

# Siblings of shalom

Theological reflections on  
peacebuilding



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**Cover:** Younis Al-Kafarnah and some of his family. They live in Gaza and have lost land, livestock and a daughter/sister in the ongoing conflict.

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## List of Acronyms

<b>ECONI</b>	Evangelical Contribution on Northern Ireland
<b>GBV</b>	gender-based violence
<b>ICJP</b>	Inter-church Commission on Justice and Peace
<b>PCI</b>	Presbyterian Church in Ireland
<b>PMRS</b>	Palestinian Medical Relief Society
<b>SADD</b>	Anglican Service of Diakonia and Development
<b>SSCC</b>	South Sudan Council of Churches
<b>WILPF</b>	Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

## Foreword

I write the foreword for this collection of faith stories not only in my capacity as Chair of Christian Aid Ireland, but also as an ordinary parish minister who worked in a location where peacebuilding was a daily reality.

‘Those who make peace sow the seeds of justice by their peaceful acts’ (James 3:18, Common English Bible).

Sowing seeds of justice and peace was exactly the challenge which faced my own congregation on the border of North Belfast. The parish area criss-crossed several tightly knit opposing communities – some saw themselves as Protestant, Unionist and Loyalist and others saw themselves as Catholic, Nationalist and Republican. There were deep divisions, frequent outbreaks of violence, regular rioting, community tension and serious mistrust.

Before I arrived as minister in 2000, the churches in the area – Catholic, Church of Ireland, Methodist and Presbyterian – had been working on a programme together called Moving Beyond Sectarianism. Those who were involved said it was a very difficult time when deep-felt hurts came to the surface and sharp political divisions sometimes left them feeling vulnerable and exposed. But they persevered.

Whitehouse Presbyterian Church was in a small mixed area that was referred to by one paramilitary representative as no man’s land, meaning that no paramilitary group was either defending or protecting us. In fact, it was the ideal position for us as a church and meant we were able to reach out to all sides. We were the nearest interface for the communities around us, which meant the church building was unusually vulnerable to arson.

After many failed attempts, our building was finally reduced to a shell by a firebomb in 2002.

The extraordinary thing was that from early that morning, as the building was still smouldering, the whole community began to gather. We just kept repeating to each other: ‘The church is not the building, the church is the people.’ The five neighbouring Catholic churches held a collection for us and came to present us with nearly £10,000. All our neighbouring churches came to our support. The year before, we had collected for St Bernard’s, a local Catholic church, when it was burned to the ground – we were to receive that gift back 10 times over.

On the day of the fire, a house in the neighbouring Catholic and Nationalist housing estate was attacked with a drive-by petrol bomb, allegedly as revenge for our fire. I went to visit and pray with the family, along with one of our elders. On the following Sunday, the family arrived during our evening service and presented me with a large jar full of coins and notes. The children had collected around the housing estate and all these people had given for our church. There was hardly a dry eye in the house and everyone was deeply touched at the family’s courage in coming forward.



We were determined that when we rebuilt we would not spend a million pounds on building our new worship space just for use on a Sunday. We wanted our premises to be available to the whole community. With the help of a local community development worker, we met with a seniors group from that neighbouring housing estate. They had lots of ideas, but no regular place to meet. We planned together how we would share our new premises, forming a partnership called Friends and Neighbours. The Cross Community Lunch Club that was formed then still continues in Whitehouse even if the membership has greatly changed over the intervening years.

The problems have not gone away – there are conflicts still seething beneath the surface and there are still those who choose to dissent from peacebuilding – but deep relationships have been formed and other new relationships are opening up. There is no going back for the Church of Jesus Christ as we endeavour to follow the greatest of all peacemakers, the One who, in the giving of his own body, has sought to break down the wall of hostility between human beings and God and, consequently, between each of us.

The story of Whitehouse Presbyterian Church is similar to the peacebuilding work that so many others engage in every day. Compelled by faith, they work and encourage others to move from violence to peace.

I warmly commend this document and the vital peacebuilding work that it represents.

**The Rev Dr Liz Hughes**

**Chair, Christian Aid Ireland**

## Executive summary

This paper sets out a theological underpinning and inspiration for Christian Aid's From Violence to Peace work. It uses biblical stories of sibling conflict and contemporary stories from our partners to explore some of the significant theological themes that speak to the four aims of our Violence to Peace Strategy.

These theological themes include shalom, incarnation, *Imago Dei*, and reconciliation through encounter, trust, forgiveness and justice, contemplation and action. The stories of sibling conflict we have used to examine these themes are:

- Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:1-16), which is used to explore how we can best ensure those most vulnerable to violence are kept safe, become resilient and secure.
- Amnon, Tamar and Absalom (2 Samuel 13), which brings a challenge to faith communities as well as an encouragement for their involvement in challenging the pandemic of gender-based violence.
- Joseph and his brothers (Genesis 37-50) help us explore the process of reconciliation, including the principles of encounter and trust, past and future, forgiveness and justice.
- Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38-42) lead us to consider our contemplation and action in response to violence and building peace in the world.

Each is set alongside contemporary stories from our partners which help to shape the reflections on the theological themes we have identified.



## Introduction

This paper draws heavily from biblical and contemporary stories of conflict and peacebuilding. It takes stories from scripture as a starting point and deduces peacebuilding principles from those passages and then shows how the work of our partners reflects that learning. It is written with the conviction that theology has a valuable contribution to make 'in helping people articulate, embrace and pursue a compelling vision of flourishing life for themselves and all creation.'<sup>1</sup>

We hope this resource will be used by Christians in the UK and Ireland to encourage and inspire their involvement in building peace and to enable them to engage with the work of Christian Aid partners around the world. We also hope that it will be a source of encouragement to our partners and the communities in which Christian Aid works, a means to reinforce and sustain their faith, spirituality and values. For the casual reader, we hope that this paper might provide a glimpse of how the task of building peace is something in which we can all participate as we continue to work out how best to live together as the family of humanity, to become siblings of shalom.

## Violence and poverty

For more than 70 years, Christian Aid has provided long-term support to help communities lift themselves out of poverty. At the time of writing, Christian Aid is working through partners in 19 countries where violence is a daily infringement on human rights.<sup>2</sup> Violence, in whatever way it is expressed or experienced, has been described by the World Council of Churches as a denial and abuse of life.<sup>3</sup>

Poverty itself is 'an insidious form of violence, which can scar multiple generations' and our partners across the world are witnessing the perpetuation of poverty and the regression of development because of violence.<sup>4</sup> Around two billion people live in countries affected by political and armed violence.<sup>5</sup> Thriving societies are being destroyed and millions of people are being displaced.

Poverty rates are 20% higher in countries affected by repeated cycles of violence. By 2030, an estimated 46% of the world's poor will live in fragile or conflict-affected areas.<sup>6</sup> By the end of 2017, more than 68.5 million people were displaced from their homes and livelihoods because of conflict and violence, including 41.3 million people displaced internally within 55 countries, the highest figure ever recorded.<sup>7</sup>

## Our story

While our focus on building peace has become more intentional in recent years, our beginnings were rooted in the response to conflict in Europe.<sup>8</sup> We were set up by the churches of Britain and Ireland to respond to the needs of refugees at the end of the Second World War. Former director Janet Lacey wrote that while this practical activity was 'feverishly going on, the more difficult task of reconciliation had to be tackled.'<sup>9</sup>

Our first commitment outside Europe was in response to the displacement of people in the Middle East.<sup>10</sup> We set up an emergency programme in Kenya to help those detained in the Mau Mau uprising, and built an ecumenical conference centre to bring together people of all races, classes and creeds to plan and discuss solutions to their problems.<sup>11</sup>

We were active supporters of the civil rights movement in the US and the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa. We provided support to refugees from Kosovo and helped build up civil society in Rwanda in order to foster reconciliation in the years after the genocide.<sup>12</sup>

Throughout our history, we have sought 'not only to help with social and economic problems but to be in the forefront and ready to offer love and reconciliation when bitterness between races separates communities as they struggle for justice and freedom.'<sup>13</sup>

## Siblings of shalom

Our work in peacebuilding is inspired by the Hebrew word, shalom, and of a renewed world that has become God's home, where 'all live in peace with God and creation, and all inhabit a space of joy, God's and humans'.<sup>14</sup> We understand shalom as being closely linked with justice, rightness, compassion and truthfulness. Christianity shares with other faith traditions the understanding that 'peace, understood as shalom, is so much more than the absence of conflict and war'.<sup>15</sup>

It is important to note that 'peace' has different meanings in certain contexts. For example, in Myanmar, a local partner has expressed suspicion over the word. To them, peace is often a form of government propaganda. When someone talks about peace, they view it as a step to create power that will be imposed upon them, whether they like it or not.

