

The People of the Cross? Blessing of a Cross of Shells by the Archbishop of Canterbury at the Afghanistan War commemoration service, St Paul's Cathedral, London, Friday 13 March 2015

Alastair McIntosh

the Friend **INDEPENDENT QUAKER JOURNALISM SINCE 1843**

CONTENTS VOL 173 NO 17

Quaker questions Justin Welby

THE QUAKER writer and broadcaster Alastair McIntosh has questioned the role of Justin Welby, the archbishop of Canterbury, in blessing a cross that was made out of used shell casings.

In a letter to the archbishop, Scottish Friend Alastair McIntosh challenged Justin Welby's participation in blessing 'a cross made out of used shell casings, used to kill our fellow humankind'. Justin Welby made the blessing at an event to commemorate the war in Afghanistan.

Alastair McIntosh wrote to the archbishop: 'I appreciate the wrestled depth of prayer you must have given this. But how will it be seen by the jihadists? What message will they take from this day's images? What signs to read of what we have become? Consider. Salutes and eyes directed to the Heavens as clattered warplanes shotgun rode St Paul's Cathedral.'

The Quaker writer added: 'Jesus never taught "just war" theory. He only taught nonviolence. That is the deeper meaning of the Cross that we might "sin no more", this third millennium. One of your dear priests

said to me last week: "Paul was once Jihadi John." I pray that all of us be dazzled on that war-strafed Damascene road.'

Alastair McIntosh's 'Thought for the Week' in *the Friend* on 6 March questioned whether Christians in Britain were living up to being called 'People of the Cross' in the wake of the beheading of Coptic Christians in Libya. A copy of the article published in *the Friend* was sent to the archbishop.

In his recent Easter sermon, delivered at Canterbury Cathedral on Sunday 5 April, Justin Welby offered a different message from that conveyed by his earlier blessing of a cross made from used bullets. Reflecting on the recent massacres of Christians in Kenya and Libya, he said: 'Christians must resist without violence the persecution they suffer and support persecuted communities, with love and goodness and generosity.'

Alastair McIntosh said that he was heartened by this in a *Thought for the Day* broadcast on BBC Radio Scotland on 7 April.

the Friend, 17 April 2015

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This PDF file also contains:

1. Picture of the blessing of the cross of used shell casings and military helicopter flypast of St Paul's Cathedral at the event.
2. Letter from Alastair McIntosh to Archbishop Welby
3. Article about the "Islamic" State beheadings published in *The Friend*, sent to Welby.
4. Standardised letter of reply from Archbishop Welby's correspondence unit.
5. Archbishop's sermon as delivered at the Afghanistan service.
6. Alastair McIntosh's BBC Radio Scotland *Thought for the Day* reflection.
7. *Note 1*: the Archbishop's Easter Sermon striking a different pitch on violence is at <http://goo.gl/gqtQTC>. Report, was lead item on BBC news, at <http://goo.gl/VwuGmc>.
8. *Note 2*: CNN Interview with Coptic Bishop Angaelos who influenced Archbishop Welby's views is at <http://goo.gl/JoWJX6>. *Christian Today* report with Copts' family affirmation of forgiveness: <http://goo.gl/FUX0gH>.

Service of Commemoration, Afghanistan War St Paul's Cathedral, Friday 13th March 2015



A cross made from used artillery shell cases is brought to the altar by servicemen (John Stillwell/Pool)

<http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/royal-family-attend-service-commemoration-british-troops-who-served-afghanistan-photos-1491809>



<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2993992/It-s-insult-say-families-SNP-chief-Nicola-Sturgeon-snubs-Afghan-war-memorial.html>

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Friday, 13th March 2015

Archbishop Justin Welby
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Dear Justin Welby

I hope you will accept my seeming informality, addressing you according to the hallowed Quaker way. You probably won't know of me, though your predecessor warmly used my work when writing about climate change in witness for the Copenhagen Summit. For the past seventeen years, I have guest lectured on the Advanced and now the Higher command & staff courses at the UK Defence Academy, as well as at other European institutions. I find that their integrity is not in question, our difference being not of ends, but means.

Last week in *The Friend*, following the beheading of the Coptic Christians, I wrote a piece on whether we live up to being called, *the People of the Cross*. I enclose a copy.

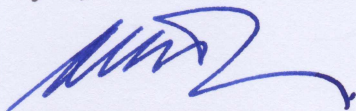
Would you read it? I ask, unable to find sleep tonight. Quaking at the news today about the service to commemorate the Afghan War. The BBC's report of how you blessed a cross made out of used shell casings, used to kill our fellow humankind.

