: storage/disposal/safety/usage

Road to Peace

- International: League of Nations, United Nations, European Union
- National: A glossary of peace organisations
- Local: Tavistock Peace Action Group

Blocks on the Road to Peace

- Nationalism
- Vetoes in the UN and unilateral action by Superpowers
- Arms race and the military industrial complex
- Boy/girl soldiers and the militarisation of British schools
- Lack of nuclear disarmament and Trident
- Use of torture, rendition and illegal detention

We joined the Imperial War Museum Centenary Partnership which gave access to material and links to other organisations who are preparing projects. We made a request to the Heritage Lottery Fund for £4000 and if successful will produce a booklet to complement the abbreviated posters. If we have enough money we hope to produce an edited booklet aimed at young people. However we aim to have all the background information available on our website www.tavypeace.org.uk. We hope to lend the exhibition to schools and local organisations and to build on it over the next years.

Those who wish to obtain an electronic copy of our exhibition so far, please email rupert.gude@gmail.com. You can use it as a base to create your own exhibition or display adding and deleting at will. Good luck and peace be with you!

Rupert Gude, Tavistock Peace Action Group, a small local peace group founded in 1978.



Vere Bennett died aged 33 in France. This is his memorial in St Andrews Church, Whitchurch, Tavistock. His relatives tried to make sense of this tragedy by using a Latin sentence taken from a Roman poet Horace. Translated it means 'It is sweet and right to die for one's country'.

Many people in Britain had little idea of the appalling conditions in the trenches of France. Wilfred Owen fought for most of the war and wrote one of the war's most powerful poems. Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori.

Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,
Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge,
.....

My friend, you would not tell with such high zest,
To children ardent for some desperate glory,
The old Lie: Dulce et Decorum est pro patria mori.

Resources and ideas to support 2014 - 2018 peace initiatives

A huge number of resources are being developed to mark the 2014-2018 anniversaries. The difficult task is to identify those that emphasise peacemaking rather than being purely commemorative. Below are some initial suggestions that may help give a flavour of what is around. Pax Christi aims to produce other resources for next year including liturgy ideas for use during memorial ceremonies/peace vigils etc, the 2017 Peace Note of Benedict XV and ideas on how schools and parishes might create peace memorials as a dedication to peacemaking beyond 2018. (If you have ideas to share with us on any of these please send them to the office). In addition we are planning a reflection day in spring 2014 which will take a critical look at remembrance, repentance and war and the challenge to peacemakers.

Resources

Opposing World War One: Courage and Conscience. A 14-page A4 briefing edited by Valerie Flessati which suggests that local and national events to mark the centenary of the First World War should also honour those whose convictions led them to oppose it. It also introduces those peace movements that were formed during World War I and offers a reading list. Produced by Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR), Pax Christi, Peace Pledge Union (PPU), Quaker Peace and Social Witness, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF). Available from the office price £1.50 (including postage).

Pax Christi petition to stop recruitment of 16 year-olds into the military. This is a simple awareness raising and campaigning tool (enclosed). Use this with schools and with your Church to stimulate critical discussion on recruitment and war - and change Government policy too.

Conscientious Objector DVD. Produced and directed by Colin Stevens this is a short but powerful DVD of the Edna Vincent Millay poem Conscientious Objector. It comes with a full print-out of the poem. A useful tool for reflection or a good discussion starter. Available from the office price £5.00 (including postage).

Benedict XV by Fr Ashley Beck. Published by CTS. Available from the Pax Christi office price £3.00 including postage.

Remember War, Make Peace. Services, reflections, prayers for Remembrance Sunday and other occasions. The book includes a free CD. Price £10.00 from Movement for the Abolition of War www.abolishwar.org.uk/ or Tel: 01235 526265.

Web-based resources

WWI Centenary Peace is a webpage hosted by the Network for Peace. It has a Calendar of national and local peace initiatives that are being planned and you can sign up to an e-list to be kept in touch with resources and events. Just contact mail@networkforpeace.org.uk. Do send them details of events you may be planning too. www.networkforpeace.org.uk.

No More War is a project of the Peace Pledge Union. It aims to tell the stories of men and women who objected to that war or those who, at considerable cost, refused to be conscripted into the armed forces and spent many years in jail. It has an information gathering element too where you can contribute or offer help. www.ppu.org.uk/nomorewar/index.html.

National Archive and First World War. Simple background information including useful page on the Costs of World War I in the section on Aftermath. www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/firstworldwar.

The Pearce CO Register. Database of over 16,500 WW1 COs created by Cyril Pearce. It will be posted in the Imperial War Museum website <http://www.iwm.org.uk/centenary/lives-of-the-first-world-war>, free of charge.

First World War Centenary site. This is led by the Imperial War Museum and has a huge collection of postings and resources but not necessarily with a peace focus. Parts of this are open, for example the events calendar, local, regional, national and international cultural and educational organisations. There is a members' extranet for the 1,600 local and national groups and organisations who have signed up to the Partnership scheme (Pax Christi has signed up). Useful in finding out about events planned in your area - and seeing how best to respond or participate if appropriate. www.1914.org/

First World War Centenary is the Government's own webpage on events and project. For example it gives details of the £5.3 million project to send at least two pupils from every school on a four-day visit to see battlefields and to take part in remembrance ceremonies on the Western Front. Worth keeping an eye on what is being planned. www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/first-world-war-centenary.

