

'We pray for peace' by Alan Gaunt (*Singing the Faith* 719)

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We pray for peace,
but not the easy peace
built on complacency
and not the truth of God.
We pray for real peace,
the peace God's love alone can seal.

We pray for peace,
but not the cruel peace,
leaving God's poor bereft
and dying in distress,
we pray for real peace,
enriching all the human race.

We pray for peace,
and not the evil peace,
defending unjust laws
and nursing prejudice,
but for the real peace
of justice, mercy, truth and love.

We pray for peace:
holy communion
with Christ our risen Lord
and every living thing;
God's will fulfilled on earth
and all his creatures reconciled.

We pray for peace,
and for the sake of peace,
look to the risen Christ
who gives the grace we need,
to serve the cause of peace
and make our own self-sacrifice.

God, give us peace:
if you withdraw your love,
there is no peace for us
nor any hope of it.
With you to lead us on,
through death or tumult, peace will come.

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I lost my temper in a charity shop this week. As a relatively even-tempered, mild-mannered introvert this isn't typical but as I skimmed the spines of books I overheard a discussion on the subject of Syrian refugees: 'You see these people on the television all saying they want

to come here and it's for no other reason than our benefits. They're not our problem, we've got enough of our own to look after'.

Of course the refugee crisis unfolding across the world at the moment is hugely complex, not reducible to soundbites or well-meaning simplistic responses. Listening to the individual stories, to statistics and politicians, it is tremendously tempting to turn away. I have to force myself to watch the news these days. I have to force myself not to turn my attention elsewhere. I have to steel myself to look into the face of the wailing infant or the gaunt, despondent teenager, or the stricken, desperate young mother. I'm a Christian and these men and women, young and old, footsore and frightened, these are my brothers and sisters. I feel helpless to do anything about it aside from paying attention and prayer - to pray for some measure of peace for every one of those souls tossed about with scant protection on stormy seas and scant protection from stormy world politics.

I need to listen to the realities of the world, because it is too easy for me to get caught up, as Alan Gaunt puts it, in the easy peace of my own immediate experience. It is too easy for me to excuse a cruel peace that ignores the world's poorest. It is too easy for me to be seduced by an evil peace that locks the door against the uncomfortable questions raised by the arms trade, military intervention, unjust trade and unequal relationships. Psalm 113 says: 'How good and pleasant when brothers and sisters dwell together in unity'. If the incarnation is to mean anything at all, it must mean that every man, woman and child on this earth is my sister, my brother. Peace can only be true and lasting peace if it includes all of us in a unity of 'justice, mercy, truth and love'.

So there I was, standing in a charity shop in an impoverished Northern town feeling my hackles rise, feeling angry at these women, my sisters too, disturbing my Tuesday afternoon book-browsing peace, bringing the spectres of fear and poverty, of racism and complacency into my little haven of quiet. I didn't manage much of a challenge beyond an expression of my feeling that most people I saw on television wanted to live, to not be afraid, to be safe and that the vast majority were seeking refuge, and finding welcome, in countries much poorer than our own.

I didn't do the subject justice, and my innate reserve probably meant that I was the only one aware of my levels of emotion. But I'm grateful to those women because they disturbed my peace, and that disruption can only do me good. It is not that I believe that the role of the Christian is to be perpetually angry, but I do believe that God has a hand in waking us from the doze of comfort that our world sometimes lulls us into.

What, after all, is Christian peace all about? Well it is, at some level, a peace that 'passeth understanding' but it is about more than assurance, the belief that all will be well in the end. Peace is not the same as cosiness or contentedness, a felt experience of comfort. The peace of God is not, primarily, a private peace. It is much bigger, more all-encompassing, more world changing. It is in the building of this peace that we are challenged and privileged to participate. The process isn't necessarily easy or comfortable. Our discomfort, though, can be a sign of God's love working in us calling us to commit ourselves more to God's own vision of peace. As Alan Gaunt's hymn assures us:

With you to lead is on,
Through death or tumult, peace will come.

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