



from Garth...

Between Two Easters



The Church of the Resurrection (Holy Sepulchre), Jerusalem

As I write, this is Holy Week for the Orthodox Church, and this newsletter particularly focusses on issues relating to the two Easters.

It is very sad to have what the Pope describes as “a cruel and senseless war” happening throughout

Lent and in Holy Week. We are just a few days away now from the Orthodox Easter, and to see such a neglect of the way and lifestyle of Jesus at the holiest time of the year is very painful.

The Easter of War

In the Pope’s Easter message last Sunday he was calling for reconciliation in the Russian/Ukraine war, and for peace between Israelis and Palestinians, and he asked the world to remember other regions hit by conflict and poverty, including the Yemen.

Archbishop Rowan Williams, who is an authority on Orthodox Christianity, has been critical particularly of the Orthodox Church in Russia, and he said, “I’m still waiting for any senior member of the Orthodox hierarchy to say that the slaughter of the innocents is condemned unequivocally...”

We’ve seen no signs amongst the Russian hierarchy of a willingness even to ask for a ceasefire. That’s the minimum I would hope to see,” said Rowan. When asked what he would say if he could speak to Patriarch Kirill Rowan said, “Your own flock are being killed in Ukraine, by other members of your own flock. **It is your responsibility**

to condemn the killing of your own flock, for whom you are answerable to Jesus Christ.”

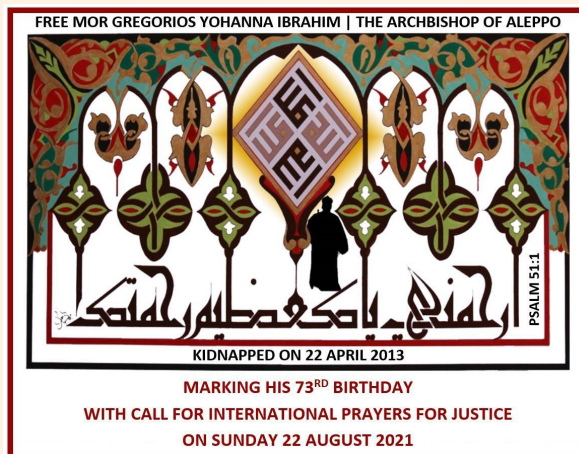
God Loves All People...Wise words of Gustavo Parajon

The methodology of Jesus is the methodology of the suffering servant - of the poems that we see in Isaiah. It then becomes very clear that violence is not redeeming in any way, that violence only engenders more violence. God loves all people and has given us Jesus as a wonderful gift that has shown us that violence has no part in the plan that God has for the world.

Gustavo Parajon, Founder of CEPAD, Nicaragua

as quoted in Easter Revolution Companion Booklet, page 15

Easter Greeting from an Orthodox Christian



I had a very moving message from a friend, Aziz Noor, who not only sent Easter greetings but said it was a pity that the date of Easter could not be unified in fulfilment of the words of Christ “that they all may be one.”

Aziz is the person who asked me to write a song about Mar Gregorios Yohanna Ibrahim, the Syrian Archbishop of Aleppo, who was

kidnapped nine years ago. Nothing seems to have been heard about him but Aziz is trying to make sure that the case, the cause and the memory are kept alive.

So for your prayers and thoughts we have put [this link to the song](#) I wrote for him, “Come Home, Mar Gregorios”, as Aziz requested that we keep this alive to encourage people’s prayers. He included a couple of posters that have been released over the years calling people to pray for justice, one of which we are showing above.

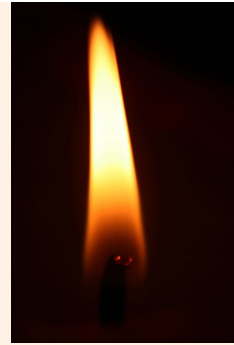
Come home Mar Gregorios - we wait for you each day
Come home Mar Gregorios - come and show the way
You’re our shepherd - you’re our prophet
You’re our peacemaker too

Come home Mar Gregorios - we wait and pray for you.

Mar Gregorios, Mar Gregorios
Mar Gregorios, Lord hear our cry
Mar Gregorios, Mar Gregorios
Mar Gregorios, Lord hear our cry.

There's a stone wall of silence since you've been away
A stone wall of silence – let's roll that stone away
We need you - so we're waiting
For your resurrection day

Come home Mar Gregorios – let's roll that stone away



Double Standards



*Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Occupied Jerusalem,
Theodosios Atallah Hanna*

A further Orthodox voice comes from the Archbishop of Sebastia - he is the **Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Occupied Jerusalem, Theodosios Atallah Hanna**, and he speaks some challenging words about what he describes as international double standards.

"These international double standards in our world clearly show the deep levels of the state of immorality and lack of human

values many western regimes have reached," Father Hanna said.

"We stand with solidarity with victims of war, especially the civilians who have nothing to do with it, and we also have to ask ourselves why those countries are condemning the war in Ukraine and at the same time ignoring the victims of wars they created in several parts of the world," Father Hanna stated. "America and its allies destroyed Iraq and committed war crimes against its people, and we are witnessing what is happening in Syria and all the devastations of wars they created in the region."

"In Palestine, the people continue to suffer ongoing Nakba, facing racism, oppression, and injustices inflicted on our people by the Israeli occupation; however, we have not seen those elevated levels of condemnations from those countries similar to what we are witnessing with Ukraine," he added, "Don't the Palestinians deserve this solidarity, this support?! After all those years of ongoing occupation, injustice, and oppression?!"

