



# action

by

# Christians

*All that is  
required for the  
triumph of evil is  
that good men do  
nothing*

# Against torture

Nov/Dec 2015 & Jan 2016

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## Christmas Meditation

At Christmas we are reminded of the blessing of new life and of the value of our own lives. We celebrate the birth of Christ who came as God Incarnate so we might be saved. Despite this cause for celebration, Christmas is intimately linked to Christ's Passion, where we are reminded of the great cruelties that people commit against each other. Christ was born as an innocent child but died as a tortured and humiliated man alongside criminals.

To torture someone is to treat them in the worst imaginable way, to take away their humanity and their dignity. Torture is, as Pope Francis said of human trafficking, a 'crime against humanity'.

Pope Francis has announced that the Catholic Church will celebrate a Jubilee Year of Mercy which begins this December. He has made clear in both his statements and gestures that this is a time to forgive rather than to condemn. This is an opportunity for us, with renewed fervour, to remind political leaders of the need to combat the use of torture throughout the world, to defend those threatened with torture, and for mercy in the execution of their own power.

During this Jubilee Year, Pope Francis calls on people to leave their lives of corruption saying: 'Corruption prevents us from looking to the future with hope, because its tyrannical greed shatters the plans of the weak and tramples upon the poorest of the poor. It is an evil that embeds itself into the actions of everyday life and spreads.' In his Letter to the Romans, St Paul states that governments should serve God for the benefit of their people; they have a duty of care. Many people and governments fall into the trap of believing that the ends of an action justify the means but permanent damage is done to the victims of these methods. In the current political climate, and with widespread civil unrest across much of the world, it is essential that we defend the human right to dignity and integrity of mind and body for all people.

We pray that those countries where there is institutionalised torture may recognise the damage that this treatment does to the very fabric of society and how other people then treat each other. We pray also for those people that are victims of torture that they may find healing, peace and safety.

*Cardinal Vincent Nichols, Archbishop of Westminster and Patron of ACAT UK*

## LETTER FROM THE COMMITTEE

We are, once again, without a Chairman - a very sorry state of affairs. The Committee will do its best to carry on with ACAT matters and will continue producing a mailing every two to three months for as long as possible.

Following our letter to all members sent last month we had some interest shown in joining the Committee and as such, we welcome Derek Lewis and possibly Naomi Bowen who will be co-opted onto the Committee, several other members will come to the next meeting to see if they wish to join us. We welcome Ben Myers onto the Committee as well.

So, currently the bottom line is that we still need a Chairman and we still need help with Secretarial work, or producing the mailing, so our letter still stands.

We were also very disappointed in the lack of numbers at the AGM and Conference. A total of 10 members meant that we were only just quorate. Those who did come heard an excellent talk from David Fulton; a report appears further on in this mailing.

At this moment we have not set a date for the next AGM. We need advice from the membership regarding the time of year, venue and format of future meetings as clearly we are not working with our membership as we would like. So, if you have any suggestions as to how we can approach future AGMs and the Conference please let us know.

On a completely different note, our annual Greetings Card list is included with this mailing. For those receiving a hard copy it is situated in the centre of this mailing. For those receiving the mailing by email or reading this on the website it is a separate attachment. Please use this list to send cards to the people and organisations named. David Fulton (our speaker) told us that his greatest joy whilst being imprisoned in a 6 foot by 4 foot darkened cell was receiving brightly coloured correspondence, which was pushed through a small outlet in the cell door. It brought, he said, some brightness into his darkness. So the brighter the card the better.

As you will see our Patron, Cardinal Vincent Nichols, has written a special pre-Christmas meditation. It is likely that we will be inviting other Patrons to do likewise during the year, which will be good.

On the subject of Patrons we are delighted to welcome Archbishop John Sentamu and Baroness Cox as Patrons.

It does not seem that long since our 2014 Christmas mailing; now, a whole year later we are again preparing to mark the Advent of our Lord, his birth, the killing of baby boys under two years old by Herod's men and the flight of the Holy Family into Egypt.

