

Revitalising Peace Theologies for Today

A Multi-Faith Peace Conference

Hosted by the Centre for Faith in Public Life
at Wesley House, Cambridge, 5-6 June 2025



Revitalising Peace Theologies for Today: A Multi-Faith Peace Conference

Welcome

A very warm welcome to Cambridge and the Peace Conference. The original idea for this Conference was to scope out who else believes peace theologies are worth pursuing in this time of war. We were heartened by the responses of those willing to share their research and attend. We hope this gathering will foster meaningful connections across borders and faiths, inspiring a renewed commitment to the pursuit of peace in our fractured world. Thank you for joining us.



Dr Richard A. Davis

Director of the Centre for Faith in Public Life at Wesley House, Cambridge

Conference Team

The Conference Organizing Committee is:

Dr Richard A. Davis, Wesley House

Professor Pauline Kolontai, Wesley House

Ms Wan-Yin Lim, Wesley House

Mr John Cooper, Fellowship of Reconciliation

Quiet Prayer Room

Upstairs at Wesley Church the Conference has a room for those needing a space for quiet reflection, time out, or prayer.

Smoking and Drinking

There is no smoking or drinking inside Wesley Methodist Church, Cambridge.

Wifi

Public wifi is available in the Church:

Network name: WesleyGuest

Password: WesleyChurch123*

Social Media

Wesley House, Cambridge will be posting on Facebook and X. If you are sharing anything about the Conference, please use this hashtag #peacetheologies2025

Phones

Please keep phones on silent during talks.

Teacups

After tea breaks do not leave cups in the church, please return them to the Refectory.

Worship

Following the lecture on Thursday afternoon there will be a Eucharist service in the Wesley Methodist Church. All are welcome to join.

Conference Dinner

The Conference Dinner is fully booked. If you have not booked, please make other arrangement for an evening meal. Restaurants can be found on King Street, Burleigh Street, Mill Road, and Bridge Steet.

Feedback

We would love your feedback so that future events can benefit from your experience. Please respond here: <https://forms.gle/vW9oYZYRLB1Dv1bR8>

Conference Programme: Thursday 5 June 2025

09:00–09:30 Welcome, Introductions, and Housekeeping (Dr Richard Davis)

09:30–10:30 Session 1: Peace in Israel and Palestine

Chair Ms Wan-Yin Lim (Wesley House, Cambridge)

Paper 1.1 Ms Courtney Reeve (Durham University)

Encountering the Divine Through Love of Neighbour: An Immersive Theological Ethnographic Study of Palestinian and Israelis Choosing Reconciliation Amidst Occupation and War

Paper 1.2 Prof Pauline Kollontai (York St John University, Wesley House, Cambridge)

'Breaking the Silence': Jewish Women Working to Reassert Shalom in Israel

10:30–11:00 Morning tea (30 mins)

11:00–12:30 Session 2: Lessons for Peace in Ecumenical and Interfaith Settings

Chair Mr John Cooper (Fellowship of Reconciliation)

Paper 2.1 Dr Sara Silvestri (City St George's University of London and University of Cambridge University, St Edmund's College)

The Political Limits of Christian Efforts Promoting Peace and Social Justice without a More Significant Ecumenical Engagement

Paper 2.2 Ms Anna Blackman and Dr Gaston Bacquet Quiroga (University of Glasgow)

Restorative Justice and Theologies of Nonviolence: Learning from Thich Nhat Hanh and Dorothy Day

Paper 2.3 Mx Peach Hoyle (University of Cambridge)

Security, safety and cohesion: a critical lens on peace discourses in UK interfaith spaces

12:30–13:15 Lunch (45 mins)

13:15–14:45 Session 3: African Cultural Wisdom and Peace

Chair Dr Mary Kinoti (Kenya Methodist University)

Paper 3.1 Dr Femi Omotoyinbo (Queen's University, Belfast)

Women and War: A Pacifist Doctrine from the Odù Ifá

Paper 3.2 Dr Jacob Mokhutso (University of Pretoria)

Ubuntu Theology as Peace Theology

Paper 3.3 Rev Emmanuel Shu (Wesley House, Cambridge)

Creating an Effective Contextual Discipleship and Theology of Peace in the Anglophone Regions of Cameroon

14:45–15:15 Afternoon tea (30 mins)

15:15–16:45 Edward Rogers Memorial Lecture

Chair Dr Richard Davis (Wesley House, Cambridge)

Lecturer Bishop Minerva G. Carcaño (United Methodist Church)

The Virtues of Compassion, Mercy and Justice Must Shape the World We Will Live In

16:45–17:15 Break (30 mins)

17:15 Wesley House Eucharist Service

Presiding The Rev'd Dr Jane Leach (Principal of Wesley House, Cambridge)

Preacher Mr John Cooper (Director of the Fellowship of Reconciliation)