In South Sudan, peace might mean a list of practical indicators for interactions and transactions or the process of understanding and reconciling with the past. Both are important.

Isaac Kenyi, of the Catholic Church Justice and Peace Desk in Juba, explains that the different emphasis is because South Sudanese 'do not have the same reference points for "peace" that many international actors enjoy, they are born in war, traumatised in war, now living in war, they don't know what this thing is we call peace.'<sup>16</sup>

The siblings of shalom motif in this resource takes its inspiration from the many stories of sibling strife and reconciliation found in the book of Genesis and throughout the Old Testament. It seeks to follow the example of John Paul Lederach, renowned for his peacebuilding work.<sup>17</sup> He has drawn on Jacob and Esau's story of betrayal, journey and encounter (Genesis 27-33) more than any other biblical text in the work of conflict transformation.<sup>18</sup> Lederach uses this story to find common ground between faiths because it is shared by the three Abrahamic faiths.

Jacob had fled for fear of revenge from his brother, Esau after he duped their father into giving him the blessing Esau was entitled to. Their eventual reunion illustrates that the work of building peace is a long process. It highlights how building peace is rooted in multiple and repeated encounters, rather than being an immediate and

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Isaac Kenyi, Catholic Church Justice and Peace Desk, Juba

instant realisation. Jacob had several profound encounters that transformed him on the journey towards his estranged brother. It emphasises the importance of context in building peace. The places of Jacob's dream, his wrestling and his reunion are all significant and part of the journey to peace with Esau.<sup>19</sup>

## Stories and aims

This story of Jacob and Esau led to an exploration of what lessons could be learned from other stories of sibling strife and reconciliation in the Bible. Four stories were used to reflect on the four aims of Christian Aid's From Violence to Peace work.

The first story of violence in the Bible, Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:1-16), leads us to reflect on the first aim of our global strategy – how those most at risk of violence in our areas of engagement are less vulnerable and more safe, secure and resilient.

Aim two is reflected in the story of siblings Anmon, Tamar and Absalom (2 Samuel 13), which helps us consider how to ensure the risk of gender-based violence (GBV) is reduced, survivors receive adequate support, and women, men, and institutions are working to change the conditions which give rise to GBV.

The story of Joseph and his brothers (Genesis 37-55) is the only story that Islam shares with Judaism and Christianity that is not re-written – in the Quran, the Yusuf narrative is more or less the same story.<sup>20</sup> This becomes the lens through which we reflect on our third aim: how local communities are empowered in their calls for peace, justice, and security, peace building is inclusive and transformative, in particular for women and marginalised groups, and efforts are made to challenge the key drivers of violence, address impunity, hold perpetrators to account and inspire them to rehabilitate.

The story of Mary and Martha leads us to consider how to root our action in contemplation as we amplify the prophetic voice of our partners. This is at the heart of the fourth aim, where we speak out and challenge violence, poverty, inequality and injustice. We require the courage of our convictions to challenge oppressive structures and seek justice.<sup>21</sup>

Each of these aims is further explored through the stories of peacebuilding from Christian Aid staff and partners. Stories, as theology, 'help us to face up to our experiences, clearing away the mechanisms we all use to hide from the truths about ourselves and the world.'<sup>22</sup> We draw on personal stories to engender a sense of encounter and with the hope of humanising the important concepts that surround the work of building peace. These stories are shared with the awareness that many acts of building peace are carried out under the radar by 'quiet peacemakers'.<sup>23</sup> They are shared with the knowledge and hope that there are many more untold stories of peacebuilding happening right now across the world, and with the concerning realisation that there are also stories that we cannot tell since to do so would jeopardise the security of those involved.

## Religion and violence

The relationship between religion and violence is important, as made clear by Father Alberto, from our partner Inter-church Commission

**'We draw on personal stories to engender a sense of encounter and with the hope of humanising the important concepts that surround the work of building peace'**

on Justice and Peace (ICJP) in Colombia. He says: 'We have to take the role of religion in society and in our personal lives very seriously. It can play both a very positive and very negative role. Positive, because it can be used to change systems and negative because it can be used to legitimise the established system in the name of God. So, if we want to build peace we need to take religion and faith into account.'

It is beyond the scope of this resource to examine how religion can be both a catalyst and an inhibitor of conflict. We recognise that there are shocking examples of religiously inspired violence across the world and scriptural texts from three Abrahamic faiths have been used to incite violence.

Robin Gill writes: 'The scriptures of Judaism, Christianity and Islam (as well as other religious traditions) do have some texts that appear to justify violence... these texts need to be addressed honestly and carefully, drawing from the expertise of scholarship to contextualise them in the broader frame of peace-making.'<sup>24</sup> Gill challenges the idea that 'religious commitment inherently causes war and violence' and suggests that it has also been shown to be a significant factor in promoting peace.<sup>25</sup>

Research has shown that religion is more likely to contribute to peace if activism is a result of people of faith acting on their religious conviction, rather than responding to outside pressures from government, media and popular opinion.<sup>26</sup>

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks reminds us of this positive potential of shared religious values. He points to the common values that are a humanising force in Abrahamic monotheism, including the sanctity of life, individual dignity, justice and compassion, the moral responsibility of the rich for the poor, and commands to love the neighbour and stranger. He adds: 'The insistence on peaceful means of conflict resolution and respectful listening to the other side of a case, forgiving the injuries of the past and focusing instead on building a future in which the children of the world, of all colours, faith and races, can live together in grace and peace. These are the ideals on which Jews, Christians and Muslims can converge, widening their embrace to include those of other faiths and none.'<sup>27</sup>

## Am I my brothers' and sisters' keeper?

### Cain and Abel

The first act of physical violence in the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament is Cain's murder of his brother Abel (Genesis 4:1-10). According to Croatian theologian Miroslav Volf, this story is 'not only an example of rivalry between two brothers, it also narrates the structure of encounter between "them" and "us", it is an ancient story of how all human beings tend to behave toward others.'<sup>28</sup>

The root cause of this violence is found in the inequality between Cain and Abel. As firstborn, Cain regards himself as more important, and he reacts badly to his offering being rejected, which leads to killing his brother and breaking his relationship with God.<sup>29</sup> Tackling the root cause of inequality, perceived or actual, might have helped protect Abel from his brother's jealous anger.

### Kenyan conflict

It was the story of Cain and Abel that Christian Aid's theology adviser Bob Kikuyu drew on when he and pastors responded to the extreme violence following the 2007 Kenyan elections. Bob describes how personal the conflict became for him and his family when he and his wife were unable to travel a short distance to go and collect their children due to the threat to their own lives: 'We were too scared to go and pick up our children. We would have to pass through a tribal area opposed to my wife's tribe. And we could not go to her tribe because I would have been attacked.'

