



# action

by

# Christians

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

# Against torture

Feb/March 2016

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## Letter from the ACAT Committee

If it's not too late to say it, "Happy New Year to you all!"

Christmas has now been put away for another year, Candlemas falls in early February and on the tenth of the same month we mark Ash Wednesday. The Church's season is well under way. Before we know it we will be in the midst of Easter celebrations, then the glory of Pentecost.

I love Candlemas, when we remember how Mary and Joseph took the child Jesus to the temple, where he was greeted by Simeon and Anna. It was Simeon who recognised the child for who he was and spoke those words that have come down to us through the centuries, known as the Nunc Dimittis: "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace..."

It is important at this time to recognise the need for us all to see each other's humanity. Remember the crucifixion of Jesus, his trial where Pilate paraded Jesus before the crowd who were demanding his execution. Pilate said to the crowd about Jesus, "Behold the man" It is only by failing to recognise the humanity of others, by dehumanising others and themselves that torturers are able to carry out their painful, degrading and humiliating activities.

At the temple where Simeon takes Jesus into his arms to bless him starts the other way round. Here Simeon doesn't just accept the humanity of Jesus, he recognises his divinity. Here wrapped in human flesh is the one who saves, the Messiah, the Son of God. And Simeon blesses the One whom he probably would have preferred to be blessed by; just as John the Baptist is later to baptise the One by whom he would rather have been baptised.

The Candlemas scene in the temple is a reminder that we are to recognise the Christ in ourselves and in others. St Paul tells us in Colossians 1:27 that the great secret of the Christian faith is "Christ in us".

At the time this letter is being written once again we see the horrendously tragic sight of bodies of men, women and children being

pulled out of the sea in the Greek Islands and Turkey. Bodies of those who are struggling to escape from the inhumanity in Syria and other areas in the hope that they can restart their lives in the safety and security of Europe. The Greek Islands, places of tranquillity and restfulness to the many holiday makers drawn there, once again the site of great tragedy.

How can we prevent this evil?

Last year, we ran an appeal in support of the Syrian and Iranian refugees who were spending a winter in cold refugee camps, with little to eat or drink, no warmth and no hope. We obtained many many signatures which were sent to the Home Office, with covering letters going to those people in authority in the UK. We were unsure if this would work; would it be read even? Especially as we received just a very short acknowledgment from the Home Office.

There are a great many appeals to be written over the coming year, we cannot see the situation in Syria righted immediately but at some point there will be an end in sight. The task is not over.

We pray that God will give us all the strength we need for the tasks that lie ahead this year, and especially for all that we will try to do on behalf of others who are being tortured even now, as you read this.

Especially as we once again appeal to the membership to prayerfully consider if they wish to join our small and ever dwindling committee.

As we seek to put Kingdom values into practice may we recognise the Christ within us all and know that in serving others in his name, we are serving him.

God bless you all

The ACAT Committee

***Please note that due to Margaret's illness, the next mailing will be produced by Derek Lewis, who will also be taking over much of the secretarial work.***

## Remember in your Prayers

**Mohammad Faisal Abu Sakha, Israel** On 14 December 2015, Mohammad set out from his parents' home to the Palestinian Circus School where he works. But he never made it. Israeli soldiers stopped him at a checkpoint and took him to a nearby detention centre. He has been held ever since, and is now thought to be in Megiddo Prison, in northern Israel. He has never been charged with a crime and his family have not been allowed to visit him.

**23 members of the Lesotho army at risk of unfair trial and possible death penalty** facing a court martial on mutiny charges. 19 soldiers are still in detention; they have been in custody at Maseru Maximum Security Prison since May and were in solitary confinement for almost two months, up to the end of preliminary proceedings on 4 December. There are concerns that evidence against them was obtained through torture and that they will not receive a fair trial.

**Erick Ivan and Veronica Razo Casales, Mexico**, brother and sister, in preventive detention for four and a half years. Under torture, they were forced to confess to kidnapping. Although their torture is proven, they are still being held in prison. The only evidence against them are the statements made by their co-defendants, presumably under torture.

**Natalya Sharina, Russia** Director of the Library of Ukrainian Literature in Moscow. Police raided her home, after a tip-off from an ex-employee who was dismissed in 2010. After searching her home for hours, the police went to the library to continue their hunt for 'extremist literature'. Investigators claimed to find works by Dmitry Korchinsky - a Ukrainian nationalist - in a pile of books that had not been indexed or made available to the public.

**Nabeel Rajab, Bahrain** Director of the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights. He has been detained since 2 April 2014, accused of insulting the body corporate, spreading false rumours in time of war and sending tweets denouncing violations of human rights.