“What we are witnessing now is another proof of the ugliness of western politics, it is abundantly clear how they do not care about humanity, human rights, and dignity, but are only interested in their agendas, political and colonialist interests,” he said, **“Israel is ongoing with its serious assaults and violations against the Palestinians, especially in Jerusalem, and its army is even bombing Syria....”**

“We aren’t supporting the war in Ukraine; we do not support wars, but many who are condemning this war are ignoring the suffering of the people of Palestine, Iraq, Syria, and several other countries,” he added.

Father Hanna also expressed his hope that this war would end, adding that the world needs the language of dialogue and understanding to end these conflicts.

I began by quoting some words of the Pope which he spoke last week on the Western Easter Sunday. I was not surprised that he spoke strongly against war, as I had come across the words he spoke in Nagasaki at the end of 2019 and used them in an anti-war song on the album **Easter Revolution**. The final verse of the song reflects what Pope Francis said, that nuclear weapons “are an affront crying out to heaven.” He then added, *“In a world where millions of people live in poverty every day, money is being squandered on these terrible weapons of war. It’s an affront crying out to heaven, time to say no more.”*



[Here is a link to the song in full on YouTube](#)

Though I’m strongly reflecting anti-war sentiments in the album, I never anticipated that we would be in the middle of a cruel and brutal war such as this one at the time the album would come out, though of course other conflicts have been carrying on.

The lyrics of one of the songs, *Forgiveness for Humanity - A Hymn For Lent*, ask for forgiveness for humanity. As one verse puts it:

**So forgive us for the genocides
The slave trades and the holocaust
Forgive all our brutal wars
For the desperate love of money
Ethnic cleansing and the arms trade**

For the racism, torture and cruelty

And then the chorus says

Give us a new spirit, a spirit of hope

Give us a new way that's making us whole

May we treat all with justice and with equality

So loving our neighbour becomes the human way

And loving our planet becomes the natural way

The Peace Groups

The witness of the peace groups at the moment is something very special.

Stop the War Coalition, with its Convenor Lindsay German, speaks with great clarity.

They were founded at the time of, and marched particularly against, the Iraq war in the biggest public anti-war demonstration that we've had. I was on that demo and wrote the song 'Not in My Name' as a result of it. I wrote the chorus during the demo - we were following a Jewish group called Not In My Name, and that seemed a strong title for a song!

CND, the **Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament**, has also spoken up prophetically for many years.

Also **Peace Pledge Union** is the oldest pacifist campaigning organisation, working on peace-building and non violence.

The **Campaign Against the Arms Trade** is another important group - they are working for a Just World where conflict is resolved without use of force.

I was shocked to hear leader of the Labour Party Keir Starmer criticising all these groups and yet these are the prophetic voices that instead of yelling for more weapons are asking for negotiation and to cease from the violence. They are linked to peace groups in Russia and Ukraine and they have consistently reflected the values of "love your neighbour as yourself."

Not in my name, not in my name

When you go to war it's not in my name

As the bombers are bombing and the innocent are slain

I want you to know - it's not in my name

One of the early sponsors of Stop the War Coalition was **Jeremy Corbyn**, who wrote this last week:

"Easter should be a time of peace and reflection

With a war going on in Ukraine, an uneasy ceasefire in Yemen, the attack on Palestinians at prayer in Jerusalem and many other conflicts around the world it might seem to some to be inappropriate to talk about peace.

It is also the time to talk about our humanity, or lack of it, to people in deep distress

as a result of armed conflict, abuse of their rights or the grinding poverty that many face as a result of massive global inequality.

There must be an immediate ceasefire in Ukraine followed by an agreed troop withdrawal and agreement between Russia and Ukraine.

Everyone knows this is what will happen at some point, but why delay it for bombing and killing, more refugees, more dead and more grieving families in Ukraine and Russia? The war has sucked millions of dollars worth of weapons into Ukraine, setting arms lobbyists into a frenzy in all countries either supporting Ukraine or supplying Russia.

This Easter, let us renew our commitment to a world of peace and justice."

I'll end this newsletter with some words from the final song on the **Easter Revolution** album, followed by some words of Archbishop Desmond Tutu:

**Go with peace, go with love,
go with justice in your heart
Go with peace, go with love,
go with justice in your heart
As a member of the Easter Revolution
Go with peace, go with love,
go with justice in your heart.**



**Jesus our leader our teacher our guide
Our liberator, healer and friend
You're the inspiration for the community of love
You walk beside us right till the end**

Go with peace, go with love, go with justice in your heart.

"In God's family there are no outsiders... all belong" *Desmond Tutu*

I have a dream that swords will be beaten into ploughshares,
Spears into pruning hooks.

My children will know they are members of one family,
The human family, Gods family.

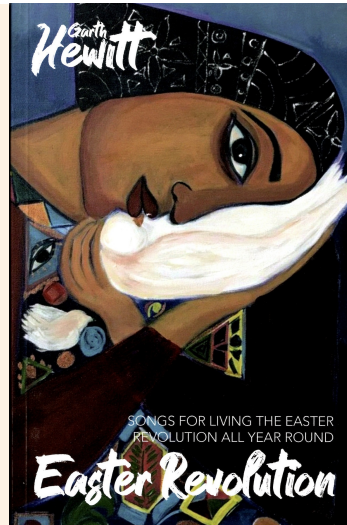
In God's family there are no outsiders... all belong.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu

*as quoted in **Easter Revolution Companion Booklet**, page 26*



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