6:30 Conference Dinner at Wesley House, Jesus Lane
(for those booked, otherwise own arrangements)

Conference Programme: Friday 6 June 2025

08:45 Notices for the day (Prof Pauline Kollontai)

9:00–10:30 Session 4: Peace, Justice, and Nonviolence

Chair Rev Emmanuel Shu (Wesley House, Cambridge)

Paper 4.1 Dr Richard A. Davis (Wesley House, Cambridge)

The Priority of Peace?: Revisiting the Relationship between Peace and Justice in Christian Thought

Paper 4.2 Dr Ayla Gol (York St John University)

Rethinking Peace and Justice in Islamic Theology: A Critique of Moral Governance under the AKP in Turkey

Paper 4.3 Dr Tom Woerner-Powell (University of Manchester)

Good Muslim Pacifist, Bad Muslim Pacifist: Peace and Justice in the Islamic Nonviolence of Jawdat Said and Wahiduddin Khan

10:30–11:00 Morning tea (30 mins)

11:00–12:30 Session 5: Christian Peace Theologies in Context

Chair Mrs Ruby Quantson Davis (Wesley House, Cambridge and Learning and Impact Manager, Peace Direct)

Paper 5.1 Dr Laurie Lyter Bright (Presbyterian Peace Fellowship)

Shifting the Narrative on Conscientious Objection in the US and Beyond

Paper 5.2 Mr Steve Hucklesby (The Methodist Church in Britain, JPIT and University of Exeter)

Faith Engagement on Killer Robots: Is Christian Theology up to the Challenge?

Paper 5.3 Ms Wan-Yin Lim (Wesley House, Cambridge)

From Communion to Compassion: A Methodist Theology of Peace in a Religious Nationalist Context

12:30–13:15 Lunch (45 mins)

13:15–14:45 Session 6: Costly Religious Peace Witness

Chair Dr Jonathan Chaplin (Wesley House, Cambridge)

Paper 6.1 Ms. Riya Kartha (University of Cambridge)

Transforming the Self, Transforming the World: Daisaku Ikeda's Buddhist Philosophy of Peacebuilding

Paper 6.2 Dr Frank M. Hasel (Biblical Research Institute)

A Pacifist on Hitler's Front Lines: Franz Hasel and the Theology that Motivated His Nonviolence

Paper 6.3 Dr Luke Li (University of Edinburgh)

Overcoming Communist Violence: The Burden and Promise of Liu Xiaobo's Nonviolent Courage

14:45–15:15 Afternoon tea (30 mins)

15:15–16:45 Session 7: Peacebuilding through Religious Traditions

Chair Prof Pauline Kollontai (Wesley House, Cambridge and York St John University)

Paper 7.1 Prof Jamie Pitts (Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary)

Peace When There is No Peace: Anticolonial Revolution and Peace Witness in Three Christian Traditions

Paper 7.2 Dr Hina Khalid (University of Cambridge)

The Integrative Possibility of the Truthful Word: Can Islamic Understanding of Speech as a Locus of Peace

Paper 7.3 Mr Robert Harrap (SGI Europe)

Buddhist Philosophy's Contribution to Building a Culture of Peace

16:45–17:15 Wrap Up and Thanks (Dr Richard Davis)

Conference Paper Abstracts

Thursday 5 June 2025

09:30–10:30 Session 1: Peace in Israel and Palestine

Paper 1.1 Ms Courtney Reeve (Durham University)

Encountering the Divine Through Love of Neighbour: An Immersive Theological Ethnographic Study of Palestinian and Israelis Choosing Reconciliation Amidst Occupation and War

As polarised narratives have been reified since the October 7th attacks in Southern Israel and the following bombardment of Gaza and now in the Occupied West Bank, voices of those seeking reconciliation in everyday life have been stifled. To render these voices visible in such a time, this paper illuminates the complex moral formation of Palestinians and Israelis involved in the faith-based reconciliation organisation Musalaha. Through immersive theological ethnography conducted over these past three years and attention to critical intersubjectivity, this paper specifically examines how Jewish-Israeli and Palestinian Christian participants of Musalaha conceptualise the Divine through the Levitical injunction to love one's neighbour. While no cohesive meaning of 'loving neighbour' is reached between the groups, they nonetheless narrate the risk of recognising the other's dignity through 'trying to understand' and holding 'disagreement and respect' in tension. I suggest these narratives of the Divine in everyday encounters with the other reveal the significance of, and imperative for vulnerability, where the limits of moral formation are found in the unknowability of the self without the other. I further argue this vulnerability mediates the presence of the Divine as a politically liberative act disrupting dominant narratives constraining Israeli and Palestinian group belonging.