How similar is that to the situation in Eastern Europe, Syria and Iraq and many other countries. Just like the Holy Family, men, women, young and old are fleeing regimes in countries like Syria and Iraq, and brutal groups such as ISIL. In their thousands they are so desperate that they get into flimsy boats, often having been charged hundreds of pounds by others, and floated across the Mediterranean to what they hope is a new life free from violence and ill treatment. I do not propose to go into the rights and wrongs of the situation save to say that when they eventually get to a European country very often it seems they are encountering more and more barriers, experiencing cold, wet, and hunger once again as more and more countries are closing their borders and refusing entry to these refugees.

You may recall that earlier this year we sent a petition to the Home Secretary asking the Government to reconsider its position and to allow more Syrian and Iraqi refugees into the country. We got a very short response at that time saying that the UK was working in refugee camps and felt it was better to keep the refugees in their own countries. It took the very vivid pictures of a young boy who had drowned and been washed up onto a Turkish beach to change the views of the Government and other countries and we are allowing more refugees into the country over the next few years. However, is this enough? We are keeping an eye on the situation and will not be afraid to act should the situation prove necessary.

We wish all our members a very blessed Advent, Christmas and New Year.

Your ACAT Committee

## Remember in your Prayers

**Mahdi Abu Dheeb - Bahrain** a school teacher in Bahrain and the president of teaching union the Bahrain Teachers' Association, was arrested for encouraging members of his union to strike. As a result of his torture, Mahdi suffers from many medical conditions, including diabetes and hypertension. The prison is not able to provide the medical treatment he needs and he has not been allowed to receive this outside of prison.

**Atena Farghadani - Iran** a 29-year-old painter and activist, was sentenced to 12 years and nine months because she was seen to be critical of the Iranian regime in her art and in her peaceful activism. Her lawyer visited Atena in prison after her trial and shook her hand. This led to charges of 'illegitimate sexual relationship short of adultery' and 'indecent conduct' being brought against both. Before her trial for this 'crime' she was forced to have a virginity and pregnancy test. Such virginity testing is internationally recognised as a form of violence and discrimination against women and girls.

**Luaty Beirão - Angola** organised a workshop on democratic change. 13 other young activists gathered to expound peaceful protest techniques. Hours later, they were all illegally arrested, accused of "rebellion" and "coup attempt". Luaty has been frequently subjected to arrests and ill treatment and has been detained in a prison far from his family for a much longer period than that provided by law. He is currently critically ill as a result of being on Hunger Strike for many months.

Give thanks for the release of Shaker Aamer from 14 years captivity. Pray also for his family and friends as they readjust to life with him home.

For all recipients of our Christmas Greetings Card campaign

For all people detained without fair trials in the world

For all refugees fleeing unfair and cruel regimes

*Lord Jesus*

*You endured ill-treatment, torture  
and a violent death, although you  
had done no wrong,  
Be with those who suffer at the hands  
of the torturers.*

*Grant that in the midst of their  
suffering, they may know they are  
not alone.*

*Give them renewed strength and  
hope, and an end to their suffering  
and their despair.*

*If it is your will bring them freedom.  
Be with the families of all who suffer  
harsh imprisonment and torture.*

*Bring them, in the pain of not  
knowing what has happened to their  
loved ones, the knowledge that all are  
held in your loving arms and that  
nothing can tear them from you.*

*Amen*



## Talk by David Fulton at the Conference

David became a Christian following a chequered career which culminated in prison for some years after being convicted of armed robbery. He became a Christian in Dartmoor Prison through the work of the Prison Fellowship.

Following his release he started work as a Minister with the Prison Fellowship. He went on holiday to The Gambia in 1994. The Gambia was 'a country dying' caught up in coups and in a dire situation.

On his return to the UK he and his wife felt that God was calling them to The Gambia not knowing what they had been called to do.

Within 3 months of his arrival he was appointed Chaplain for Prisons. Whilst in the course of this work he met with prisoners who had been in prison for some 16 years without trial. He went to see the Governor but with no joy so he went to talk with the Director of Prisons. The men were released - he was dismissed as Chaplain.

He was then asked to become Chaplain to the Army whilst his wife went into the Prison.

During his ministry he came across many Christian soldiers whose 5 - 8 year old daughters had been taken away into the jungle where FGM took place. He led a group of soldiers to go and rescue them and over a period of time many girls were rescued. He led Alpha courses where many Islamic soldiers were led to Christ.