At least 1,300 people died in the post-election ethnic violence and 300,000 fled their homes.<sup>30</sup> The churches were divided along ethnic lines and conflict was brewing there as well. In response, Nairobi Cathedral, where Bob was a staff member, called for the church to come together and reconcile before organising a Caravan of Peace to help reconcile the country. He explains: 'They decided to bring church leaders together to gather in the places where the most violent clashes took place. Using the story of Cain and Abel in Genesis they would gather in those locations to silence the blood crying out as confession and call for joint action for peace.' The Caravan of Peace served as an intervention, protecting communities from further violence.

Bishop Cornelius Korir, who had many years of peacebuilding in Eldoret in Kenya, described how intervention is only the beginning: 'Reconciliation after violent conflict is a subtle, slow and often difficult process that is not just about ending observable fighting. It also involves communities recognizing the worth of others, atone for injustice, heal wounds of the spirit and commit to building a non-violent, equitable and just society. While external actors can support it, sustainable reconciliation requires an intensive focus at the grassroots by faith institutions and local civil society to build relationships of interdependence.'<sup>31</sup>

This intensive focus at the grass roots requires commitment to be with communities for the long haul and to seek to accompany them

'Tackling the root cause of inequality, perceived or actual, might have helped protect Abel from his brother's jealous anger'

towards reconciliation. It echoes the Christian theology of incarnation, when God became human in Jesus.

### **Incarnational peacebuilding**

The incarnation itself was ultimately an act of reconciliation: 'All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation' (2 Corinthians 5:18). The Word becoming flesh was a vulnerable, risk-taking move (John 1:14). In Jesus, God chose to enter into the violence of the world. It was a barrier-breaking, uniting initiative between the human and divine.

Throughout his life on earth, Jesus challenged the cultural, political, physical and religious barriers of his day, whether it was asking for drink of water from an outcast Samaritan woman (John 4:4-26), touching a leper (Luke 5:12-13), going to the home of a disreputable tax collector (Luke 19:1-10) or subverting the understanding of stranger as neighbour (Luke 10:25-37). And in his death, 'the open arms of Christ on the cross are a sign that God does not want to be a God without the other – humanity – and suffers humanity's violence in order to embrace it.'<sup>32</sup>

Jesus witnessed that a way was possible other than 'the violence that was seldom beyond the horizon in the Gospels'.<sup>33</sup> The Kenyan Caravan of Peace was incarnational in a number of ways – the pastors took a risk and made themselves vulnerable by travelling to the most volatile and wounded locations, it was costly in terms of time and finances, and it challenged and brought down ethnic barriers of division across Kenya.

### **Deep solidarity**

Incarnation can also be understood as an act of deep solidarity, which opens a window on who God is in the Abrahamic religions. In the Exodus stories, 'God is not working from the outside, employing models of charity and advocacy for those experiencing violence in Egypt; rather, God is part of the struggle. This is also made clear in the references to the Exodus in the Qur'an.'<sup>34</sup>

Practising deep solidarity puts us in a mutual and equal relationship with communities experiencing violence, helping us realise how much we share. Moving from 'privileged helping the underprivileged' to an understanding of what we have in common and that we need to work together if we want to make a difference.<sup>35</sup> Deep solidarity replies to Cain's question 'am I my brother's keeper' (Genesis 4:9) with a resounding 'Yes! As he is mine.' We are interdependent, responsible to and for each other's flourishing. "'Cain" is all the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve in relation to their brothers and sisters.'<sup>36</sup>

Father Alberto from Christian Aid partner ICJP in Colombia reiterates this, and encourages us all into deeper solidarity wherever we are: 'what happens somewhere else doesn't just happen far away, it matters because we are all brothers and sisters regardless of distance, skin colour or cultural experiences. At the end of the day, we are all brothers and sisters born of the same Father.'<sup>37</sup>

We are all siblings seeking shalom.

**'For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us'**

Ephesians 2:14



## Inter-Church Commission for Justice and Peace, Colombia

Father Alberto provides an inspirational and incarnational example of deep solidarity at work. He brought the idea of humanitarian zones to Colombia. These are areas where no weapons are permitted and where the community can live in safety. Communities are often vulnerable to violence due to unequal land distribution. In Colombia, 81% of land is owned by 1% of the population and forced displacement and land grabs have been a central part of the conflict. In 2017, Colombia had the world's largest population of internally displaced people, with 7.5 million registered. Christian Aid and its partners have worked for more than 20 years in Colombia, demanding an end to violence and calling for justice on issues of impunity and human rights violations committed in the course of the conflict.<sup>38</sup>

In ICJP's advocacy work, Father Alberto takes inspiration from how Jesus 'questioned and challenged political, religious, economical and religious powers which dominated at that time. Jesus questioned – from the roots – the established system and unjust structures. Jesus of Nazareth shows both how to fight against the abuse of power and how to find a sense of meaning in this struggle. He shows us the value of justice, equality, truth and the respect for creation and diversity. This is contrary to what many claim was the work of Jesus.'

The incarnational example of Jesus being with the most marginalised and those considered 'the least of these' (Matthew 25:31-45) has served as one of many biblical influences on the peacebuilding work of Father Alberto and ICJP.<sup>39</sup>

### Land and conflict

The story of Cain and Abel also reminds us that the land is deeply affected by conflict. Saturated with Abel's blood, the land that Cain tilled no longer yields to him its strength and he becomes a wanderer and fugitive (Genesis 4:10-13).<sup>40</sup>

Land is a significant factor in many conflicts – there are disputes over land rights and contested land grabs, and the land and environment suffer because of violence. The relationship to the land is crucial to indigenous communities. In Colombia, it has sacred significance as well as being essential for people's survival and development.

Indigenous Bolivian theologian, Sofia Nicolasa Chipana describes how bodies and territories are integrated, because the deep pain of the spirit affects the body and vice versa. This requires a sacred and holistic approach to healing and restoration.<sup>41</sup>

ICJP stands in solidarity with communities, challenging violence and seeking security of land tenure through legal and advocacy work. In 2016, a hard-won legal decision resulted in the handover of 177,817 hectares from the Colombian state to the Afro-Colombian community in Naya River Valley. This land is now home to 18,000 people from 52 communities.<sup>42</sup> The Naya land restitution was deeply significant and showed what was possible, not just for the Naya community but across the country.<sup>43</sup> This incarnational example of being in solidarity



**'We have to understand and analyse the deep meaning of the life and actions of Jesus of Nazareth. Really, what Jesus did was to reject the use of violence and used non-violence as a principle'**

Father Alberto, ICJP, Colombia

with communities and amplifying their voices for justice ensures that those most at risk of violence are less vulnerable and more safe, secure and resilient.

The Methodist Colombian theologian Elsa Tamez says: 'The society we want is one that promotes peace. Not only with respect to women, but peace in all areas of society, because violent society, while it is patriarchal, aggravates violence against women. Women want to respond to God's love that overcomes all barriers, as full partners in the fight for peace and justice, for the freedom and dignity of all.'<sup>44</sup>

This full partnership approach to peacebuilding, a peace for all that protects and involves everyone, is the focus of the next chapter and an aim of our violence to peace work.



## Of the same flesh

### Texts of terror

When we turn to the scriptures, we discover that some texts inspire horror, as they testify to the ways in which relationships between women and men are marked by sin and suffering. Like all stories in scripture, these need careful interpretation. It is important to face up to such stories and confront the challenge of GBV, both in biblical times and today. Sibling conflict in the Hebrew scriptures takes a deeply traumatic turn, with the rape of King David's daughter Tamar by her half-brother Amnon and the subsequent vengeance wrought by her brother Absalom (2 Samuel 13). It is a profoundly shocking story of violence.