Paper 1.2 Prof Pauline Kollontai (Wesley House, Cambridge and York St John University)

'Breaking the Silence': Jewish Women Working to Reassert Shalom in Israel

Judaism has within its biblical and rabbinic writings a rich body of teachings on shalom which embraces the concepts of both negative peace (the absence of war and conflict) and positive peace (wholeness, well-being, compassion, safety). In rabbinic writings, Shalom is presented as an ethical value to manage and overcome social tensions and the prevention of conflict and war and instead build contexts where respect for the dignity and sanctity of all life is the dominant principle determining how people live together. This requires a commitment to the Jewish teaching of Tikkun Olam, to repair and improve the world, which in contemporary times has become predominantly associated with social action promoting peace and justice. In contemporary Israel, a distortion of shalom has developed over the decades promoted by many religious and political leaders. The evidence of this is seen in the decades of Israeli oppression of Palestinians through Israel's illegal occupation of the West Bank. This paper discusses how one Israeli-Jewish women's organization, Machsom Watch, works to reclaim and reassert the full meaning of Shalom through its 'in-the-field' advocacy work for Palestinian human rights and a just solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict. The discussion will explore the non-violent methods used by these Jewish women and identify how their work reflects biblical and rabbinic teachings on the practice of shalom.

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11:00–12:30 Session 2: Lessons for Peace in Ecumenical and Interfaith Settings

Paper 2.1 Dr Sara Silvestri (City St George's University of London and Cambridge University, St Edmund's College)

The Political Limits of Christian Efforts Promoting Peace and Social Justice without a More Significant Ecumenical Engagement

I have been researching in the past few years how the Catholic church engages in global politics and European politics on key issues such as migration and the environment. This led me to discover a number of ecumenical initiatives on migration/refugees. So I expanded on other Christian traditions although my core materials and knowledge remain the Catholic tradition (my own). In many countries, including Italy and the UK, the churches attempt to be a united front against restrictive and inhumane migration policies and border controls. These ecumenical efforts are quite important concrete manifestations of the shared search for the kingdom of God on earth. Yet the Christian label has been hijacked by the extreme right and the Christians of goodwill who are indeed committed to social justice continue to be divided on doctrinal points, or split between conservatives and progressives; and many eventually abandon their institutional churches... All this weakens the moral and political position and potential for Christians to bring peace to the world. So to put it simply, my argument is that Christians need to bypass the progressive/conservatives debate if they want to be faithful to Christ and make a difference in society. Eventually more peace, more dialogue between Christians can be the route to peace in the world not simply in idealistic terms but also because of the way in which states engage with religious institutions and perceive and respond to the power of faith groups

Paper 2.2 Ms Anna Blackman and Dr Gaston Bacquet Quiroga (Glasgow University)

Restorative Justice and Theologies of Nonviolence: Learning from Thich Nhat Hanh and Dorothy Day

Our paper will focus on the nonviolent theologies of Thich Nhat Hanh and Dorothy Day, bringing into dialogue their respective Buddhist and Catholic approaches to social change. While previous studies have examined these figures as exemplars of engaged spirituality, this paper will focus on their convergence around the application of restorative justice as a form of nonviolent practice. The spiritualities of both figures place an emphasis on community-building and solidarity, which underpin the restorative approach. Day's perspective, rooted in the Catholic social tradition, emphasized the dignity of each person, joined together in the Mystical Body of Christ, impacting her solidarity with the oppressed and marginalized. Thich Nhat Hanh, on the other hand, promoted the concept of interbeing, or the deep interconnection amongst all beings and things. His work and teachings on mindful dialogue, empathy and understanding, emphasize the importance of transforming suffering through compassion. Central to the thought of both is a belief in the transformative power of nonviolence, reconciliation, and the healing of broken relationships, all core tenets of restorative justice. As restorative justice seeks to promote the restoration of peace, this paper will argue that the nonviolent theologies of Day and Thich Nhat Hanh can make important contributions to the restorative justice framework, whilst exploring what each tradition can learn from the other.

Paper 2.3 Mx Peach Hoyle (University of Cambridge)

Security, Safety and Cohesion: A Critical Lens on Peace Discourses in UK Interfaith Spaces

During my 2023-24 fieldwork in UK women's interfaith spaces, I found that interfaith practitioners and participants typically understand themselves as promoting cultures of peace. However, the meanings of peace within these spaces are rarely explicit. When global events make these meanings more salient, conflicts can arise which sometimes pose serious threats to the ongoing work of the groups in question. In this paper, I will critically engage with the ideas of safety and peace as they arise in UK interfaith spaces. My argument will draw on analysis of statements put out by interfaith organisations in response to three events: the Black Lives Matter protests of 2020, the rise in reported Antisemitic and Islamophobic hate crimes in 2023-24, and the far-right riots of 2024. I argue that there are two distinct frames of peace at play in UK interfaith discourse: one frame focuses on counter-extremism, cohesion and security; another on antiracism, peace and mutual care. Negotiation of these competing frames is part of a process of co-constitution of the faith-state relationship, wherein interfaith organisations act as spaces for the creative navigation of top-down and grassroots faith agendas. This in turn has consequences for the ability of the UK interfaith sector to contribute to wider struggle for peace.