The Gambia is a very Islamic country.

In 2008 his compound was stormed by the Secret Police and he, his wife and young daughter were taken to the Police Station. They were charged with Sedition (plotting to overthrow the Government). During this time his wife was also in the female wing of the Prison well looked after by the women prisoners.

After about 10 days he was then taken away to the NIA headquarters (Secret Police), where he was tortured in various ways: *he could not revisit this episode as he experiences regular flashbacks to this day -*

save to say that he was in a small cell measuring 4ft wide 6ft long and 5ft high. For most of the time he was in total darkness and in solitary confinement with only cockroaches and rats for company.

He went on to list types of torture which had been used: hanging upside down, being badly beaten, being hung up by his wrists and electrocuted. He was also taken outside, had a gun held to his head and told he would be shot if he did not convert to Islam. Blank bullets were in the gun. He now suffers from sciatic nerve damage, has regular bouts of tinnitus and an 80% post traumatic strain disorder and cannot go into lifts or confined spaces.

The British High Commission knew of his incarceration but said they could do nothing as they were 'bound by red tape'. A representative QC from the UK was refused entry into The Gambia.

David said that he was in no way anti-Muslim in fact Muslims saved his life because while he was in the cell the guards did their best to help by giving him food. He said he received lots of help from them.

This help included smuggling in letters and cards. The things that really got to him and helped him the most were the postcards. The brightly coloured ones especially were 'awesome'. He went on to say that what prisoners need is encouragement: to know that someone is praying for you is fantastic.

After some 2 years' incarceration, he was freed and smuggled out of the country. He would not say why or how. He settled back into the UK in the South West. He went through a lot of recovery time, about 3 years he thought, but still gets recurring nightmares.

With the help of a counsellor he started the cathartic writing of a book 'A Time to Tell', which has helped him immensely.

At the end of his talk so many questions were asked. The one question which struck me most was: 'Why did the High Commission do nothing when they heard what was happening?' His reply was: 'There was too much red tape ... until a new High Commissioner was brought in.'

This talk was one of the most distressing yet gripping talks I have heard in my years of attending Conferences.

Richard Dent and I first met David at the Christian Resource Exhibition in Exeter earlier this year and we were so struck by his story we invited him to come and talk to us and the Conference.

Praise God he did.

Margaret Russell

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## **AGM feedback**

We were very disappointed with the number attending this year. We were only just quorate.

The election results were:

Chairman	Vacant
Treasurer	Ray Dunnett
Secretary	Margaret Russell
Membership	Ray Dunnett
Publicity	Peter Dixon
SOS Torture	Janet Norwood
J & P rep	Kevin Burr
Death Penalty	Audrey Wells

Ben Myers was elected to the Committee.

Additional people showed an interest in joining the committee so are coming to a Committee meeting to see how we work and will probably then be co-opted on.

The various Committee reports are included in our Annual Report available from the office.

## **Derek Lewis**

Derek has been co-opted onto the committee.

He is a retired Senior Lecturer of Modern Languages (German) and Director of Its Foreign Language Centre.

He was also a visiting Lecturer at the University of Wurzburg in Germany and specialised in Contemporary German Affairs, Language and translation studies.

For several years he was an active member of Amnesty International (AI) chairing the East Devon Group.

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## **Shaker Aamer**

We are delighted to report that following years of campaigning, countless appeals being written by both The Office and members and many greetings cards sent over the 14 years that Shaker Aamer was incarcerated in Guantanamo Bay he is now back in the UK.

Wonderful news indeed.

We thank everyone who has helped to publicise his ill treatment and so helped to gain his release.

## Looking At Prisons (2)

In our June/July edition, I put forward some figures of people who had been killed whilst in custody in the UK and the USA. Remembering that the US is a huge country, I found some more figures of “extra-judicial” killings by police in the US, often before a person has even reached a prison or been held in custody. Here are a few details from various cities. One notorious incident recounted on the internet tells of a 12 year old boy, alone in a playground with a toy gun. He was shot within seconds of police arriving at the scene, and they held back his sister from comforting him, as he lay dying! Another was a man (poor?) selling single cigarettes on the street. He was wrestled to the ground and ended up dead!!

The percentage of black persons receiving this treatment is way out of line with the numbers in the populations of the cities concerned. E.g.