**The work of ACAT-UK** and our continued requests for new committee members.

*From Psalm 88*

*My soul is full of troubles and my life draws  
near to Sheol.*

*I am counted among those who go down to the  
Pit;*

*I am like those who have no help, like those  
forsaken among the dead,*

*like the slain that lie in the grave, like those  
whom you remember no more,*

*for they are cut off from your hand.*

*You have put me in the depths of the Pit  
in the regions dark and deep.*

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13 November 2015

*Dear Margaret,*

Thank you for sending me a copy of Action by Christians Against Torture's annual report for 2015 and newsletter. It is good of you to keep me updated with the ACAT's work. I note the information about those prisoners and victims of torture whom ACAT are seeking to help. I shall hold all who suffer in this way and the families they are separated from, in my prayers.

I shall also pray for you and for all those giving their time to co-ordinate the work of ACAT.

With every blessing,

*Stephen*

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## **From Ray Dunnett, Treasurer**

Most of our members who pay their subscription by standing order do so to our CAF Bank account. However, there were about 40 who were still paying into our account with the National Westminster Bank. If you are one of these I wrote to you by letter or email a couple of months ago to say that we would be closing the National Westminster account fairly soon, which we have now done.

I asked you to transfer your standing order to our account with CAF Bank and most of you have - many thanks for doing so. However there are about a dozen of you who either have not or, if you have, have not let me know that you have done so. If you think you may be one of these please contact me (details on the back page) so that I know the situation or can give you the necessary information.

I would also be delighted to hear from anyone who would like to switch to paying their subscription by standing order, not least as it saves the need for sending reminders.

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## **GOOD FRIDAY AND EASTER**

From "At the Cross" by Richard Bauckham and Trevor Hart -  
a meditation on the role of Simon of Cyrene

Following Jesus' way to the cross must involve for us the bringing to remembrance of those with whom Jesus suffered, the victims with whom he identified, especially those who are so easily forgotten, and locked away in the prisons of the world, hidden by political propaganda, neglected in the dark places of our world.... There are many kinds of forgotten and neglected suffering. To remember the victims we must take the way of the cross, with Jesus, beyond illusions into the brutal reality of this world. This is a costly and difficult task, but like Simon of Cyrene we shall find it draws us closer to Jesus. Lord, break the chains of humiliation and death, just as on that glorious morning when you were raised. Let those who weep as they sow the seeds of justice and freedom, gather the harvest of peace and reconciliation. Those who weep as they go out as instruments of your love will come back singing with joy, as they witness to the disappearance of hate and the manifestation of your love in the world.

## Replies to Appeals

Thank you to all members who have sent in their replies to an Appeal to the authorities in North Korea.

All replies were of course in Korean but we have managed to obtain a translation:

As a nation of established liberal democracy and democratic judicial order, the Republic of Korea is a place where basic rights, such as the right to assemble, and also human rights are better guaranteed than in any other country. Lae Goon Park, Hyung Sik Kim, Hyung Jae Ham whom you are claiming to be human rights activists did not organise peaceful assemblies but rather led widespread illegal violent protests on 4 occasions in around April - May 2015 (committed illegal acts of riot standards by assaulting police officer which resulted in dozens of people getting injured, by destroying 70 buses of the police department, and by stealing the contents from police department buses, which were for public use). Clearly in violation of the positive laws of the Republic of Korea. As such, these people were arrested on charges and detained according to the criminal justice procedure of the Republic of Korea and are currently on trial in Court of Law.

When the trial tests are confirmed, it is to be decided whether or not these people will be released (as of November 2, 2015, Lae Goon Park was released on bail and stands trial for the first trial while not being held in detention, and Hyung Sik Kim and Hyung Jae Ham received suspended sentences, while receiving guilty verdicts on all counts, and have since been released.)

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*It seems to us that this is a positive result in some ways.*

Thanks must go to Rosemary McCosh for arranging the translation and taking the trouble to send it in. Other members sent in translations in part, but this was the most complete one we received.

Thank you.



## Feedback from the 2015 Christmas Greetings Card Campaign

This was, once again, a success. The names were included in our last mailing, placed on our web site and sent to hundreds of people via our email connections. In addition, the list was made available through the Justice and Peace Network, and many dioceses. One diocese in fact included a copy in literature sent over the internet to its parishioners, meaning potentially 5000 copies were received. Probably this year the list reached more people than ever before

**Horfield Parish Church in Bristol** had a signing session on the first 2 Sundays in Advent. A total of 85 cards were sent. People were encouraged to take the slip containing the information home with them and put it on their fridge door as a reminder to pray for the person during Advent and Christmas

Another church sent 34 cards.