13:15–14:45 Session 3: African Cultural Wisdom and Peace

Paper 3.1 Dr Femi Omotoyinbo (Queen's University, Belfast)

Women and War: A Pacifist Doctrine from the Odù Ifá

International humanitarian law (IHL) prohibits violence against women and girls during war. Article 27 of the Fourth Geneva Convention states: "Women shall be especially protected against any attack on their honour, in particular against rape, enforced prostitution, or any form of indecent assault." (UN, Geneva Convention, 1949, p. 179). However, there is little indication that the violence against women and girls in wars around the world, both historical and contemporary, are stopping. My contention starts with the view that commitment to the protection of women and girls in war is necessary for overall peace. But this transferable peace is unrealisable without a more fundamental reason for the wrongness of violence against women other than it is unlawful. "The Odu Ifa is the sacred text of the spiritual and ethical tradition of Ifa that has its origins in ancient Yorubaland...in modern Nigeria" (Asante and Mazama, 2009). The conception of women, within the Odù Ifá is apt to create a pacifist doctrine that first protects women and girls from war violence and ultimately discourages war. *Ôsá méjì* of the Odù Ifá classifies women as holders of sacred powers for world order and as pathway to posterity (de Mattos, 2016). Such pacifist doctrine from the Odù Ifá could impress on combatants to understand violence against women and girls as a self-defeating facilitation of world disorder and a *bellum contra posteritatem* (war against posterity).

Paper 3.2 Dr Jacob Mokhutso (University of Pretoria)

Ubuntu Theology as Peace Theology

Africans have a philosophy that encapsulates their understanding of what it means to be human, called Ubuntu in the Nguni languages of South Africa. This philosophy has kept African communities knitted to each other and has influenced their ethical, spiritual, and moral lives for a millennium. With the arrival of the colonizers and missionaries in Africa, Islam and Christianity were influenced. For this paper, the focus will be on Christianity and traditional African religion. Over the years, African traditional religion and Christianity have lived side by side, influencing each other to the extent that one of the pioneers of African religion studies, John Mbiti, refers to Christianity as an indigenous religion. This relation led to what some scholars call Ubuntu theology, a concoction of African philosophy and Christian ethos. This paper, therefore, aims to first define in detail what Ubuntu is according to African philosophy. Secondly, the paper discusses Ubuntu theology as argued by various scholars in the field. Thirdly, the paper argues that Ubuntu theology is an indigenous peace perspective born and bred in Africa relevant to contributing effectively and promoting global peace efforts as a peace theology. The paper applies desktop literature review as a methodology and concludes that Ubuntu theology, even though it is an African Indigenous theology, what it teaches and advocates for remains relevant in the 21st century.

Paper 3.3 Rev Emmanuel Shu (Wesley House, Cambridge)

Creating an Effective Contextual Discipleship and Theology of Peace in the Anglophone Regions of Cameroon

The origin of the Anglophone crisis can be traced from European colonial activities as the Scramble for Africa led to the annexation of the “Duala territory” by the Germans in 1884 later known as “Kamerun”. With the defeat of Germany in the First World War, Kemerun became a “mandated territory” under the League of nations (LoNs) and was ceded to France (80% French speakers) and Britain (20% English speakers) to be administered in 1922. In 1961, a United Nations (UN) administered plebiscite was held to decide if West Cameroon could be granted independence by joining Nigeria or East Cameroun without considering the linguistic and cultural differences. To decry the marginalization through protest, the government military suppressed the peaceful population. In response, a cross section of Anglophone civilians took up arms in demand of an independent state called “Ambazonia”. Worthy to note is that many involved in the anglophone crisis lack the basics of peaceful living, as can be observed that many youths have left the war-torn areas and are now living as internally displaced persons (IDPs) within safer areas. This raises the challenge on how the church forms Christian disciples, especially youths, who are promoters of peace and justice. In this paper, I discuss on how the church can help create a peaceful society through non-violence and foster cooperative relationships among communities, and encourage understanding, tolerance and forgiveness.

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The Edward Rogers Memorial Lecture

Bishop Minerva G. Carcaño (United Methodist Church)

The Virtues of Compassion, Mercy and Justice Must Shape the World We Will Live In

Forced migration continues to inflict great danger and death to many around the world. Countries where migrants land, with some exceptions, are becoming more and more hostile towards the migrant. While people of faith and good will continue to work to lead in their communities and nations to welcome the migrant, and reform unjust and often inhumane immigration policies, there have now arisen the forces of religious nationalism, including Christian nationalism, and growing political authoritarianism that bring further harm to migrants and communities. Migration will not cease in our lifetime. How we live together with migrants will depend on our commitments to the virtues of compassion, mercy and justice, and a spirit of welcome to migrants who will come our way.