<b>CITY</b>	<b>Blacks</b>	<b>Killed</b>
Chicago	32.9%	91%
Houston	23%	48%
New York	28.6%	87%
Rockford	20%	100%

Does this mean that black people are the majority of criminals or just that their crimes, if committed, are easier to spot, as opposed to e.g. banking frauds?

Compare those figures to killings of white and Latino persons:

<b>CITY</b>	<b>Latinos</b>	<b>Killed</b>	<b>Whites</b>	<b>Killed</b>
Chicago	28.9%	4% (1)	31.7%	4% (1)
Houston	43.8%	2% (3)	25.6%	(8)
New York	25%	9% (2)	33.3%	4% (1)
Rockford	15.8%	(0)	54.4%	(0)

So, apart from being killed by beating, shooting, gassing or some form of torture, black people are at a great disadvantage merely because they are black! Hence the campaign “Black Lives Matter” in North America.

However, it is not all bad news. In Texas, one of the harshest states for prisons, there is a Judge called Bobby Frances, who has set up a regime to combat drug and drink addiction—the cause of many crimes. He gives prisoners, after court hearings, an informal talk in groups, but will not tolerate being lied to, and offers to help people access a rehabilitation programme to turn their lives around. This is cutting the re-offending rates and gives people who have had a rough start in life, with few opportunities, the chance to improve themselves and their lives.

Also, in UK, I saw a piece on TV about Michael Gove visiting a women's rehabilitation centre, where the women help to train guide/helper dogs for others. It seems the more of these schemes are available, the better for everyone.

Janet Norwood

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## **Israeli regime torture of Palestinian children is increasing**

A lawyer from the Prisoners' Commission has eyewitness accounts of Palestinian children being beaten and tortured by Israeli security forces while in detention, *Pls48.net* reports. Hiba Masalha provided the media with a number of examples of such incidents on Wednesday. They are on the increase, she pointed out.

Giving a personal account of his treatment at the hands of the Israelis, Amir Arrar, 17, from Ramallah, said that a group of soldiers assaulted him in the street and beat him with their guns on his back and legs. "They pushed me down to the ground and continued beating me with their hands and kicking me." He claims that one soldier held his neck so tightly that he was unable to breathe properly. "At the same time, another soldier beat my back with his gun very hard until I couldn't stand up because of the severe pain."

Arrar's testimony includes his claim that he was pulled by the soldiers to their vehicle; they kept beating him while doing so. "I fell unconscious and when I came round I found myself lying on the ground and wet in an army camp." There, he continued, the soldiers still beat him. "They stepped on me and threw stones at me. Then I was taken to Al-Jalam Investigation Centre and the investigator there beat

me on my face. I was scared and in pain. Then I was moved to Megiddo Prison.”

Prisoner Shadi Jabarin is just 16 and from Shua’fat Refugee Camp in Jerusalem. He was arrested on 6 July and is now in Hasharon Prison. “Undercover forces assaulted me at 3pm near the camp and started beating me on my face, back and leg with their pistols and kicking me. I suffered severe pains all over my body.” At the investigation centre, he said, the security officers took turns in beating him, causing a lot of pain.

Also in Hasharon is Ratib Haymouni, 17, from the Silwan district of Jerusalem. He was arrested at his home on 25 May. According to Hiba Masalha, the soldiers who arrested him beat him as they took him to their vehicle, while he was blindfolded and handcuffed. “He remembers falling down several times due to the harsh beating. They pulled him savagely when he fell down and this caused him bruises in different parts of his body. While he was in the jeep, they continued beating him and putting their feet on him.”

Before being moved to Hasharon Prison, said Masalha, he was investigated for 36 hours. During this time he was tied to a chair and beaten by investigators. Such cases, she explained, are now becoming more common as Israel tightens its occupation of the West Bank and Jerusalem.

# *Prayer and Meditation for Advent and Christmas*

Moonless darkness stands between.  
Past, the Past, no more be seen!  
But the Bethlehem-star may lead me  
To the sight of Him Who freed me  
From the self that I have been.  
Make me pure, Lord: Thou art holy;  
Make me meek, Lord: Thou wert lowly;  
Now beginning, and alway:  
Now begin, on Christmas day.

GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS

If I can stop one heart from  
breaking,  
I shall not live in vain:  
If I can ease one life the aching,  
Or cool one pain,  
Or help one lonely person  
Into happiness again  
I shall not live in vain.

*Emily Dickinson*

Then at dawn we came down to a temperate valley,  
Wet, below the snow line, smelling of vegetation;  
With a running stream and a water-mill beating the darkness,  
and three trees on the low sky,  
And an old white horse galloped away in the meadow.  
Then we came to a tavern with vine-leaves over the lintel,  
six hands at an open door dicing for pieces of silver,  
And feet kicking the empty wine-skins.  
But there was no information, and so we continued  
and arrived at evening, not a moment too soon  
finding the place; it was (you may say) satisfactory.  
All this was a long time ago, I remember,  
and I would do it again, but set down  
this set down  
this: were we led all that way for  
Birth or Death? There was a Birth, certainly,  
we had evidence and no doubt. I have seen birth and death,  
but had thought they were different; this Birth was  
Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death.  
We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,  
But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,  
with an alien people clutching their gods.  
I should be glad of another death.

*T S Eliot*

Light looked down and beheld  
Darkness. "Thither will I go," said  
Light. Peace looked down and beheld  
War. "Thither will I go," said Peace.  
Love looked down and beheld  
Hatred. "Thither will I go," said  
Love. So came Light and shone. So  
came Peace and gave rest. So came  
Love and brought Life.

*Lawrence Housman [1865-1959]*

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Give us courage, God our strength, to  
see your Christ in all who suffer, to  
be hands to the helpless, food for the  
hungry, and rescue for the  
oppressed.

\* \* \*

Holy One, holy and eternal,  
awesome, exciting and delightful in  
your holiness; make us pure in heart  
to see you; make us merciful to  
receive your kindness and to share  
our love with all your human family;  
then will your name be hallowed on  
earth as in heaven.

*Both from A New Zealand Prayer Book  
Copyright 1989 by the Anglican Church  
in Aotearoa*

May Christ our infant Saviour give you  
the joy of the Bethlehem shepherds,  
the awe of the worshipping sages,  
and the humility and love of the Holy  
Family; and the Blessing of God  
Almighty, Father, Son and Holy  
Spirit, be with you and remain with  
you for ever. Amen \*

Now I say to you in conclusion, life  
is hard, at times as hard as crucible  
steel.

(Mmm)

It has its bleak and difficult  
moments. Like the ever-flowing  
waters of the river, life has its  
moments of drought and its  
moments of flood.

(Yeah)

Like the ever-changing cycle of the  
seasons, life has the soothing  
warmth of its summers and the  
piercing chill of its winters.

(Yeah)

But if one will hold on, he will  
discover that God walks with him,  
(Yeah. Well)

and that God is able  
(Yeah)

to lift you from the fatigue of  
despair to the buoyancy of hope and  
transform dark and desolate valleys  
into sunlit paths of inner peace.

(Mmm)

*Eulogy for the martyred children  
Martin Luther King jr. - 1963*

The Word gave life to everything  
that was created, and his life  
brought light to everyone. The light  
shines in the darkness, and the  
darkness can never extinguish it.

*from John 1 (NLT)*

## *A PRAYER FOR CHRISTMAS*

*Saviour of the world, born in a stable at Bethlehem, we celebrate your birth, safe with our families and friends in the warmth and security of our homes.*

*Grant that in the midst of our joy, we may not forget those who are imprisoned, tortured and suffering great anguish and pain.*

*Help us to lift up to you those who live in fear of the knock on the door, the abduction in the street, or the assassin's bullet.*

*May we stand alongside them in their suffering and fear and in the suffering of their families.*

*Comfort them with the knowledge that they are remembered and that nothing can separate them from your love.*

*Amen*

# A final Thought '

*“In our age the road  
to holiness  
necessarily passes  
through the world of  
action”*

*Dag Hammarskjöld UN Secretary  
General (1953 - 1961)*

We hope you find this mailing stimulating and thought provoking.

Articles for the next and future mailings are always required. Especially it would be good to hear about individuals or group activities, any good news about prisoners or any queries you may have about the work of ACAT (UK).

Please send any material - handwritten, or typed to:-

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