

“And what did we learn? The challenge to peace makers commemorating First World War

Notes from presentation by Pat Gaffney, General Secretary, Pax Christi.

I want to start with three short reflections - a personal starting point.

As a child I heard more about the East Rising of 1916 than of the First World War ... part of the ‘culture’ of being brought up in an Irish/Scottish Catholic family, with quite another view of history. A reminder of how our worldview can be so shaped by our family background.

Every Sunday I sit in the same place at Mass.... and it is only recently that I have taken note of a simple wooden plaque on a pillar ahead of me. It carries the message “Pray for Joseph Morell who died of wounds in France, Christmas 1914”. With many thousands I too have prayed for all the dead of wars of the 20th and 21 centuries... visited the killing fields and war graves in Flanders to recall the 9 million deaths / 6,000 for every day of the week and puzzled over how best to ‘remember’. This Christmas, the simple plaque with one name left an unexpected impression on me.

Behind me each week sits David. A lovely Irish man in his late 80s - sacristan and helper in the Church. We chatted after midnight Mass and he recalled a Christmas in the 1950s when he was serving in the army in Korea. Then he said, “but I should not be telling you this... you work for peace, you won’t want to talk to me again”. I laughed it off and said of course I would always talk to him! But I was saddened by his word. Why would I stop talking to him because he had once served in the army? What perception does he have of me/ of peacemaking that he felt the need to say this? That someone would assume that peacemakers would not engage/dialogue/see the person, stand in their place is a challenge to me in how I present myself and my work.

So much of our world view is determined by where we come from, where we stand/sit....Only as a young adult did I become more aware of the jigsaw of wars... pieces fitting together across continents to capture a picture of a particular time in history. I think that the commemorations during these coming years will bring challenges to us all. We will all have our ‘histories/stories/ connections with the events of the First World War and we will all have our views on what ‘Remembrance’ is about and how it should, or should not be marked.

What I want to do in this afternoon is

- to look at some of the less-well known stories of the First World War... of peacemakers and their stories, to see how these might encourage and inspire us to continue the task of peacemaking.

- begin to explore how these stories might be celebrated and commemorated

- look at some of the contemporary issues for peacemakers that point to the systems/institutions that still allow the war machine to do so much damage to our global community.

19th and 20th century peace efforts and movements pre-date 1914. In 1816 the Peace Society was founded for the promotion of permanent and universal peace. The Society coordinated campaigns against the war in the Crimea and in South Africa - the First and Second Anglo Boer Wars. The Society survived until the beginning of the FWW

One of the secretaries of the Society was Henry Richards, a Welsh nonconformist, a devout Christian and pacifist, who became a Liberal MP Liberal member of parliament for the Merthyr Tydfil. Over one million people signed a petition he launched calling for a permanent system of arbitration to solve conflict between countries nonviolently

In 1901 **Keir Hardie**, founder and first parliamentary leader of the Labour Party, was interviewed for a foreign newspaper and asked what he felt was the chief danger in the new century. See his reply: "*Militarism. It distracts attention from social questions, subordinated the rights of the civilian to the imperious rule of the soldier, increases taxes, interferes with trade and commerce and glorified war... it is a contradiction of the principles of Christianity*" (in Keir Hardie, Labour's Greatest Hero by Bob Holman)

The international socialist movement, already mobilised on worker rights, spoke out against war: The 1907 the Congress of the Second Socialist International in Germany resolved "*should war break out... it is their (the working class's) duty to intervene in favour of its speedy termination...*" (Peace Diary, 2014)

The women's suffrage movement too was well placed to mobilise. Linking work for peace with the women's movement was clear and obvious to internationalists on the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies... the British wing of the International Women's Suffrage Society - drawing up appeals to urge the British Government to remain neutral and to mediate between Austria-Hungary and Serbia .^{*} Other women's organisations, the Women's Cooperative Guild and the Women's Labour League joined then in organising a Women's Peace Meeting in on 4 August 1914. Two thousand women were in the hall and hundreds gathered outside. That same night war was declared!

Once war had broken out, words and messages of solidarity began, including this written to the women of Germany and Austria by **Emily Hobhouse** and signed by 100 British women suffragists, Christmas 1914: "*[T]he brunt of modern war falls upon non-combatants, and the conscience of the world cannot bear the sight ... Do not humanity and common sense alike prompt us to join hands with the women of neutral countries, and urge our rulers to stay further bloodshed?*" Emily Hobhouse had campaigned against the Boer War and her attempts to build bridges between Germany and Britain were rejected... perhaps this accounts for the title of the book on screen.