I appreciate the wrestled depth of prayer you must have given this. But how will it be seen by the jihadists? What message will they take from this day's images? What signs to read of what we have become? Consider. Salutes and eyes directed to the Heavens as clattered war planes shotgun rode St Paul's Cathedral. The finery of dress and robes, the kisses to the cheek, the wining and the dining in the Guildhall "... and the Almanach de Gotha/ And the Stock Exchange Gazette, the Directory of Directors/ *And cold the sense and lost the motive of action*"?

Jesus never taught "just war" theory. He only taught nonviolence. That is the deeper meaning of the Cross that we might "sin no more," this third millennium.

One of your dear priests said to me last week: "Paul was once Jihadi John." I pray that all of us be dazzled on that war-strafed Damascene road.

God bless you, Justin, in your leadership, as you survey that harrowed path. God walk you, onward *miles Christi*, pray.



Alastair McIntosh

The People of the Cross?

The Cross today might seem obscure. Not so, in the so-called 'Islamic' State's recent video of beheading twenty-one Coptic Christians. Its captions make two mentions.

The first proclaims: 'A Message Signed with Blood to the Nation of the Cross.' The red jumpsuits worn by the impending martyrs evoke Guantanamo Bay. They define the nation in question, its shadow side played out in cultic drama. They define our nation too, by special relationship.

Consider how militant Islam might see America and Britain. Historically, we have colonised them more deeply than almost any other part of the world. George W Bush launched his 'war on terror' as a 'crusade'. Initially, the war in Afghanistan was codenamed *Operation Infinite Justice* – an attribute that usurps the place of God. Tony Blair reportedly felt these wars to be a duty of his faith. So does the British state. *Dieu et mon droit*. Lest we forget.

Fast forward to 2009, and it was revealed that Donald Rumsfeld's top secret daily defence briefings on Iraq to president Bush were decorated with Bible verses. A year later, ABC News broke the story that Trijicon rifle sights – widely used by both the US and British forces – had Bible references coded into their etched-on model numbers.

Such idolatrous appropriation of the Christian faith by the god of war has left the Cross, itself, crucified. Islam, too, is in the dock, mangled in the violent spiral. The followers of Allah – that beautiful sense of God 'the Beneficent, the Merciful... the Cherisher of the Worlds' – yearn to be more faithfully heard. The Muslim Council of Britain could not be clearer. Since the *Charlie Hebdo* massacre, its website has carried this message:

'Nothing justifies the taking of life. Those who have killed in the name of our religion today claim to be avenging the insults made

against Prophet Muhammad, upon whom be peace. But nothing is more immoral, offensive and insulting against our beloved Prophet than such a callous act of murder.'

The second mention of the Cross in the beheading video speaks of Christians as, 'the People of the Cross.' Well, there's an accolade! Writing for a trending website, father John Parker points out that John the Baptist was just the first of many early Christians who were murdered by beheading. Other innocents were massacred at birth, crucified, stoned, ripped apart and roasted alive. And yet, this gentle Orthodox priest reminds us: 'The saints prayed for their torturers, and relentlessly clung to Christ. To my knowledge, there are no recorded acts of violence returned for violence.'

From such a soil as this our Quaker Peace Testimony grew. Here is the Cross that radiates divine compassion – the cosmic *karunā* that absorbs and transfigures all the violence of the world. Hell shrinks before such love. Resurrection is intrinsic, for such is the reality that stands outside of space, of time.

A line left in a letter from Norman Macleod, an old lobster fisherman, a south Harris Presbyterian, echoes through my mind.

'My God, Alastair, *inhabiteth* eternity.'

Imagine, if you or I were led along some lonely beach, its waves awash with martyrs' blood. Single file. Jumpsuits. How might we plead before our executioners? What testimony might we leave, to echo and transfigure in their dreams?

Would we merely shiver? Or might we quake?

Whither our Peace Testimony today?

Let these beheadings be a wake-up call.

Je suis... the People of the Cross.

Alastair McIntosh
Glasgow Meeting



LAMBETH PALACE

David Grier

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Our Ref: 23065

18 March 2015

Dear Mr McIntosh,

The Archbishop of Canterbury has asked me to write thanking you for your recent letter and to reply. Much as he would like to be able to, he very much regrets that the pressures on his time make it impossible for him to reply personally and in detail to all the hundreds of letters and emails that he receives.