**St Joseph the Worker, Hutton** sent a total of 120 cards to prisoners.

**The Justice and Peace group in Coventry** organises a signing every year using our list. When they first did it they left the addressing of envelopes to the parishioners and found the short addresses were the most popular! So now, all addresses are handwritten on the envelopes in advance, making sure each prisoner/group gets at least one card. They also cut the list up so that the information for each entry is put in an envelope for the parishioners to read. Some take the slip home to remember them in their prayers. They make sure that no information is left in the envelope before sealing it. Donations cover the cost of mailing the cards, with any excess sent to us.

These are only a few of the feedback reports sent to us. Thank you all so much for making the card signing such a success yet again.

Last year we produced an Easter Greetings card for Christian prisoners and made it available to members who receive the newsletter by email. It proved to be very successful so we are doing this once again but this time for all our members.

This should be available during Lent and will be sent to members who request it.

## Urgent

We are sad to advise that at the AGM this year we will be needing a Chairman, a Secretary and a Treasurer along with several committee members. After having been on the committee as Treasurer for nearly 10 years Ray Dunnett feels that he needs to give up to relieve his workload somewhat. Margaret Russell, having stood down at the last AGM as Chairman but continuing as Secretary, advised that she would be retiring from the committee in 2016 after 20 years' service.

Clearly, losing several major members of the committee - Secretary, Treasurer, Membership Secretary and Minutes Secretary and still not being able to recruit a Chairman - we have had to really review the situation.

As you may remember we sent a letter to all members last year stating the manpower problems ACAT UK was experiencing; we did manage to recruit 2 committee members at that time who may be able to take on the positions of Secretary and Minutes Secretary.

However even so, at a committee meeting recently it was decided that the matter was now extremely serious. As such we agreed that unless we manage to recruit people willing to join the committee by the time of the AGM in October we could have no option but to look at closing the charity.

If you feel that you might be willing and able to join the committee at the AGM or earlier, please contact the Secretary for further information.

The ACAT UK Committee

## The Recent Executions in Saudi Arabia

In early December the ACAT-UK Death Penalty Campaign group sent appeals to the British Foreign Secretary, Philip Hammond, urging him to investigate reports that Saudi Arabia was soon to execute 52 prisoners in a single day and asking him to use Britain's influence to stop this grotesque procedure if the reports were true. Some of the condemned were juveniles who were arrested at protest meetings. It seems that they may well have been tortured into making confessions. According to Arabic media reports all the prisoners were convicted in the secretive Specialised Criminal Court. Many of them were outspoken critics of the government.

Sadly in January we heard that 47 of the prisoners were executed (some beheaded) but at least the juveniles were not. These include Ali al-Nimr, the nephew of the Shia cleric Nimr al-Nimr (the outspoken Shia critic of the government whose execution outraged Iran and fellow Shias internationally).

Ali al-Nimr and Dawoud al-Marhoon were both 17 when they were arrested and possibly tortured into making 'confessions' in the wake of political protests in Saudi Arabia's eastern province. Both faced execution by beheading and Ali by having his body crucified afterwards. However probably because of an international outcry this sentence was not carried out.

Saudi Arabia executed 158 people in 2015 - the highest number for Saudi Arabia in two decades according to Human Rights Watch (*The Times* 2 Jan 2016). The previous year the number was 90.

The media have claimed that the UK (with its huge trade in arms) has not pressured Saudi Arabia to stop its executions.

This has been stoutly denied by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Mr Tobias Ellwood.

In a speech to the House of Commons (*Hansard* 5 Jan 2016) he said:

'As I said in my statement on Sunday, the UK is firmly opposed to the death penalty. Our opposition extends to all circumstances and all countries. We remain firmly committed to advancing the global abolition of the death penalty. Regarding recent articles on the FCO's

“Strategy for Abolition of the Death Penalty 2010-2015”, I would like to clarify that this document is a general policy guide from 2011, rather than a case-by-case list of countries where the death penalty is applied. A full list of countries of concern was published in March 2015 in the annual human rights report; that includes Saudi Arabia and its use of the death penalty. The Saudi Arabian Government are well aware of our views. We will continue to raise our concerns with them.

We also raised the case of Ali al-Nimr with the Saudi authorities again over the weekend. We expect that Ali al-Nimr and the two others who were convicted as juveniles will not be executed. We will continue to raise these cases with the Saudi authorities.

More broadly, Saudi Arabia remains a Foreign and Commonwealth Office human rights priority country, not only because of the use of the death penalty, but because of restricted access to justice, women’s rights, and restrictions on freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and freedom of religion or belief. The UK’s position on human rights in Saudi Arabia is a matter of public record.’