Sadly, the movement was to become divided by the war: indeed on 7 August 1914 an amnesty was granted to all suffragettes in jail... the expectation being that they would put their energy into the war effort. Many including Millicent Fawcett and Emmeline Pankhurst believed that it was more important to support the Government and the war effort...and that this might eventually strengthen their case. There must have been **huge pressure** to conform and women were probably targeted as key allies in helping with recruitment/fostering patriotism as well as being drawn into the labour market, including armaments production.

Others, including **Catherine Marshall**, Maude Royden and Sylvia Pankhurst moved further towards socialist and pacifist views. Sylvia Pankhurst is recorded as saying that with the war '*a thousand leagues had intervened*' between herself and her mother. (Keir Hardy by Caroline Benn)

Despite major internal and external difficulties a Women's International Congress was planned in The Hague (Netherlands was neutral) in April 1915. 1200 women from 12 countries participated to discuss how the war could be ended. 180 British women were due to travel by boat to Holland...some had been issued with passports (newly introduced) However, just one week before the **Home Office** cancelled these. After much negotiation Catherine Marshall managed to secure twenty-four passports but arriving at Tilbury they found that all shipping had been halted... only three British women succeeded in getting through. In the months following delegates visited 14 countries meeting 24 influential leaders... calling for continuous mediation to neutral to end the way... many of the women's proposals were taken up by President Wilson in his Fourteen Points which laid the foundations for the League of Nations. An international Congress was held in Zurich in 1919 and women's movements came together under one name: the Women's International League for Peace & Freedom, the oldest women's international peace organisation still functioning today.

Liverpool connection: **Maude Royden** born in 1876, the daughter of the ship-owning Conservative MP from Liverpool, Sir Thomas Royden. She was a regular speaker for the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies from 1908. She joined the 'peace' side of the movement and became the secretary of the Fellowship of Reconciliation with other Christian Pacifists. When the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom was established there, she became the vice-president. (She had intended to attend the women's peace congress in the Hague in 1915 that year but was unable to do so when travel via the North Sea was forbidden) (*Most Dangerous Women: Anne Wiltsher*)

Others too rallied against the war - those we are most familiar with would be the COs. At the start of the war recruitment was voluntary. In November 1915 the No Conscription Fellowship was formed - the idea of Lilla Brockway, wife of Fenner Brockway. Apart from the USA no other country in the war formed such an organisation. Conscription was seen to be the norm. When the Military Service Act was introduced in 1916 - to legally force men to enlist, the NCF campaigned for a conscience clause which allowed Cos to argue for their exemption at a tribunal. Of the 16,000 who claimed exemption very few were granted. Some 6,000 were imprisoned - 80 died.

Some Cos were absolutists - Refused to obey or cooperate in any way with military orders... following tribunals most of these were sent to prison or into military camps where they were often treated brutally. (*Experience of George Dutch.. refused to wear uniform.. taken to top of cliff in November... , left in tent for 10 days only singlet/pants/socks... from PPU podcast*)

Then in July 1916, Home Office Service began-offered a chance to leave prisons and work in labour camps/ on the land... some accepted this - saw it as a stop on the way to prison reform

Others took Non Combatant status, 10 K served in this way... manual labour/medical teams. Out of this Friends Ambulance Unit was formed... huge humanitarian service to soldiers on all sides, doing jobs no else would touch!

Motivation ranged from political to humanitarian and religious. As this image shows, the idealism on 'international brotherhood; would have been a strong motivation. Among religions were Quakers, Primitive Methodists, Christadelphian and to date we estimate around 90 Roman Catholics. Now we can only wonder at how these men, and in some cases, their families too, were treated. Such positions would have been very counter-cultural within society and mainstream churches.

We have found that in Liverpool CB there were 273 Cos, we have identified three of these as Catholics. John Collins, 36, a hairdresser who served time in W Scrubs and Shrewsbury. Thomas Hanon, 27, who served time in Wandsworth and Hull and Arthur Robert Walls, 29, a Church furniture designer who served time in W Scrubs and Ipswich. Another was William Denis Eden an artist -born in Liverpool and lived near Oxford. One of his works of art is now in the House of Commons.