This 'text of terror' has a remarkable capacity to evoke the voice of a biblical woman and the kindred voices of contemporary women who share her experience of violence and abuse.<sup>45</sup> This provides added impetus for the second aim of our violence to peace work: the risk of GBV is reduced, survivors receive adequate support, and women, men, and institutions are working to change the conditions which give rise to it in the first place.

The account describes the depths of Tamar's distress over what has happened: 'Tamar put ashes on her head, and tore the long robe that she was wearing; she put her hand on her head, and went away, crying aloud as she went (2 Samuel 13:19). She is described as 'a desolate woman' and stays in her brother Absalom's house (2 Samuel 13:20-21). The passage does not shy away from the harrowing and traumatic consequence of sexual violence, and nor should we.

When the Ujamaa Centre in South Africa has used the rape of Tamar passage in Contextual Bible Study, it has often heard the comment: 'If this story is in the Bible we will not be silent'. Tamar's remarkably articulate voice has provided vocabulary 'with which contemporary women can tell their own stories and work together to bring about the transformation of the patriarchal systems that both construct and condone gender-based violence'.<sup>46</sup>

### Violence against women

The reality of sexual violence against women in conflict today is an equally uncomfortable story, but it is not something to be avoided. A study in Sierra Leone, which experienced armed conflict from 1991 to 2002, found that up to 250,000 women and girls suffered targeted gendered violence including rape, sexual slavery, torture, abduction, sterilisation, forced pregnancy and sexual exploitation.<sup>47</sup>

However, to focus on sexual violence as a weapon of war would neglect the much broader understanding and experience of GBV. The rape of Tamar is not only a case of sexual violence, but also domestic violence perpetrated by a patriarchal system – the prince is more powerful than the princess.<sup>48</sup>

The UN estimates that almost half of all women who were murdered in 2012 were killed by intimate partners or family members, compared to less than 6% of male homicide victims.<sup>49</sup> Violence against women is endemic – 35% of women globally have

**'The rape of Tamar is not only a case of sexual violence, but also domestic violence perpetrated by a patriarchal system – the prince is more powerful than the princess'**

experienced some sort of physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime. According to the World Health Organization, violence may exacerbate and take on new forms in situations of conflict, post-conflict and displacement. These include physical violence and intimate partner violence, emotional and psychological violence, harmful traditional practices and socioeconomic violence.<sup>50</sup>

### Faith communities and GBV

When facing up to the honesty of the texts of terror and the pandemic of GBV it is vital that faith communities are also held to account. Indian and feminist theologian Aruna Gnanadason states it clearly: 'Violence against women is sin'.<sup>51</sup>

Thursdays in Black is an international movement of people who wear black on Thursdays in solidarity, to raise awareness and hope for a future without rape and violence. Its founder, the Rev Phumzile Mabizela, reminds us that tackling harmful theology is important if the world is to be changed and we need to challenge how the scriptures have sometimes been used to justify violence against women and to encourage women to be uncomplaining. She speaks strongly about how genuine faith is distorted when it is used to support any abuse of power between men and women and encourages many communities and churches to engage with Thursdays in Black.<sup>52</sup>

Most religious teachings have encouraged maintenance of traditional male and female roles, yet we recognise, through the experience of our partners, that gender equality is critical to development and fullness of life for all. The empowerment of women transforms societies; it unlocks the potential of half the world's population.

### Discussing domestic violence in Brazil

The rape of Tamar is included in a Bible discussion resource created by Christian Aid partner the Anglican Service of Diakonia and Development (SADD) in Brazil. The resource highlights that GBV against women 'is a problem that should affect us, that violence overpowers and violates the life of those who are the image and likeness of God: women'.<sup>54</sup> Tamar's story was used to emphasise the high percentage (85% at the time) of physical violence that occurs in the home, mostly perpetuated by the spouse.

In Brazil, a woman is assaulted every 15 seconds and a woman is murdered every two hours, giving the country the seventh highest rate of violence against women in the world.<sup>55</sup> Christian Aid's partners are part of a grassroots movement that is tackling this violence. Though the law has been changed and strengthened on the issue, it is not always being implemented. The patriarchal nature of Brazilian culture makes changing attitudes towards women a difficult task, and something that the law cannot succeed in doing by itself. The work of SADD encouraging discussion about GBV and of the Casa Noeli dos Santos, the only church-run safe house in Brazil, are sources of hope and inspiration.

### Elineide and Elione

The Rev Elineide Ferreira is the heart of the Casa Noeli dos Santos, a refuge for women fleeing domestic violence. It can house up to 10

**'In many countries, there is a culture of impunity for those who carry out this kind of violence. It is seen as normal, acceptable, and even Christian churches very often hide, tolerate, perpetuate and even practise violence against women'**

The Rev Kathy Galloway, former head of Christian Aid Scotland<sup>52</sup>

women and children at a time and currently helps about 150 women a year. Elineide felt called to create a refuge for women fleeing domestic violence after her sister Elione was stabbed seven times by her violent husband when she tried to leave him. Elineide helps the women in the safe house report crimes to the police. She makes legal referrals and finds schools for children who have fled with their mothers. When the women leave the refuge, she travels with them to help them feel safe. Inevitably, Elineide is drawn into their lives.

When Elineide thinks about what the women have gone through, the horror of it sometimes threatens to overwhelm her, but her faith gives her the strength to go on. Elineide has big plans for the future: 'I'd like to turn this house into a teaching centre,' she says. 'It wouldn't just be a place of welcome and safety. I'd like to offer courses to train women and give them new skills and knowledge. That way, this house can become a model for others.'

### Imago Dei

As well as facing up to the reality of GBV that the texts of terror enable, we need constructive theology that helps communities and partners respond to the scandal of violence against women. The Side by Side faith movement for gender justice, which Christian Aid helped establish, has brought together a wealth of resources to help faith leaders be instrumental in challenging GBV.<sup>56</sup> Side by Side's vision is that: 'We are united by a belief that each person has intrinsic value and dignity; every person has equal rights in the distribution of power, knowledge, and resources. All must be free from cultural and interpersonal systems of privilege and oppression, from violence and repression based on gender, so that gender is seen as gift rather than danger, a source of life and hope rather than oppression or fear.'<sup>57</sup>

In *Of the Same Flesh: exploring a theology of gender*, we took inspiration from the concept of the *Imago Dei* – all humanity is made in the image of God and every person is instilled with inherent worth and sacred dignity.<sup>58</sup>

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**'So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them'**

Genesis 1:27

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This was and is an extraordinarily counter-cultural text, that our being male and female should not be a way to divide the human community so that some oppress or are violent towards others. The *Imago Dei* offers the hope and promise that male and female are both made in the image of God and are of one flesh. God being outside the created order, begotten not made, embraces and transcends gender. Being made in the image of God celebrates our being 'one', having the same fundamental being and value, and acts as a profound challenge to all forms of GBV. This is emphasised in our oneness in Christ, which is an appeal to our common identity.

Any man who is violent towards a woman should know that he is beating 'flesh of my flesh'. Any society that cuts, abuses, discriminates against or disenfranchises women needs to hear that women are made of the same flesh as men, and that the way in



**'I don't do this for money. I don't do this for recognition. I do this to see women rebuild their lives'**

The Rev Elineide Ferreira, Casa Noeli dos Santos women's refuge, Brazil

which they relate to one another is to be shaped by that fundamental, God-given identity and equality.<sup>59</sup>

## Resisting violence

Women are far from just being the victims of violence, the contribution of women is essential in building peace as noted by Elsa Tamez above. Tamar's saying 'no' to Amnon four times, her insistence that Amnon does not send her away after he has raped her, and her loud lament after she is thrown out by Amnon (2 Samuel 13:17-19) can all be understood acts of resistance.