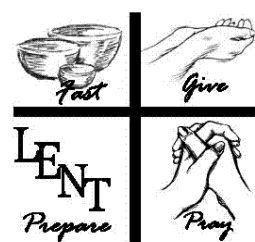
While this is reassuring, the fact that Saudi Arabia is one of Britain’s major customers for its weapons is a matter of concern. This also means that the UK has influence with the Saudi government. ACAT-UK will therefore continue to pressure the British Foreign Office to use this influence whenever relevant.

Audrey Wells (Co-ordinator for ACAT-UK Death Penalty Campaign)

*The time has come for the Church to take up the joyful call to mercy once more. It is time to return to the basics and to bear the weaknesses and struggles of our brothers and sisters. Mercy is the force that reawakens us to new life and instils in us the courage to look to the future with hope.*

*Pope Francis*

## *Prayer and Meditation*



## *For Lent*

Seek the Lord while the Lord may be found; call on God while God is near. Let the wicked forsake their ways and the unrighteous their thoughts. Let them turn back to the Lord, who will have mercy on them, to our God, who will freely pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. (Isaiah 55:6-9)

Jesus said: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you. If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

(Luke 6:27-36)

God loves human beings. God loves the world. Not an ideal human, but human beings as they are; not an ideal world, but the real world. What we find repulsive in their opposition to God, what we shrink back from with pain and hostility, namely, real human beings, the real world, this is for God the ground of unfathomable love.

*Dietrich Bonhoeffer*

## Merciful like the Father [cf. Luke 6:36]

1. Give thanks to the Father, for He is good [cf. Ps 135/6]  
He created the world with wisdom  
He leads His people throughout history  
He pardons and welcomes His children [cf. Luke 15]

*His mercy is everlasting*

2. Give thanks to the Son, Light of the Nations  
He loved us with a heart of flesh [cf. John 15:12]  
As we receive from Him, let us also give to Him  
Hearts open to those who hunger and thirst [cf. Matt 25:31 ff.]

*His mercy is everlasting*

3. Let us ask the Spirit for the seven holy gifts  
Fount of all goodness and the sweetest relief  
Comforted by Him, let us offer comfort [cf. John 15:26-27]  
Love hopes and bears all things [cf. 1 Cor 13:7]

*His mercy is everlasting*

4. Let us ask for peace from the God of all peace  
The earth waits for the Good News of the Kingdom [cf. Matt 24:14]  
Joy and pardon in the hearts of the little ones  
The heavens and the earth will be renewed [cf. Acts 21:1]

*His mercy is everlasting*

### **Vessels of Mercy - a prayer for the year**

God of Mercy

As you have forgiven us, so you send us forth, to bear your message of  
mercy to all.

Give us willing feet and gentle hands - bless us with listening ears and  
searching eyes.

Endow us with understanding minds, and ordain us with  
compassionate hearts.

In our acts and in our words, make us vessels of your mercy  
To reach out to the broken and those in prison, on behalf of the  
Father who wipes away our sins,  
As lovingly as he wipes away our tears, and calls his children home.

Help us to lift your people in body and spirit,  
And so make every day a day of mercy. AMEN

## *Reflection for Good Friday and Easter*

**Lord** Through your death and resurrection you have broken the hold of evil in our world to proclaim justice for those who are tormented, tortured and destroyed by other men's cruelty and greed for power. We pray to you that all those who suffer will swiftly find peace, comfort and freedom; and renew our hearts to work for their cause. We ask this in your Name. Amen

Father, you are a God who lies hidden and yet there is nowhere cut off from your presence, no-one who can be locked away from your care. Do not remain hidden from those who have been shut away by their fellow men in the loneliness and isolation of solitary confinement. Even the darkness is not dark for you, and the night is as clear as day. Even in the darkest dungeon, even behind the bars and the bolted doors of the smallest prison cell, your hand is there to lead them and hold them.

Speak to them your Word in their silence and pour into their cells and their hearts



your Spirit of courage and strength. Warm them with your presence and your love, and show them that they are never alone, for you are with them always. Amen

***Bishop Trevor Huddleston, who campaigned against the evils of apartheid and wrote "Naught for your Comfort" once said: I have found Jesus where every Christian should expect to find him; in the darkness, in the fear, in the blinding weariness of Calvary. And Calvary is but one step from the Empty Tomb. We cannot take the full measure of the world's sorrows but Christ has died, Christ has risen and Christ will triumph; the world's evil will be swallowed up by the goodness of our God; the clamour of war will be silenced by the peace of our God; the despair of humanity in all its need will be overruled by the hope which Christ inspires.***



# Final Thought '

There is no dichotomy between man and God's image. Whoever tortures a human being, whoever abuses a human being, whoever outrages a human being, abuses God's image. *Archbishop Oscar Romero*

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 individual 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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by 10th March 2016

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