Friday 6 June 2025

9:00–10:30 Session 4: Peace, Justice, and Nonviolence

Paper 4.1 Dr Richard A. Davis (Wesley House, Cambridge)

The Priority of Peace?: Revisiting the Relationship between Peace and Justice in Christian Thought

It is a commonplace among Christians—and others seeking peace—that true peace comes through the pursuit of justice. According to this view, justice is prior to peace; to work for peace, one must first work for justice. As Martin Luther King Jr. famously stated: “True peace is not merely the absence of tension; it is the presence of justice.” This paper will explore the roots of this idea in Catholic Social Thought, beginning with the teachings of Pope Paul VI, and critically examine whether this sequence is always necessary. Can peace be sought directly without the intermediary pursuit of justice? Moreover, the pursuit of justice itself may sometimes conflict with the realization of true peace. For instance, seeking justice through violent means, such as the coercive power of the state, can perpetuate further injustice and indefinitely postpone the achievement of genuine peace. By drawing on biblical conceptions of peace, the aim of this paper is to restore peace to its rightful place in Christian social theology—as both an end and a means. This approach contends that peace can be pursued directly, without reliance on justice movements, thereby reimagining the relationship between peace and justice in the Christian tradition.

Paper 4.2 Dr Ayla Gol (York St John University)

Rethinking Peace and Justice in Islamic Theology: A Critique of Moral Governance under the AKP in Turkey

This research paper will analyse the complex interplay between ‘peace’ (salam) and ‘justice’ (adale) in Islamic theology and how this dynamic has been exploited under the Justice and Development Party (AKP) rule in Turkey. By applying a mixed method of critical historiography and textual analysis, the research question focuses on how the AKP has leveraged Islamic theology to consolidate its moral governance and power under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdogan since 2002. The paper first traces how the AKP utilised

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the narratives of ‘peace’ in Turkey by intertwining Islamic values and nationalist discourses, appealing to a broad base of Kurdish minorities and perceived internal threats. The second part then focuses on the concept of ‘justice’ in Islamic theology as the AKP’s underpinning rationale often argues true justice can only be achieved through adherence to Islamic values. This approach aligns with the AKP’s narrative that Islamic values inherently promote moral governance and social justice, positioning the party as the guardian of these values and peace against secular elites and corrupt establishments. However, the continuing conflict without finding a peaceful solution to the ‘Kurdish question’ and increasing polarisation in Turkish politics questions the moral governance and power of the AKP.

Paper 4.3 Dr Tom Woerner-Powell (University of Manchester)

Good Muslim Pacifist, Bad Muslim Pacifist: Peace and Justice in the Islamic Nonviolence of Jawdat Said and Wahiduddin Khan

This paper explores contrasting attitudes toward the relationship between peace and justice between two preeminent Muslim advocates for nonviolence. In 2015, the United Arab Emirates’ state-sponsored Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies proposed to award its Peace Prize, the Sayyidina Imam Al Hassan Ibn Ali Award, jointly to the most celebrated Muslim pacifists of Syria and India: respectively Jawdat Said and Wahiddudin Khan. The latter accepted the award alone, while the former condemned it as ‘fraud and counterfeit’. Beyond the transient politics of the controversial institution involved, this event illustrates two fundamentally different approaches to the natures of peace and justice, and to the means of their attainment. What is more, it reflects a long history of both nonviolentists’ theory and practice. This paper examines and contrasts those divergent paths, while also suggesting points of convergence between them. In the process, it questions common dichotomies between activism and quietism in religious and secular leadership.

11:00–12:30 Session 5: Christian Peace Theologies in Context

Paper 5.1 Dr Laurie Lyter Bright (Presbyterian Peace Fellowship)

Shifting the Narrative on Conscientious Objection in the US and Beyond

This paper is an examination of three theological traditions known for conscientious objection beginning in World War II in the U.S.: Mennonites, Presbyterian Church (USA), and the Episcopalian tradition. By examining archival data and conducting interviews with conscientious objectors from each tradition, this paper then employs grounded theory to propose a theory of the theology of conscientious objection. Furthermore, it explores the possibilities of how this knowledge might be amplified through education to reduce the stigma of conscientious objection on those who follow that path.

Paper 5.2 Mr Steve Hucklesby (The Methodist Church in Britain, JPIT, and University of Exeter)

Faith Engagement on Killer Robots: Is Christian Theology up to the Challenge?