An enormous number of people have written to Archbishop Justin giving him their views and making suggestions, or just sharing their experiences. The contribution of regular Christians to the life of the Church is vital, and the Archbishop is grateful to you for taking the trouble to write.

With regards to the Archbishop's recent sermon at St Paul's Cathedral to mark the end of combat operations in Afghanistan, military conflict is an issue that ceaselessly provokes strong feelings on all sides of debates, and the Archbishop is more than aware of this.

However, the Archbishop was not glorifying war, but did give thanks and remembrance to all those who have served in our nation's defence forces and have served abroad in military operations in Afghanistan. Our military personnel are second to none, and their bravery and sacrifice must be acknowledged and not be forgotten. That is why the Archbishop has backed the Evening Standard's Homeless Veterans Appeal – because we must remember to help those who have chosen to help defend our nation's freedoms and values.

I attach a copy of the Archbishop's sermon for your perusal.

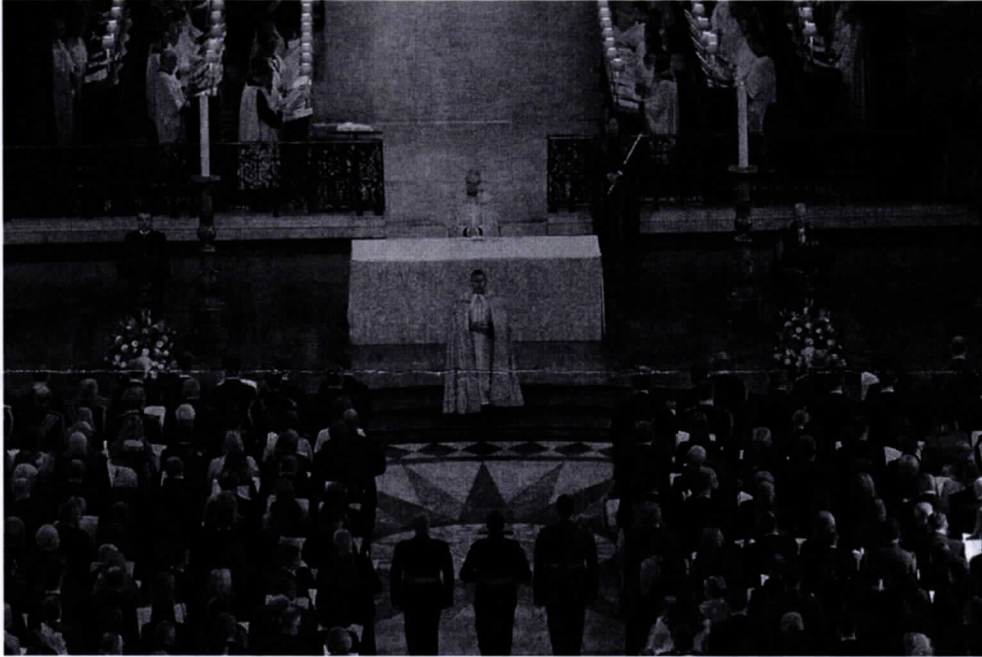
Thank you again for taking the trouble to write to the Archbishop of Canterbury with your concerns, and also for your kind words which are much appreciated. Archbishop Justin has asked me to say he will remember you in his prayers and thoughts.

Yours sincerely,

Archbishop of Canterbury's sermon at Afghanistan service

Friday 13th March 2015

Sermon preached by Archbishop Justin Welby today at a service at St Paul's Cathedral to mark the end of combat operations in Afghanistan.



Lamentations 3:22-33; Matthew 5:1-12

'Great is your faithfulness,' says the prophet Jeremiah, turning to God in a time of deep distress.

As our nation honours at this service all of you who served in Afghanistan – forces personnel and many others, alongside so many of other nations – I ask you to hear those same words today, reverberating around our land: great is **your** faithfulness. You know about faithfulness.

Today is a moment for us to say thank you: thank you to all who served, whatever your role.

We thank you for your faithfulness: you who left family behind, you who trained hard, you who did not turn from danger, you who suffered injury and you who risked yourselves to care for the injured. I'm told that each wounded person was supported by up to 80 others by the time they got home. Great is your faithfulness.

We also thank those of you who stayed behind, who let your loved ones go: you who worried for their safety each day and took your phone to your bedside each night, you who lived with the pining of children, as well as your own fears. Great is your faithfulness.



