the shofar

February 16th

Peace is not the absence of troubles but the presence of Christ.

The war to end all wars but didn't

Across the West, there is an incredible depth of bitter experience illustrating the futility of trying to transform the world by violence or through the promotion of an anthropology that is based on features such as race, sex, wealth or national exceptionalism.

As a child growing up in the 60's and going to university in the 70's, I can attest to the excitement of the times. Marxism was the dominant philosophy with its vision of bringing about a whole new world, a paradisical dream in which all were equal. Their dualistic perspective on the world continues into our present times, with the dividing up of the world into haves and have nots: white races and people of colour, heterosexual and the non-hetero normatives, victims and oppressors, and the list could go on. Marx would be thrilled to see his world view at work.

Tear it down and start again

All these groups live in a state of constant conflict, with the supposed oppressors using the tools of the time (science, law, politics, education, government, etc) to keep the oppressed at bay. The only way open to ending these destructive divisions involves pulling down the entire social structures of our democracies and rebuilding them from the ground up. This includes the place of religion in society and a redefining of the traditional family so that the old paternalism it promotes and protects is washed away leaving women and children free of coercion.

In the 70's these were not mere words from the lips of impressionable adolescents carrying placards on our city streets. In the USA there was Don Cox (known as Field Marshal), an early and active member of Black Panther movement. He set down the revolutionary vision necessary to crush the powers of the oppressors: *When a guerrilla unit moves against this oppressive system by executing a pig or attacking its institutions by any means, sniping, stabbing, bombing, etc, in defence against the 400 years of racist brutality, murder and exploitation, this can only be defined as self-defence.*

That philosophy justified the beginning of assassinations, first aimed at the police ("pigs") and from there extending to kidnappings, ransoms, multiple prison breaks, hijacking of commercial aeroplanes, all funded by setting up criminal organisations engaged in drug running and robberies. They justified this by insisting they were warriors of the *revolutionary class* who were doing nothing more than leading *the black masses into a higher degree of revolutionary consciousness.*

Of course, the theory was a nonsense, and it failed. People recoiled at the bloodshed, killings that included people living in the black ghettos. They watched on in horror as black police officers were executed and their own children going

down the destructive pathways of drug addiction. The leaders of the revolution, unsurprisingly, became warlords, often addicted to drugs and doing little more than replacing the gangsters who had previously dominated the streets.

Where Christ lives there hope thrives

Here is a conundrum. Christianity presents a different perspective compared to secular humanism when it comes to our human condition. It acknowledges the challenges inherent in the human condition (the effects of original sin) while also suggesting that overcoming these challenges is possible, and, importantly, in some sense, *has already been achieved*. The life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus as the Christ of God has irrevocably broken the chains of sin and death and invited all men and women into an intimate relationship in the Blessed Trinity. That cannot be undone. The reality in which Christians now live is powerfully spelled out by St Paul in **Romans 8***… And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love.* [39] *No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord*.

Luke's Sermon on the Plain a revolutionary manifesto?

While not explicitly considered a "political revolutionary", Jesus is often viewed as a radical and transformative figure who challenged the established social and religious norms of his time. His teachings and actions could be said to be "revolutionary" in the light of their impact on morality and societal values; particularly through his emphasis on love, compassion for the marginalized, and forgiveness, which went against the prevailing power structures. In the end though, what he was advocating was a return to covenant faithfulness and not some new religion. He was one who fulfilled rather than tore down.

The kingdom of God is divine leaven in the midst of the world

Jesus exemplifies the life of an activist. He lives by a vision for the future, one characterised by justice, peace, and unity. He initiated God's reign on earth with a radical ethics, one that exceeded what had gone before. He did not bring the Law to an end but perfected it, opening its true meaning for living in the human community. He insisted on the loving of enemies and embracing persecution as a part of following in his footsteps. Through his crucifixion and descent into hell, Jesus, according to St. Paul, identified with the lowest elements of society, transforming suffering and evil through his resurrection. Fulfilling the prophesies of Isaiah, he ultimately succeeded through what the world perceived as failure (Isaiah 42:1–4, Isaiah 49:1–6, Isaiah 50:4–11, Isaiah 52:13–53:120). While those revolutionaries of the 1970s produced little more than pain, death, fear, suspicion and division, the Gospel fully lived offers the world a new vision, one not limited by human sin. The Truth is known to men and women of faith, to those willing to sacrifice all for the sake of others: Only Christ can bring about enduring Peace.