We have also found three brothers from Nelson: Peter, Tom and James with an Irish background, anti-war family history. Buried at Barrowford Catholic Church. Where did these young Catholics find support? What helped to form them? How were they sustained in their witness? These are stories that need to be unearthed as part of the commemorations. (Mention database)

While searching I found another little story of resistance from Liverpool. Dr Stanley Mellor was a Unitarian Minister from Hope Street Church, Liverpool. Painfully conscious as a pacifist of being shunned by the overwhelming majority of his fellow citizens who supported the war delivered these words in a sermon sometime between 8 November 6 December 1914 “ *I know that my voice is only one, one with little influence... but if many will not listen, I would speak to the few. Therefore, you lonely idealists, dreamers, believers in humanity, seekers after good, pursue your sincere idealists road, dream your dreams.* (From *Semi Detached Idealists, The British Peace Movement and International Relations 1854 - 1945*, Martin Ceadel, OUP)

Some Christian responses. This image of **The Great Sacrifice**: James Clark (1858-1943) gives us one picture of what the Church/Christian culture of the day was presenting. Hardly a true representation of the reality of war... yet probably a huge comfort to families of soldiers who had died in the first - then subsequent years of war. This was replicated in all sorts of ways, on cards, in magazines, in stained glass windows as this one. This photograph is from the parish church of St Laurence in Hythe. Comment: The figure of Christ reinforced the belief in the validity of the cause and the sanctity of sacrifice. Indeed, Clark painted a second picture, *The Greater Reward*, showing a dead soldier holding the hand of an angel as they ascended from the battlefield to heaven. Bishops were blessing

And the Catholic Church? Little has been made of the role of the mediation work of **Pope Benedict XV** during the First World War. With large numbers of Catholics involved in all sides Benedict called for prayer to end war 1 September 1914 and with Cardinal Gaspari worked with dogged persistence to stop the war from spreading... with a particular focus on Italy and the USA. In the run-up to Christmas 1914 Benedict called for a ceasefire.... It seems that Britain, Germany and A-H were sympathetic the French and Russians were not. In early 1915 he called for prayer for peace saying “ *We proclaim it without modification ... open condemnation of every injustice, no matter where committed*”. In

some places the call for prayer mis-used for national purposes.. with Belgian and French clergy urging prayers: *for conditions honourable to our Fatherland*

Cardinal Bourne, Arch of Westminster, was anxious that the Pope should not 'antagonise the B government' and was less than enthusiastic about the Pope's peace efforts...*see quote on screen*

By May 1915 Italy had entered the war, this too was opposed by Benedict. In July 1915 he issued his Apostolic Exhortation "*To the Belligerent Peoples and their Rulers...*" In the same year the Dutch sent an envoy to the Pope to foster plans for a peace conference in The Hague... seeing the Holy See as creating opportunities for peace efforts with a "league of neutrals", Netherlands, Spain, the Swiss and perhaps the Americans. In June 1915 he received a visit from two American women, Jane Adams and Alice Hamilton Batch, fresh from their own Peace Conference in the Hague. Reports tell us they received a positive reception from the Pope.

A group of Catholics formed the Guild of the Pope's Peace.. Francis Meynell and Stanley Morison, calling loyal Catholics to support Benedicts pleas for peace... "The voices of thousands must speak as one" and they also published a *Little Book of Prayers for Peace*. Not a single bishop supported them.

In 1917 the Vatican offered itself as a medium of communications between Germany and Great Britain.. the B Gov were prepared to use this... German Government felt unable to join and moment was lost. 1917 issued Peace Note, went to all parties but vry badly received. No formal response was made by UK government and response from USA was actually hostile.

However, these initiatives did strengthen diplomatic links with the Vatican... Britain made permanent its mission in 1919 and Germany and France in 1922 and in his 1918 speech, *Peace without Victory* some commentators feel that President Wilson's 14 points were close in content and formulation to the 1917 Peace Note.

...(Benedict XV The Pope of Peace: John F Pollard) and (Benedict XV by Fr Ashley Beck) and (Papal Mediation during First World War, Robert Althann, Irish Quarterly Review, Irish Province of Jesuits, Vo 61. Autumn 1972 on-line version and Tablet archives

On to = And what did we learn?

War is something to be lamented of/repented of.... JP11/ Benedict and now Francis remind us that war is a failure for humanity... In the Peace Sunday message today we hear that we Francis state : *I appeal forcefully to all those who sow violence and death by force of arms....give up the way of arms and go ant and meet the other in dialogue, pardon, reconciliation to rebuild justice, trust and hope around you!*

Clear enough... but danger that with four years of '**Remembrance**' we may be drawn down a different path as Valerie Flessati warns here "*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"*

Instead, we see the polar opposite of this: a continual investment in, resort to, defence of and sometimes even a celebration of militarism and warfare. We have seen in recent years decisions to go to war, to intervene militarily, taken as a first, not a last resort. We see very dangerous links between militarism and 'making it' as a political leader leadership and militarism...Thatcher and the Falklands; Blair in Iraq, Cameron in this image with Libya.... "here Cameron found himself in the vanguard of a pivotal moment...catapult him to even greater international profile.."