Juliana Claassens, a South African theologian, reminds us that 'such an outcry of anger is an important first step in resisting the dehumanising of sexual violence.'<sup>60</sup>

'The involvement of women can make or break peace processes,' says Isaac Kenyi in South Sudan. He describes the impact of woman at the Wunlit peace conference in Sudan in 1999. 'One of the things people forget was the women who made it possible for the conference to succeed,' he says. 'The men had become hot-headed after the first days so the groups were split into men and women. When the women brought their resolutions back, they said we will not bear children just for them to be killed, this was a genuine reason for the change in mood.'

More recently, the National Women's Programme of the South Sudan Council of Churches (SSCC) has made a significant and positive contribution to the reconstruction of the role of women in South Sudan and has earned the respect of all the warring sides in its efforts to stop the civil wars and lay the foundation for peace.

Professor Isabel Phiri visited the programme and describes how it 'is well known for using prayer as a tool for bridging the hatred among the tribal and political divides by organising monthly women national prayers. The prayers bring together women from opposing sides of the war and from different denominations. This is crucial because the war that started in 2013 is perceived as dividing the churches on ethnic lines.'<sup>61</sup>

In 2018, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) held a forum on the Feminist Peace Movement in Africa, attended by 250 women from 16 African countries and international WILPF sections and partners. The aim was to bring together women peace activists to address various topics, including the root causes of violence, the role of women in social transformation, economic justice and peace building, all within the context of Africa. The Forum showcased the long-standing and powerful feminist peace movement that keeps growing despite the violence and exploitation of lives across Africa.<sup>62</sup>

## Moving beyond superficial reconciliation

The Tamar text is not only a text about gender violence, but it is also about the failure of family and governmental structures to protect women and the effects of GBV on other aspects of life.<sup>63</sup> It conveys the spiral of violence in action – the perpetrator becomes the victim when Absalom has Amnon killed (2 Samuel 12:28-29). These shattered sibling relationships are exacerbated by their father

David's behaviour. David is unwilling to seek justice for his daughter because he would not punish his firstborn son. And it is his token gesture of reconciliation with his son Absalom, where he refuses to meet him face to face, that leads both to a battle bringing violence to many lives and the eventual, brutal death of Absalom (2 Samuel 18:14-15). This story of 'false reconciliation shows what happens when justice is denied while offenders are heartily embraced.'<sup>64</sup>

What then does deep reconciliation and peace with justice look like?

## Peace with justice

### Defining reconciliation

When we manage to move past the child-friendly telling of Joseph and his technicolour dream coat in musical form, we discover a story of building peace that includes elements of trust, encounter, anger, lament, truth, forgiveness and justice (Genesis 37-50). Many of these are ingredients in the 'reconciliation stew', a term coined by Joseph Liechty.<sup>65</sup> He describes this stew as including 'forgiveness, repentance, apology, justice, truth, peace and reconciliation itself', and highlights the need for a clear and shared definition of reconciliation, the lack of one is a source of considerable confusion.<sup>66</sup>

Through their conflict research in Northern Ireland, Brandon Hamber and Gráinne Kelly offered a working definition of reconciliation which put relationships front and centre: 'We see reconciliation as moving from the premise that relationships require attention to build peace. Reconciliation is the *process* of addressing conflictual and fractured relationships and this includes a range of different activities. We see reconciliation as a voluntary act that cannot be imposed.'<sup>67</sup>

Hamber and Kelly emphasise that reconciliation is not a straightforward process, and quote Ledarach, who said: 'Reconciliation promotes an encounter between the open expression of the painful past, on the one hand, and the search for the articulation of a long-term, interdependent future, on the other hand. Second, reconciliation provides a place for truth and mercy to meet, where concerns for exposing what has happened *and* for letting go in favour of renewed relationship are validated and embraced. Third, reconciliation recognises the need to give time and place to both justice and peace, where redressing the wrong is held together with the envisioning of a common, connected future'.<sup>68</sup>

We find many of these paradoxes and tensions in the story of Joseph and his brothers and in the contemporary context of Northern Ireland.

### Encounter and trust

Encounter was vital for beginning the journey towards reconciliation between Joseph and his brothers. Living separately, they had no opportunity to work through their differences or deal with the pain of the past. Opportunities for meaningful encounter are essential for building peace.

A recent review of sectarianism in Northern Ireland identifies that it is still persistent 21 years after the Good Friday Agreement.<sup>69</sup> Segregation of housing and education, sports and cultural activities is identified as a central cause of this persistence; and many also still live in the shadow of the so-called 'peace-walls'. These practices separate many communities from encountering 'the other' for the duration of their lives. Due to suspicion, fear and mistrust, many want the walls, and perhaps the other forms of segregation, to remain.<sup>70</sup> The review highlights the need to create space for encounter; among its recommendations is an encouragement to churches to create spaces for inter-community engagement: 'Hospitality and generosity have been central to each of the Christian



denominations and major global religions. Opportunities to demonstrate both could make a critical difference to the atmosphere of relations between communities. Sustainable intercommunity relations in Northern Ireland will not emerge without humanity and mercy.<sup>71</sup>

The story of Joseph and his brothers also shows the necessity of trust in the work of building positive relationships. Even after 17 years, the brothers cannot trust that Joseph has forgiven them for selling him into slavery in Egypt and is not going to seek retribution after their father's death (Genesis 50:15-21). Their coexistence clearly has not been restorative enough.

One respondent to the sectarianism review research described how 'peace is a challenge to communities subject to ancient divisions. Negative attitudes to the "other" community are deep rooted.'<sup>72</sup>

The Very Rev Dr Norman Hamilton, former moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and former member of the Community Relations Council, identifies mistrust as a key cause of sectarianism: 'If we were to stop and take stock, we would see that there is often an underlying mistrust and fear of both people and places on the "other" side, and an avoidance of contact and relationship-building. So, division and separation continue as "normal".'<sup>73</sup>

The Good Friday Agreement itself placed 'mutual trust' as an essential part of the process of building peace.<sup>74</sup>

As the story of Joseph suggests, this mistrust is by no means a problem unique to Northern Ireland's peace process. Senator George Mitchell, chair of the Good Friday Agreement negotiations, reflects the 'poison of mistrust' is common to all conflicts.<sup>75</sup> It is difficult to build trust without acknowledging and dealing with the past.

## Past and future

Remembering the past with lament is a vital part of the story of reconciliation between Joseph and his brothers. On two occasions during his reunion with his brothers, we witness Joseph turning aside to weep as the memories of what had happened to him and what he had lost surface (Genesis 42:24, 43:30). But in the end he can hide his grief no longer. After Judah's speech, to explain why his youngest brother must be allowed to return to his father, Joseph weeps loudly and finally reveals his identity (Genesis 45:2-3).

Attempts to deal with the past in order to create a shared future together can be found in three brief examples from Northern Ireland: the work of the Corrymeela Community, the Evangelical Contribution on Northern Ireland (ECONI) and the Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI).

Bishop Trevor Williams, former leader of the Corrymeela Community, Northern Ireland's oldest peace and reconciliation organisation, recounts a story about a group of high school pupils and the losses they had suffered due to The Troubles. He says: 'Six out of the eight had lost loved ones or had direct personal experience of loss and of the six, three were from the "opposite" sides of the community. They set ground rules about listening and

**'The tragedies of the past have left a deep and profoundly regrettable legacy of suffering. We must never forget those who have died or been injured, and their families. But we can best honour them through a fresh start, in which we firmly dedicate ourselves to the achievement of reconciliation, tolerance, and mutual trust, and to the protection and vindication of the human rights of all'**

Good Friday Agreement

not responding. After the time of sharing they embraced and were inseparable for the remainder of the time together.<sup>76</sup> Acknowledging and sharing their pain of the past allowed these young people to imagine and begin a shared future together.