Advanced AI used in autonomous weapons systems (or killer robots as they are colloquially known) is likely to proliferate, becoming accessible to many state and non-state actors. The ethics of increased automation in the targeting of humans and the possibility of fully autonomous systems are hotly debated in government and military circles; it is a debate in which a faith voice ought to be present and in which faith actors are beginning to engage. Many of the institutional working groups, ethicists and faith leaders that have contributed in the area of nuclear weapons and arms control are increasingly turning their attention to the distinct challenge of new technology in warfare. Christian theological thinking on nuclear threats and disarmament is well-trodden ground, yet the positions of church institutions are neither uniform nor static over time. In addressing ethics around autonomous weapons systems, what might be learnt from past institutional faith engagement in arms control? This paper argues that while faith-based ethicists must grapple with technical complexities such as the nature of the human-machine interface and the military incentive for autonomous weapons systems, the essential contribution of faith actors must be to foreground the dignity and uniqueness of every human person whether they are combatant, civilian or assigned any other label.

Paper 5.3 Ms Wan-Yin Lim (Wesley House, Cambridge)

From Communion to Compassion: A Methodist Theology of Peace in a Religious Nationalist Context

The 2024 report on global religious nationalism reveals that 62% of Malaysians think being a true Malaysian means being a Muslim. Despite Malays, Chinese, and Indians gaining independence together, the dominance of Malay-Muslim ideologies has led to the exclusion of others from structural racial Islamization. While a public theology of communion promoting love and reconciliation has been introduced, the challenge remains: how can theology shape national belonging beyond passive tolerance or withdrawal, fostering holistic peace with ourselves, our neighbours, and God? The Methodist theology of the Image of God rejects dehumanisation and affirms equal dignity for all, shifting our focus from mere communion to deep compassion. This challenges our perceptions of the marginalisation of ourselves and highlights a way of living with our neighbours and God. Thus, this paper argues that peace is not defined by religious nationalism but by shared human dignity, reasoning that peace is not the absence of conflict but by the active presence of love, reconciliation, and flourishing. Ultimately, this paper contributes to both a contextual theology of interethnic and interreligious peace in Malaysia and a broader global Methodist theology that transcends cultural, national, and denominational boundaries. It seeks common ground among diverse Christian traditions while respecting contextual differences.

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13:15–14:45 Session 6: Costly Religious Peace Witness

Paper 6.1 Ms Riya Kartha (University of Cambridge)

Transforming the Self, Transforming the World: Daisaku Ikeda's Buddhist Philosophy of Peacebuilding

Japanese Buddhist philosopher, educator, and peacebuilder Daisaku Ikeda (1928-2023) exemplified nonviolence through his life and teachings. Rooted in Nichiren Buddhism, his philosophy centres on the dignity of life, interdependence, and the transformative potential of individuals to create a peaceful world. Central to Ikeda's philosophy is 'human revolution,' an inner transformation fostering self-realisation and empowering individuals to contribute to the collective good. Dialogue, as a nonviolent method, is integral to his approach, enabling mutual understanding and conflict resolution. Ikeda advocates for the "poetic spirit," a way of being that harmonises reason with intuition and cultivates awareness of life's interconnectedness. This spirit, central to artistic and cultural expression, counterbalances the alienation caused by over-reliance on rationality. Through the organisations he founded, Ikeda promoted peace and understanding, fostering cross-cultural dialogue and celebrating shared humanity. Ikeda's humanistic philosophy challenges dualisms—self and other, mind and body, person and environment—emphasising humanity's interdependence with all phenomena. My paper explores how Ikeda's Buddhist philosophy, with its focus on education, dialogue, and value-creation provides a unique framework for nonviolent approaches to peacebuilding, positioning him as a vital figure in the study of religious leaders committed to peacebuilding in the last six decades of world history.

Paper 6.2 Dr Frank M. Hasel (Biblical Research Institute)

A Pacifist on Hitler's Front Lines: Franz Hasel and the Theology that Motivated His Nonviolence

Franz Hasel faced a serious ethical dilemma when drafted into Hitler's army. Afraid that the pressure of war might tempt him to kill, Franz secretly replaced the revolver in his holster with a painted wooden gun. Narrowly dodging death, Franz quietly warned local Jews to escape before the SS arrived. This paper will reflect on Franz's legacy and the theological motivations behind it. The Seventh-day Adventist Church (of which Franz was a part) has a long history of conscientious objection. Since the mid 19th century, many Adventists around the globe have refused to engage in combat, sometimes at great personal sacrifice. This has been motivated, in part, by a desire to obey all ten commandments (including the command not to kill and the command to observe the Sabbath). Today, divergent views on pacifism exist among Adventists. Military involvement is not a test of church membership, and some members do enlist. However, the denomination's official stance remains one of non-combatancy. In this paper, Frank Hasel, the grandson of Franz, will discuss the history and theology of nonviolence within the Seventh-day Adventist tradition. Frank is one of the editors of *Adventists and Military Service: Biblical, Historical, and Ethical Perspectives*. Drawing from the Hebrew Scriptures, the New Testament, and lessons from church history, the traditional Adventist theology of nonviolence seeks to recover the peaceful spirit of Jesus Christ and the early Christian Church.