Look at what this is costing the world globally - \$1.7 trillion - even during the international debt crisis/austerity measures... WMS is held and increases

Here, the UK we are the 4th largest military spender. The defence budget for 2013 was set at £40 billion and you will all be aware of the spats that are taking place between the MoD and DfID about the MoD seeking to claw money from the £12 billion overseas aid budget. We have also committed £100 billion in the coming years to developing the Trident nuclear weapons programme - what the Government refer to as an insurance policy against an unknown future.

It is strange that in these days of austerity and welfare cuts, military spending appears to be protected

Then there is the role of the global arms trade - aggressive re-armament in 21st C - and our part within it. We rank 6th among the supplier list, and 2nd within Europe. This is something our political leaders love to praise and laud - how great we are. It is a trade that is promoted by high-level political and Royal delegations, attempts perhaps to add a kind of 'legitimacy' to it all. We run arms fairs, exhibitions where 'battlefield proven' weapons systems are displayed to democratic governments and dictators alike.

The most recent 'tool' within the military tool-box are armed unmanned aerial vehicles - Drones. The first British drone strike from UK soil was carried out at the end of April from RAF Waddington in Lincolnshire. Pax Christi believe that the use of armed drones is a new challenge to the morality of warfare. Prof Paul Rogers of Bradford School of Peace studies suggests that we may be entering a time when '*boots on the ground*' are out but '*drone strikes from the skies*' are in.

Challenging values....Welfare or warfare?

We have to talk about the real causes of insecurity/conflict in our world; Poverty and marginalisation/ Environmental destruction/ Resource wars. No nuclear or conventional weapon can resolve these issues!

Continual support for militarism/military budgets actually take resources away from these areas/research and development into alternatives.

Do we want welfare or warfare?

Up to us in our churches, groups, schools to make these points/put them on local and national political agendas.

So... support for the Global Day of Action on Military Spending would be a good place to start (15 April 2014) Pax Christi is a part of this project.

Challenging Assumptions - Militarism

This is a more difficult area - greater sensitivities around. But we must try to engage in a discussion that will demythologise the military as being almost 'sacred' in our society.

Images like this one that equate religious imagery/sacrifice with weapons of war!

Unquestioning support for the ever-growing number of charities to help the military that really play on our emotions.... First, the question: if these young people need support/health care.. why is the government that sent them to war not covering this? Second, the reality that the government tends to use these young people and 'their sacrifice' to seek support for recruitment to armed forces.. support for armed forces and I think this is dishonest.

Linked with this the growing number of museums/exhibitions/projects that promote the military.. the access that the armed forces have to our schools, games, arms fairs, now the £2.00 coin of Kitchner... and no doubt more such project in the months ahead.

Imagine peace

As people of faith we will need to draw upon and affirm our own symbols and images of peace that tell a different story and we have many from scripture to Christian tradition and lives of people who have chosen a different path.

When it comes to 'remembering' the First World War: we need to lament/repent of / seek forgiveness for that, and other wars. We may need to re-examine what 'sacrifice' means to us as Christians...How is the self-giving sacrifice of Jesus, the redemptive nonviolent suffering of Jesus different to the meaning given to sacrifice in warfare, to redemptive violence?

Support right to refuse to kill

One very practical thing we can do is to tell the story of Cos from the FWW... some of whom I have mentioned who come from Liverpool but the 16k others.... And affirm their choice and their sacrifice... but not to leave it there. The issue of CO s alive in many countries today and young people pay a high price for their act of conscience as with this young man here in Israel.

So we can all find ways of making International CO Day on 15 May... this year and in the years to come...

Remembering war... committing to peace

Will be the key challenge to our church communities and church leadership. What sort of 'tone' will be offer? How might we work with those planning civic events to ensure that the tone is not one of glory/winners/patriotism/ but one of learning, sadness, inclusive of all who die in wars, committing to peace!

4 August 2014 will be the 'starting' point for government events. National events are planned in Glasgow and London and the peace movement is suggesting that hour-long silent vigils be held in town centres on that day.

One very practical thing you can all do today is to sign our petition to stop the recruitment of under-18s into the armed forces. The gravestone here shows the name of a young man who lost his life at 15 years of age! Surely we honour him and the thousands of others who lost their lives in the FWW by ensuring that no young people today are lost to war and the preparations for war.