The work of the ECONI is described by Gladys Ganiel, sociologist and academic, as perhaps Northern Ireland's best example of how faith-based activists contributed to peace.<sup>77</sup> ECONI encouraged people to reflect and remember how their own religious tradition had helped to perpetuate division – and then to use resources from within that tradition to change it. For example, ECONI took the familiar phrase used within the Protestant community, 'For God and Ulster', and subverted it to create a resource for critical reflection called *For God and His Glory Alone*. More than one-third of all Protestant congregations in Northern Ireland participated in ECONI initiatives, enabling them to encounter their own identity in a new way.

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland clearly outlined the priority of dealing with the past in its response to the 2018 Northern Ireland Office consultation *Addressing the legacy of Northern Ireland's past*. It states: 'PCI believes that effectively addressing the past, including the needs of victims and survivors, will enable us all to reimagine and create a better future based on a more reconciled community at peace with each other.'<sup>78</sup>

The PCI was drawing on its own 2016 Vision for Society statement, which is a 'declaration of belief, confession, affirmation and aspiration for our members across Ireland as disciples of Jesus Christ and as peacebuilders'.<sup>79</sup> It acknowledges the past and encourages a renewed resolve to work together for reconciliation.

This willingness to deal with the past is also demonstrated in the PCI commissioning *Considering Grace*, a forthcoming book that documents the lived experience of 120 people during the Troubles. It explores how faith shaped their responses to violence and its aftermath, and points towards the need for a 'gracious remembering' that acknowledges suffering, is self-critical about the past, and creates space for lament, but also for the future.<sup>80</sup>

## **Forgiveness and justice**

Creating this space for lament was an essential part of Joseph dealing with the past and enabling him to eventually show forgiveness towards his brothers.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu, in emphasising the need for forgiveness makes clear that people are not being asked to forget. 'On the contrary, it is important to remember, so that we should not let such atrocities happen again. Forgiveness does not mean condoning what has been done. It means taking what happened seriously... drawing out the sting in the memory that threatens to poison our entire existence.'<sup>81</sup>

There is a growing consensus that there was much more emphasis placed on forgiveness than truth in South Africa's lauded Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

For example, Allan Boesak writes: 'We have not begun to consider the damage that was done, layered upon the pain of the past in



addition to the pain of retelling without hope of any resolution, closure, restitution or restoration. In this regard a young woman is quoted as saying, "I don't know if I will ever be able to forgive. I carry this ball of anger within me and I don't know where to begin dealing with it."<sup>82</sup>

At a recent talk at Christian Aid in London, the Rev Dr Sam Wells, suggested that to rush a community or a peace process to the stage of forgiveness and reconciliation, is like 'condemning the cry of rage without understanding its cause'.

Joseph is often given the accolade of being the reconciler in this story. However, it seems to have taken him a few years to arrive at this position, given his vengeful actions during the first few years of their reunion. It took time to release himself from the need for revenge by rising above it, by understanding God to have intended their harmful actions for good (Genesis 50:20).<sup>83</sup>

Jon Sobrino insists that such forgiveness, like grace, has its own power and to accept forgiveness is to acknowledge oneself to be a sinner. 'The forgiven can finally, in turn, forgive: "Beloved to love," says John. "Released to liberate", says Gustavo Gutiérrez. "Forgive to forgive," says Jesus. Forgiving humanises reality and the offender. And humanises those who grant forgiveness.'<sup>84</sup>

Forgiveness does not involve letting go of the justice claim that occasioned the need for forgiveness. As Liechty says: 'Forgiveness is always a way of responding to an injustice, and it can also be a stance from which to pursue justice without being overcome by bitterness when that justice is long delayed.'<sup>85</sup>

Nancy Cardoso, Christian Aid's theology adviser in Brazil, insists that it is vital to uphold the rights and protection of those regarded as victims of violence. Drawing on Jürgen Moltmann, she raises concerns that without justice 'impunity can give room for other forms of human rights violations and avoid tackling the root causes of violence, allowing it to persist'.<sup>86</sup> Nancy concludes that to seek justice is 'not a question of vengeance but of restoration of life in society to apprehend from loss, exercise of forgiveness and the establishment of healthy relations of power.'<sup>87</sup>

Brazilian theologian, minister and activist Ronilso Pacheco directly challenges an understanding of forgiveness that is devoid of responsibility or as an innocuous 'forgetfulness' that ignores and 'relieves violence'. He understands Jesus' proposal of forgiveness (Matthew 18:22) as 'a kind of instrument, a possible remedy, capable of disrupting the logic of violence and revenge.'<sup>88</sup>

The story of Razan and Sabrin demonstrates just such a disruption.

## **Razan and Sabrin**

On Friday 1 June 2018, Razan al-Najjar, a 21-year-old volunteer medic with our partner Palestinian Medical Relief Society (PMRS) was shot and killed by Israeli forces as she provided vital medical assistance to injured protestors in Gaza.<sup>89</sup> The protestors were demanding the Palestinians' right to return.

In July 2019, our colleagues had the privilege of visiting Razan's mother, Sabrin Jamaa al-Najjar, in Gaza. Sabrin described how Razan had prioritised her humanitarian first aid and activism work for

two years: 'Unfortunately the occupation had no mercy in her case. Razan was not guilty at all. Razan was doing great humanitarian work and voluntary work, and then the occupation killed her.'

The day before she died, Razan's friend told her she dreamed that Razan was a martyr on the beach. Her father also had a bad dream 'that a bird has flew from my hand'. On the Friday evening, Sabrin received a phone call telling her that Razan had been injured; minutes before reaching the hospital, Sabrin felt her heart stop, and she cried out: 'Razan has died.'

Sabrin describes how she touched the body of her daughter in the hospital: 'My hand just touched the area where the bullets entered her body... I hugged Razan and I took her vest – and also hugged the vest itself, and kept it with me.'

In her grief, Sabrin has chosen to proudly continue her daughter's work as a volunteer first aider for PMRS. She treats all those who are injured as if she is treating Razan: 'I am doing my best to save the lives of the injured people – and when I am doing my job, my mission, I feel that I am saving the life of Razan.'

Sabrin has found common ground with people from other religions while carrying out her humanitarian work.

Sabrin used to ask Razan what she would do if she found an injured Israeli soldier in front of her, and she always said: 'I will assist them'. Sabrin has adopted this attitude. 'Despite the fact that this soldier killed my daughter, if I find him injured in front of my eyes, there will be no doubt that I will be aiding him and assisting him as a first aider. We are a people who likes very much peace – we like to live in peace.'

She echoes Razan, who once said in an interview: 'We have one goal which is to save lives and evacuate people; to send a message to the world that without weapons, we can do anything.'<sup>90</sup>

It is with Razan's prophetic words ringing in our ears that we consider how we too can raise our prophetic voice for peace.

**'Razan did not die. She is still alive – I am here, I am continuing her work, her mission, her humanitarian dream. I will continue'**

Sabrin al-Najjar, Gaza



**Above:** Graffiti artist Banksy's Armoured Peace Dove on the Palestinian side of the separation wall in Bethlehem.

## Amplifying our prophetic voice

### Mary and Martha

We turn to the story of sisters, Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38-42) for inspiration and guidance in approaching the fourth aim of our From Violence to Peace work: 'Grounded in our understanding of prophetic voice, together with our partners, we speak out and challenge violence, poverty, inequality and injustice. We require the courage of our convictions to challenge oppressive structures and seek justice.'<sup>91</sup>

The squabble between these two sisters appears to be a very mild conflict in comparison to the previous stories of sibling violence, but it serves as reminder of the need for action and contemplation in working to counter the violence at work in the world. In his tender response to the fraught Martha, Jesus reminds her of the importance of sitting at his feet, being in his presence and listening to him (Luke 10:41-42). He gently chides her about her anxiety and worry, not her hospitality work, which was to treat guests with honour.