Paper 6.3 Dr Luke Li (University of Edinburgh)

Overcoming Communist Violence: The Burden and Promise of Liu Xiaobo's Nonviolent Courage

This essay develops the concept of nonviolent courage through the case study of Chinese Nobel Peace Laureate Liu Xiaobo and a critical dialogue with feminist thinker Judith Butler. Drawing upon Butler's concept of normative violence, I first offer a contextual reading of Liu's peace activism, suggesting that his nonviolent courage emerged through a profound identity shift from tragic hero to peacemaker. I then trace Liu's moral transformation, illustrating how nonviolent courage was cultivated through confession to a transcendent God, mourning for victims of violence, and a commitment to universal human dignity. In this process, Christian faith played a crucial role in shaping this virtue that empowered Liu to challenge the entrenched violence of the Communist regime and to stand in solidarity with the victims and the oppressed. I further explore the individual and collective facets of nonviolent courage, particularly as they matured in Liu's later life and work, arguing that this burdened yet promising virtue is essential to countering state violence. By examining the religious, intellectual, and moral components of Liu's nonviolent courage, I contend with Butler that Liu's witness deepens our understanding of the moral capacities and obstacles inherent in opposing normative violence. Moreover, it calls for the cultivation of a deeper, reflective practice of nonviolence that bridges personal virtue with collective action to advance nonviolent resistance in China and beyond.

15:15–16:45 Session 7: Peacebuilding through Religious Traditions

Paper 7.1 Prof Jamie Pitts (Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary)

Peace When There is No Peace: Anticolonial Revolution and Peace Witness in Three Christian Traditions

This paper explores possibilities for Christian witness to peace in the midst of anticolonial revolutionary violence. What does it look like for the church to embody and proclaim peace in such contexts? The Algerian War is often seen as the template for modern anticolonial revolution and so provides a helpful test case. French Catholic and Reformed Christians who had participated in the Resistance movement during WWII tended to favor Algerian independence. For some of these Christians, witness to peace entailed the risk of material support for the armed revolutionaries. Many Catholics who took this step were influenced by Dominican *nouvelle théologie* figures such as Chenu and Congar, who argued that Christian witness should take the form of incarnational solidarity with the oppressed. The Reformed, for their part, were guided by Barth's writings on the need for Christian resistance to unjust state power. A third tradition, the Mennonites, had a much smaller but still significant presence. The American Mennonites, initially led by John Howard Yoder, coordinated missionary projects that were intended to display to the Algerians the nature of Christ's peace through acts of service carried out "in the name of Christ." Although each of these traditions had a distinctive theological and practical approach, they also worked together during and after the war. Considering their examples helps clarify some strengths and weaknesses of historic peace witness in anticolonial settings.

Paper 7.2 Dr Hina Khalid (University of Cambridge)