And we honour the faithfulness of all those who gave up their lives to give peace and security for others. We will remember them and we recognise them, not only by saying thank you but by showing our thanks – with words and also in action: as we strive to imitate their self-giving, as we seek to be as courageous in living as they were in dying.

As we seek to fulfill the words of Jesus in the beatitudes: where the promise of blessing is not something warm and fuzzy to keep to ourselves but something that is found in our giving and our sharing – in comforting those who mourn, in thirsting for righteousness, in peace-making.

It is no light matter to say 'Great is your faithfulness', if we realise what faithfulness costs, and dare to commit ourselves, for decades to come, to the same faithfulness.

Jeremiah voiced these words to God after seeing his country devastated, his people killed or exiled, his city and livelihood destroyed. He who wrote those words knew suffering, he knew grief and loss: yet he spoke not of blame but hope, not of recrimination but of faith, not of anger but of love.

As Jesus died, he didn't know whether his suffering had been in vain. In sorrow, pain and agony – yet in hope – he said 'it is finished'. And because of his faithfulness, we can anticipate God's opening to us the gates of eternal life.

One day we will all, each one of us, stand before God. These are the only words we long to hear from him. They are the gold standard for all of us. "Great is your faithfulness, good and faithful servant".

Amen.

Tagged with

Thought for the Day – c. 0723, 7 April 2015 - BBC Radio Scotland

from Alastair McIntosh, a Quaker, author and independent scholar

Good Morning

Another Easter holiday has passed. It's back to work as normal – and yet, Easter should disrupt our very sense of what is “normal”.

There can be no “normal” in Kenya where, last week, gunmen opened fire, [shouting](#) at their student victims: “This will be a good Easter holiday for us.”

These jihadists have hijacked the name of Islam, to [borrow a line](#) from Robert Burns: “To murder men and give God thanks!”

Yet, how easily we recruit the name of God to war. Last month I was struck when Justin Welby, the Archbishop of Canterbury, [blessed a cross](#) that had been made from the brass casings of used artillery shells.

One wonders what jihadists made of that.

I was therefore heartened by the very different tone of the [Archbishop's sermon](#) this past Sunday. He'd been speaking with a Coptic bishop about their members who'd recently been executed by the so-called “Islamic” State in Libya.

Apparently, they died proclaiming Christ. Archbishop Welby was moved, saying: “Christians must resist without violence the persecution [that] they suffer...”

In a video, the terrorists had said their action was “a message signed with blood ... to the People of the Cross.”

It forces one to think: What might it mean for us to be, *the People of the Cross*?

Does it mean to fight violence with violence, evil compounding evil?

Or does it mean - as Christ said – to “put away your sword”? To reflect that Paul was once Jihadi John? To find that Hell cannot contain such love as this?

In another recent massacre – that of the cartoonists in Paris – people showed their solidarity by tweeting, “Je suis Charlie Hebdo.”

Easter is the transformation of the violence of the world.

Dare we pray to find the courage by which, in the words of the Archbishop's sermon, we might “resist without violence”?

Dare we even tweet it?

Je suis ... *the People of the Cross*.

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April 17, 2015

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Dear Mr Grier

Your Ref 23065 – the blessing of the Cross of Shells

Thank you for your letter of 18th March on behalf of the Archbishop. I remain concerned about the blessing of the cross made out of used artillery shells during the Afghanistan service; not least, how it might be read by jihadists of a violent nature. However, I was most heartened by the Archbishop's advocacy of nonviolence in his subsequent Easter sermon. I have said so in the attached *Thought for the Day* that was broadcast on BBC Radio Scotland the other day, and also, as reported in this week's edition of the Quaker weekly, *The Friend* (cutting attached).

Yesterday I was giving a guest lecture to senior officers in the UK armed forces on the role that nonviolence can play in resolving conflict. As part of the presentation I raised the matter of the Afghanistan service. One of the colonels in the class had been a guest at St Paul's. He told me he had found the sermon helpful as a marker of the role played by British armed forces in Afghanistan. However, he had given thought to it only as an "inner" matter. It had not occurred to him to reflect on how the event might communicate through the mass media, and perhaps be understood in the wider world in ways not intended.

Might I leave that thought for future event planning with the Archbishop and his colleagues at Lambeth Palace? I write as a Quaker, but such Established Church affairs do impact on the perception of other Christian denominations that, in the words of the ISIS beheading video, aspire to be "the People of the Cross."

Yours sincerely



Alastair McIntosh