For all who are engaged with the busy work of building peace, it is a story that reminds us to ground our work in contemplation. In the words of peace activist and contemplative, Thomas Merton: 'Without contemplation, without the intimate, silent, secret pursuit of truth through love, our action loses itself in the world and becomes dangerous.'<sup>92</sup>

### Contemplation

It is with this attitude of contemplation that Pope Francis hosted a spiritual retreat for the civil and ecclesiastical authorities of South Sudan at the Vatican in April 2019. It was an opportunity for those who had been involved in the peace negotiations to step back from their familiar environment and activities, and to take time and space to allow for 'interior recollection, trusting prayer, deep reflection and encounters of reconciliation, so as to bear good fruits for ourselves and, as a consequence, for the communities to which we belong'.<sup>93</sup>

Bishop Paride Taban, Emeritus Bishop of Torit Diocese in South Sudan, a very active peacebuilder, begins each day with the meditative practice of repeating these words for peace: 'Love, joy, peace, patience, compassion, sympathy, kindness, truthfulness, gentleness, self-control, humility, poverty, forgiveness, mercy, friendship, trust, unity, purity, faith and hope. I love you, I miss you, I thank you, I forgive, we forget, together, I am wrong, I am sorry.' He encourages others to join him with the hope it will allow for permanent peace in South Sudan.<sup>94</sup>

Contemplation is both an action itself and a precursor to fruitful action in the world, as Merton describes: 'There is that all-important stillness, and listening to God, which seems to be inertia, and yet is the highest action.'<sup>95</sup>

### Action

Mary's choice to sit at the feet of Jesus and listen to his teaching was a radical action. She was choosing to sit in the place traditionally preserved for men. 'A common saying of the time was

'Grounded in our understanding of prophetic voice, we speak out and challenge violence, poverty, inequality and injustice. We require the courage of our convictions to challenge oppressive structures and seek justice'

that it was better for the Torah to be burned than to be put into the hands of a woman. So for Mary to sit at Jesus' feet, just as any student of a great rabbi would, was scandalous.'<sup>96</sup>

Mary's action is echoed by a group of South Sudanese women who launched a petition calling for the inclusion of women in the upcoming three-year transitional government to implement the outcome of the revitalised peace agreement. 'We, South Sudanese women and girls, who are 65% of the population, are the ones who bear wars and violence brunt the most: rape, sexual violence, physical and health vulnerability, and poverty in general.'<sup>97</sup>

They described how they have been excluded from decision making and the peace process. Their call has been heard and in a speech to the Security Council, the UN peacekeeping chief stressed that women's representation is vital to realising South Sudan's revitalised agreement.<sup>98</sup>

We listen to the teachings of our faith to gain the courage to challenge oppressive structures and seek justice. We raise our voices to call governments, donors and multilateral agencies to account, demanding they take greater action to ensure peace is sustained and financed, human rights and humanitarian laws are respected, inclusive economic policies are implemented, and those most at risk of violence can influence and participate in key processes and institutions. We do this in solidarity with the policy and advocacy of our partners. Together, we demand an end to violence, injustice and for governments and institutions to fulfil the unrealised potential of peace.<sup>99</sup> We use our global voice to challenge amoral practices, such as the arms trade and militarisation, that undermine the work of peacebuilders.<sup>100</sup>

## Action on the arms trade

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**'They have treated the wound of my people carelessly, saying "Peace, peace", when there is no peace'**

Jeremiah 6:14

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Total world military expenditure increased to \$1,739bn by 2017, largely due to the substantial growth in spending by countries in Asia and the Middle East, such as China, India and Saudi Arabia.<sup>101</sup> The world spends nearly 10 times more on its military than it does on official development aid.<sup>102</sup>

It is sadly true that 'unless peace is more profitable than war we will not have peace,' as stated by the Very Rev John Chalmers, then moderator of the Church of Scotland, after a visit to South Sudan in 2015.<sup>103</sup> While we know the laying down of arms is far from the end goal of peacebuilding, we also know that we must add our prophetic voice to the cause of challenging the UK Government's double standards on aid and arms.

There is much to celebrate about the UK's role in aid and development, in responding to climate change, upholding principles of multilateralism, supporting the UN Peacebuilding Fund, and committing to 0.7% of gross national income for aid.

**'Our peace building will of necessity criticise, denounce, advocate, and resist as well as proclaim, empower, console reconcile and heal. Peacemakers will speak against and speak for, tear down and build up, lament and celebrate, grieve and rejoice. Until our longing joins our belonging in the consummation of all things in God, the work of peace will continue as the flickering of sure grace'**

*Just Peace Companion*, World Council of Churches

Yet undermining these peacebuilding efforts are transactions that promote war instead. The UK is currently on track to become one of the world's biggest arms dealers, exporting the majority of its arms to Saudi Arabia. If the UK Government is really committed to peace, Christian Aid calls on it to address these double standards and champion international law and peace in its foreign and aid policies.

Retaining development spending by the UK Government is to be welcomed, particularly when this has been put under pressure from some quarters. The £7.6bn total for development in 2017 appears laudable. However, when compared to a defence budget of £39.4bn, people of faith have reason to challenge this contradiction in policy.<sup>104</sup>

Anti-refugee and anti-migrant sentiments and calls to restructure development aid in 'the national interest' are completely contrary to the hospitality, welcoming the stranger and loving our neighbour that are essential elements of loving God. There is a need for governments to make peace a priority, over and above the increasing concerns about securitisation.

John Paul Lederach states: 'We must expose and break the false promise that places trust in violence as the defender and deliverer of security.'<sup>105</sup> We are adamant that humanitarian action and development aid must not be turned into a political and military weapon that is allotted on the basis of where a country stands geopolitically.

**'We are to build not only peace in the absence of conflict but the active, creative, co-operative well-being traditionally understood as contained in the Hebrew word shalom'**

Dr Rowan Williams, Christian Aid chair, in a Christian Aid Week lecture



**Above:** This mural commissioned by Christian Aid in 2018 highlighted the UK Government's role in Yemen's civil war.

## Positive peace

Raising our prophetic voice does not only mean critiquing social structures or speaking out against political decisions, but it is also an exercise in envisioning and portraying a positive alternative. We raise our voices to create a vision of what people will say yes to and foster the kind of radical imagination, shaped by faith, that we believe can help create the world anew. It is to reimagine the vision of Micah for today.



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**'They shall beat their swords into ploughshares,  
And their spears into pruning hooks;  
Nations shall not lift up sword against nation,  
Neither shall they learn war any more.'**

Micah 4:3

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In scripture, the prophetic voice is spoken mostly to God's people, not to the wider world. Many of the contributors to this resource lamented the complicity and indifference of their churches or communities of faith. They were often regarded as the mavericks in the work of reconciliation, and they appealed for greater support and for the work of building peace to be a more central part of the discipleship and expression of faith.<sup>106</sup>

Father Alberto in Colombia describes how painful it was to 'come to the realisation of the negative role religion in society, directly opposing the attempts of building a more just and peaceful society. This has been harder to face than the threats and the risk [of being a human rights defender].'