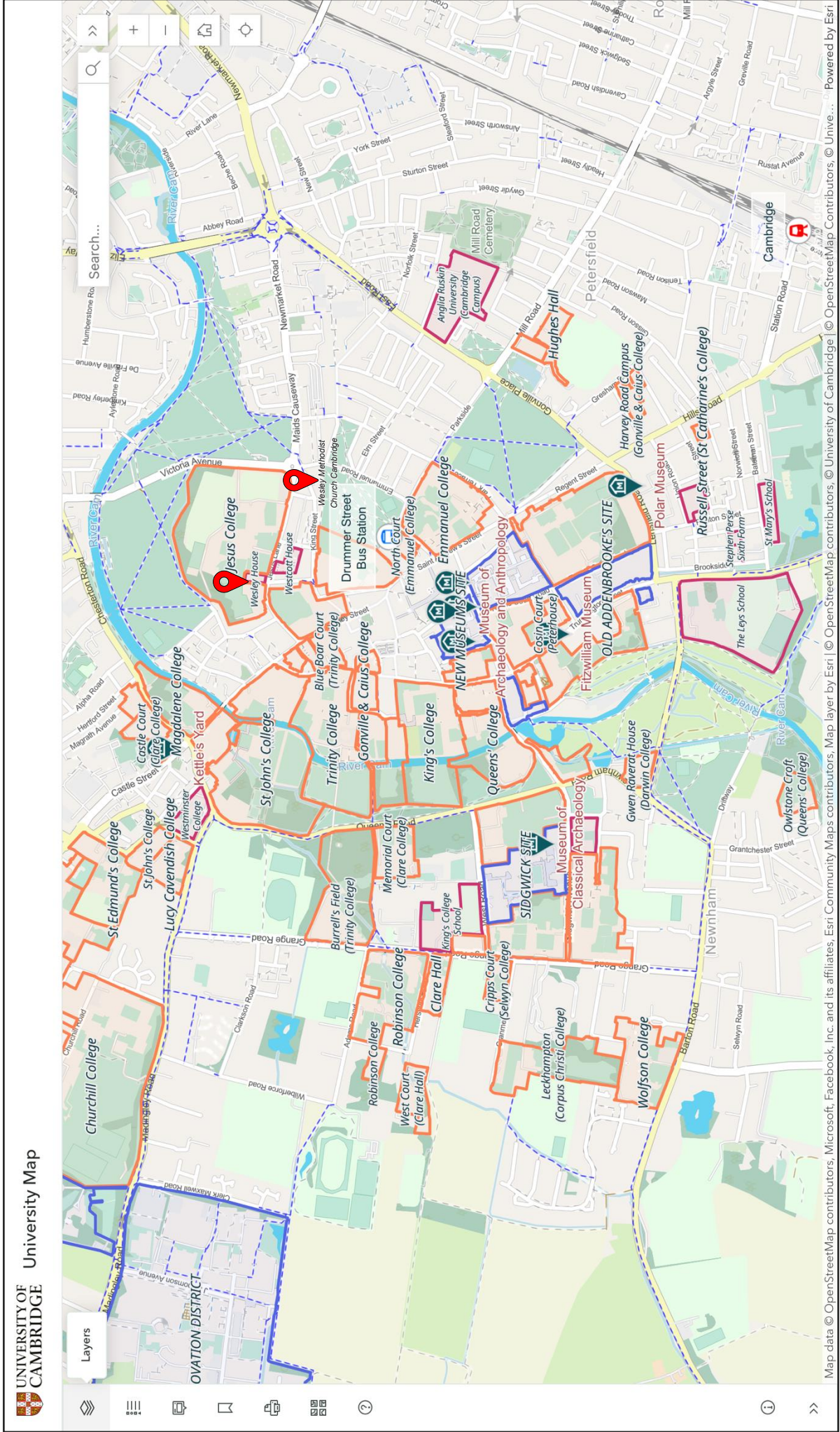
The Integrative Possibility of the Truthful Word: Can Islamic Understanding of Speech as a Locus of Peace

In a famous hadith (a saying of the Prophet Muhammad), we find the evocative declaration: “the best struggle (jihad) is to speak the truth before a tyrannical ruler”. Here, emphasis is laid upon the active utterance, the voicing of truth into being where falsity and injustice reign triumphant. Indeed, the power of words to heal or rupture, to build up or destroy, is a common motif in the Islamic theological universe; the Qur’an, for instance, declares that a noble act of charity is immediately nullified if a word of reproach is uttered to the recipient, and in a particularly beautiful image, it likens a ‘good word’ to a ‘good tree’, whose roots reach deep into the earth and whose branches rise to the heavens. In this paper, I ask: what might it mean to take words seriously as creative custodians of peace, wholeness, and healing, but also as wounding agents of selfishness, destruction, and decay? I argue that the ‘good word’ as conceived in Islam is one centred, ultimately, on the allied imperatives of peace, justice, truth, and beauty. Moreover, because these four imperatives belong, in their fullest sense, to God (among whose names in the Islamic tradition are The Peaceful, The Just, The True, The Beautiful), I will suggest that to speak ‘good words’ in a finite, human mode, is ultimately to mirror something of the eternally life-giving, and transcendently ‘peaceful’, divine speech.

Paper 7.3 Mr Robert Harrap (SGI Europe)

Buddhist Philosophy’s Contribution to Building a Culture of Peace

Nichiren, a 13th century Japanese Buddhist reformer who based his teachings on the Mahayana text The Lotus Sutra, lived during threatened invasion by the Mongols and civil war. His treatise (Rissho Ankoku Ron) delivered to the Regent of Japan suggests that the foundations for peace include: prayer ‘for the four quarters of the land’, dialogue as a conflict resolution tool and inner transformation to live with compassion, wisdom and courage, rather than the three poisons of greed, anger and delusion seen as causes for conflict and aggression. The Soka Gakkai, a global lay movement based on Nichiren’s philosophy, is active in nuclear weapons abolition and uses prayer, dialogue and inner transformation (what is now termed ‘human revolution’) in its activities for peace. In 1958, Josei Toda, then president of Soka Gakkai made a declaration to 50,000 young people calling for the abolition of nuclear weapons urging them to challenge ways of thinking such as deterrence theory which justify maintaining nuclear weapons. Since that declaration the Soka Gakkai has raised awareness of how individuals can take action for peace using a series of educational tools, including most recently the exhibition ‘Everything You Treasure—For a World Free From Nuclear Weapons’ jointly created by Soka Gakkai International and the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (2017 Nobel Peace Laureate). The paper will explore Nichiren’s philosophy and the practical steps SGI has taken based on it.



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