Events planned for 2014

National

15 May - International COs Day

12 noon ceremony round the rock dedicated to all COs in Tavistock Square London. Right to refuse to kill group. We encourage you to consider organising a local event - identifying COs from your area, perhaps inviting existing members of their family to take part. The Peace CO Register, mentioned above, may be of help.

4 August 2014 - Anniversary of day Britain entered the war

Silent vigil 12-2pm with messages 'War no More - War never again' - on steps of St Martin-in-the-Fields, Trafalgar Square, London, organised by Pax Christi, PPU, QPSW, FOR, WILPF, Peace News. Again, we encourage you to arrange local peace vigils on this day.

Government-organised events on 4 August

Glasgow Cathedral - wreath-laying and Service for Commonwealth leaders.

Westminster Abbey - Candlelit vigil of prayer and penance ending at 11pm (time when the war started).

International Peace Event Sarajevo, June, 6-9th, 2014

From a World of War and Violence to a Culture of Peace and Nonviolence. Organised by a coalition of groups this gathering will include talks, workshops and roundtable discussions on the theme; a Peace trail, a music and film festival and an International Youth Camp (Pax Christi hope to take a group of 18 - 30 year olds) You can read more on an English language webpage here www.peaceeventsarajevo2014.eu

Pax Christi Peace Pilgrimage.

We will be working with other Pax Christi sections to organise a simple pilgrimage in 2015. We will keep you informed of these plans.

Diary

23 November, Wolverhampton

Multi Faith Conference on Forgiveness, St Peter's Collegiate Church, St Peter's Square, Wolverhampton WV1. 10.00 - 1.00pm followed by light lunch. Contributions from: Ven Tejwant, Bhai Sahib Mohinder Singhe, Rabbi Harry Jacobi, Barry & Margaret Mizen, Ram Aithal, Tariq Jahan. Chaired by Bishop Clive Gregory. Free. Contact admin@wifrn.org.uk

25 - 28 November, Wolverhampton

Display on the Forgiveness Project 10.00 - 3.00pm daily at St Peter's Collegiate Church.

1 December, Barnet, Advent Peace Carol Service

Advent Peace Carol Service at Mary Immaculate and St. Peter's Catholic Church, 63 Somerset Rd., New Barnet, EN5 5.30pm. Speaker: Pat Gaffney, Pax Christi

Followed by mulled wine and mince pies with goods from Traidcraft, Cafod, Pax Christi and St. Joseph's Pastoral centre on sale.

9 December, London

Pax Christi Annual Advent Peace Service at 7.30, St Aloysius Church, Phoenix Road, Euston. Music will be led by Julie McCann. Followed by alternative Christmas Market with fair trade goods, stalls from Palestine, Peru and Africa and lots more and mulled wine too.

10-12 January 2014, Derby

Squaring the circle: is conflict resolution possible in the 21 Century. A Christians Aware conference at Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick, Derbyshire. Speakers include David Porter, Sara Savage, Rachel Stephens. Booking on 0116 254 0770 or email barbarabutler@christiansaware.co.uk

19 January, National

Pax Christi Peace Sunday. Please ensure that your parish celebrates Peace Sunday in some way and helps to support the work of Pax Christi. Resources available on the website or from the office.

25 Jan - 2 Feb. National

Poverty and homelessness action week. More information here www.actionweek.org.uk

14-16 Feb 2014, Derby

Joint FoR and Student Christian Movement conference with theme "Peace, Power and Protest: Prophets for a new world" speakers, panellists and more Pax Christi is involved in the Conference. Cost £50.00. Open now for bookings via www.movement.org.uk/peacepowerprotest#.UnJEZ_nlYpY

Report from the office

We are delighted to welcome Peter Hickey to our office team with the role new of Publications Coordinator and Member Support. Peter will be in the office every Monday and Tuesday and will gradually be making contact with those members and supporters who have offered to help with Peace Sunday or be representatives for promoting our resources. Peter can be contacted direct on orders@paxchristi.org.uk

Pax Christi visit to Israel Palestine

In October three of us Anne Dodd our Chair, Ann Farr, a member of Executive Committee of Pax Christi International and Pat Gaffney visited the region with the purpose of establishing closer links with Israeli based peace and human rights groups and renew contact with Palestinian friends and NGOs. It was a very full and rich visit and new contacts were made. If you would like a paper copy of Pat

Gaffney's report just contact the office or download a copy here <http://www.paxchristi.org.uk/wall1.php>

Pax Christi - Peace Sunday 19 January 2014

"Living as one family is the foundation and pathway to peace". Still almost two months to make your plans! We have created two new prayer-action cards and a great booklet full of ideas for liturgy on the day, including homily notes. Please, please approach your own parish and ensure that the day is marked in some way. As well as an opportunity to talk about the work of Pax Christi and the Pope's World Peace Day theme we have come to rely on this as a major source of income. We need you, our members and friends, to help make this happen. Order form enclosed with this mailing and materials will be on our website from mid-November.



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<https://twitter.com/paxchristiuk> and <http://www.twitter.com/PaxChristiYouth>

Keep peace alive. Remember Pax Christi when making or updating your will

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Tel: 020 8203 4884 email: info@paxchristi.org.uk www.paxchristi.org.uk

Pax Christi – Our Values

Pax Christi members live by the biblically inspired values of **Peace, Reconciliation, Nonviolence.**

These values are supported by the witness of peacemakers down the ages and the experience of the Pax Christi community.

Pax Christi is rooted in Catholic Christianity but is open to all who are in sympathy with its values and work.

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