Archbishop Rwaje of the Anglican Church of Rwanda said one of the greatest challenges of his peacebuilding work was when he saw the effect of his peacebuilding initiatives and how other places could benefit from them, but he was hindered by church rules from operating outside his diocese.

## **South Sudan**

The SSCC demonstrates the prophetic witness of a group of religious leaders working out a shared strategy for peace and infrastructure to support it. The churches, which like the rest of South Sudan, had been deeply affected, traumatised and, in some local areas, divided by the 2013 war, have sought to create reconciliation among themselves as well as others. The SSCC's key messages around peace and justice, and the authentic processes of representation it has sought to lead, continue to play an important role in the search for peace with justice in South Sudan.

The decision to give the SSCC a central role in national level negotiations was a recognition of the limitations of formal, inter-governmental diplomacy. But it was also a recognition of the SSCC's unique strengths – a combination of moral authority and dense connectedness with communities on both sides of the front lines. When South Sudan is divided into 'government' and 'rebel' territory, the church retains the capacity to carry out its activities across the country, just as the military and political leaders lose that capacity.

## **Holy Trinity Peace Village**

There are countless peacemakers from a variety of faith groups working at the local level. They know that addressing conflict at the local and personal level is important: creating spaces to acknowledge difficult issues, discuss how they can be resolved in peaceful ways, and to share how to deal with their impact.

One such peacemaker is Bishop Paride Taban in South Sudan. He retired early from his role as bishop of Torit Diocese to establish a Peace Village, 'a place where people can live together as brothers

and sisters regardless of tribe, religion or social status'. The initial approach was to address broken relationships and build trust by meeting shared livelihood, education and health needs, beginning with a joint agricultural project. This has since broadened to reflect the deeper needs linked to both individual and collective development and reconciliation and now includes programmes of cultural activity, vocational training and chaplaincy.

The Peace Village also coordinates Joint Peace Teams, which monitor security issues, respond to incidents and risks and take collective decisions.<sup>107</sup> Holy Trinity Village seeks to tackle the inequality that is often a root cause of violence. Bishop Paride emphasises the need for the Peace Village project to be interpersonal, respecting the humanity, value and potential of each other: 'There is only us.'

We are all brothers and sisters seeking shalom.

## Conclusion

These stories and theological reflections will hopefully serve to inspire, challenge and sustain our peacebuilding practice and activity in the world. Each of these biblical stories and contemporary examples of peacebuilding illustrate the practical work that lies behind the four aims of our From Violence to Peace strategy.

The story of Cain and Abel reminds us that the inequality that fuels conflict needs to be tackled and that the land and the environment have also become a victim of the violence. The Kenyan Caravan of Peace demonstrated how churches can overcome their political and ethnic differences and put their faith identity first to have a united voice and make a stand for peace that interrupts the spiral of violence. Their courage and vulnerability in choosing to enter places of conflict is an echo of the risk-taking, reconciling act of incarnation, when God overcame division by becoming human, and, in Jesus, broke down the religious, cultural and economic barriers in his lifetime and in the ultimate reconciliation work of the open arms of Christ on the cross.

This deep solidarity is worked out in practice in the example of ICJP and demonstrates how being with communities lies at the heart of the long-term approach needed for peacebuilding. It shows how Christian Aid and faith communities need to be in it for the long haul in order to ensure ‘those most at risk of violence in our areas of engagement are less vulnerable and more safe, secure and resilient’ (aim one).

The text of terror, the rape of Tamar, highlights the scandal of violence against women in biblical times and helps us to reflect on GBV across the world today. It calls us to acknowledge and address the impunity that often surrounds such violence, including challenging ways faith communities are complicit in allowing such violence to continue.

In Brazil, the work of SADD and the story of Elineide and Elione are examples of how churches can challenge GBV and provide a place of safety and restoration. Every individual is made in the image of God, the Imago Dei, and serves as a direct challenge to any kind of violence experienced by any human being. The Side by Side movement for gender justice and the Thursdays in Black campaign are examples of faith communities working to ensure ‘the risk of gender-based violence is reduced, survivors receive adequate support, and women, men, and institutions are working to change the conditions which gave rise to it in the first place’ (aim two). Tamar’s response to being raped is viewed as an act of resistance and a reminder of the resilience and role of women in challenging violence of all kinds. The women of South Sudan are taking a stand in response to the protracted conflict there and are coming together to pray and call for the involvement of women in the process of building peace.

Joseph and his brothers provide the lens through which we explore the process of reconciliation. This includes the need for encounter and trust, addressing the pain of the past in order to build a shared future, establishing truth before rushing to forgiveness and making sure justice remains an essential part of the process. Sectarianism in

‘Repairing the damage of war and violence may take longer than the conflict that caused it. But what exists of peace along the way, though imperfect, is a promise of greater things to come’

World Council of Churches<sup>108</sup>



Northern Ireland, lessons from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa and the moving story of a mother's grief and resolve in Gaza are used to root these concepts in lived experience.

These examples emphasise the need for 'local communities to be empowered in their calls for peace, justice, and security, for peacebuilding to be inclusive and transformative, in particular for women and marginalised groups, and efforts made to challenge the key drivers of violence, address impunity, hold perpetrators to account and inspire them to rehabilitate' (aim three).

The story of Mary and Martha leads us to ground our peacebuilding action in our faith. Contemplative action leads to transformation. A spiritual retreat for leaders from South Sudan and the daily practices of Bishop Paride Taban are examples of contemplative action, and the example of Mary sitting at Jesus' feet highlights how contemplation can be subversive. The women of South Sudan making a declaration of intent for their inclusion in the upcoming elections is an example of women taking a place traditionally reserved for men.

The action of raising our voice against the trust being placed in arms and violence as the defender and deliverer of security is to follow in the tradition of the prophets of old calling to account those who were neglecting the cause of the oppressed and the marginalised. The prophets also created a vision of how things could be and challenged the people of God to participate fully in bringing that to fruition. This is reinforced by our present day peacebuilders, who need the full support, encouragement and participation of their faith communities in the work of building peace.

One contributor posed the prophetic question of the churches: 'How are we formed to become peace makers?'<sup>109</sup> How might we, as communities of faith, make peacemaking central to discipleship so that we might 'together with our partners... speak out and challenge violence, poverty, inequality and injustice.' (aim four).<sup>110</sup>

We have used stories of siblings in conflict or reconciliation throughout this piece, not only to draw inspiration and principles from the scriptures, but also to reiterate that essential truth of our common bond.

We need 'a profound rediscovery that those who have been deeply divided in the past do indeed belong together in the future', as Byron Bland, the director of the Stanford Centre for Reconciliation says.<sup>112</sup> It is our belief and hope that religion can help bring people to an awareness of that bond between them and that they are brothers and sisters, children of the living God, that leads to shalom.

Father Gerry Reynolds, who was a quiet peacemaker for many years in Belfast during the Troubles, perhaps puts it best: 'I always believed that the Almighty, the living God, doesn't want us to be in conflict... God created us to live together in harmony and in peace and in right relationship with one another and in genuine justice. So that will of God has to be achievable. God doesn't ask the impossible of us. So that if we do work with the living God, who works in history, we will work all the time towards peace and justice and right relationships. All the religions have a role in that working for genuine human relationships in this world.'

**'In the history of the human race, those periods which later appeared as great have been the periods when the men and the women belonging to them had transcended the differences that divided them and had recognised in their membership in the human race a common bond'**

Haile Selassie, former emperor of Ethiopia<sup>111</sup>

It is our hope that this resource might help you and your community to 'reach out across the firing lines and join hands with our brothers and sisters on the other side'.<sup>113</sup>



**Above:** A young girl holds a candle to commemorate the day her grandfather and uncle were killed defending their land in Colombia.

## Endnotes

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