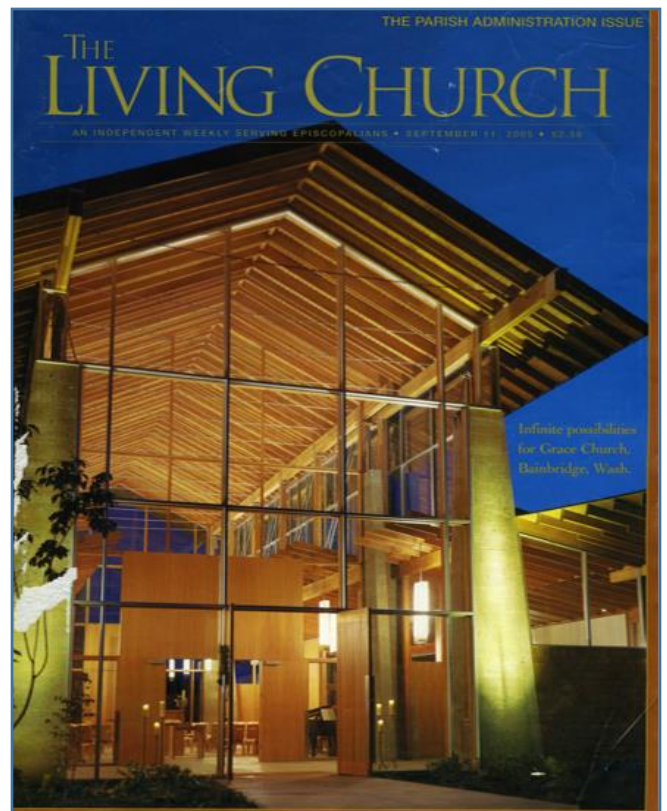
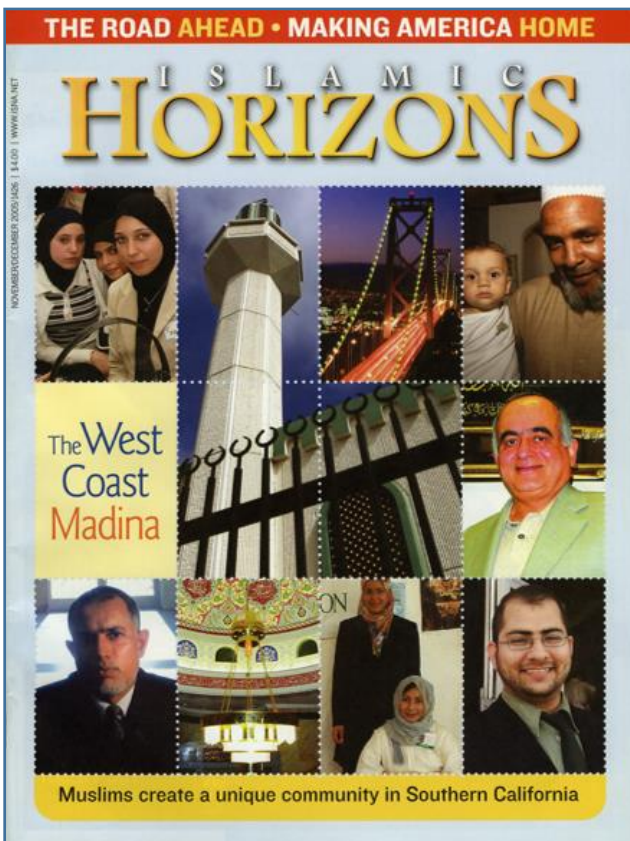
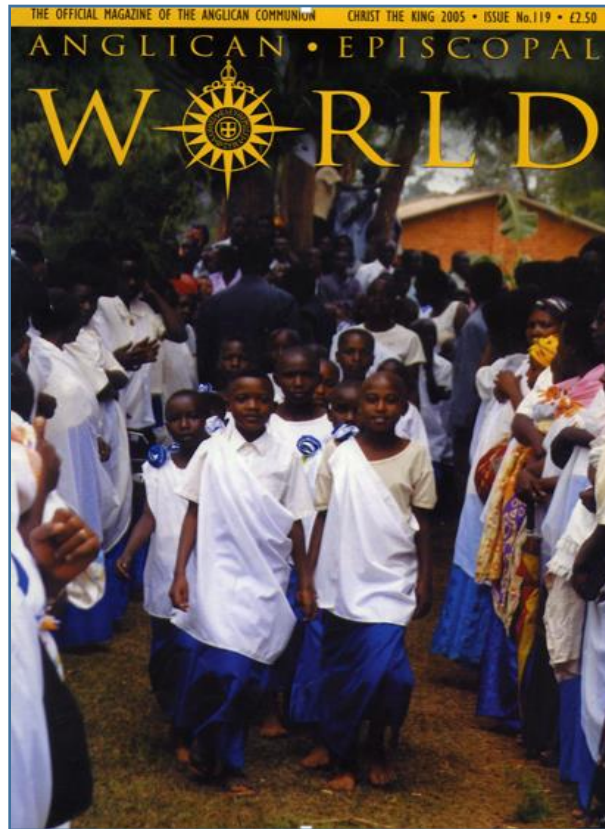


The following article appeared in *The Living Church*, *Islamic Horizons*, and *Anglican Episcopal World*. In it, Canon Augustine lays out a pathway for reconciliation between Christians and Muslims.



A Christian Response to Violence

Can Muslims and Christians utilize their faith to live in peace? **By Rev. Patrick P. Augustine**

Ifear for the future!" said the man on the treadmill next to me after the 7/7/2005 London bombings. A few weeks later, we recalled our experiences on 9/11/2001, when misguided zealots took thousands of innocent lives in our own country. Violence, terrorism, and killings are routine among Palestinians and Israelis. Pakistan and India share nuclear capabilities, a border, and centuries of animosity. Iraqis die daily in attacks and counterattacks. Religion is alive and well, but misplaced fervor seemingly fuels unending violence.

The most fanatical political struggles have been legitimized by religion. Due to religious and ethnic violence in

His name, God's creation remains "red in tooth and claw." The all-too-typical, selfish approach to solving problems with violence must be seriously questioned. We should heed philosopher Norman Cousins' simple observation, "War is an invention of the human mind. The human mind can also invent peace." Look at the progress made in Northern Ireland. Pray and act as though similar healing can be achieved elsewhere.

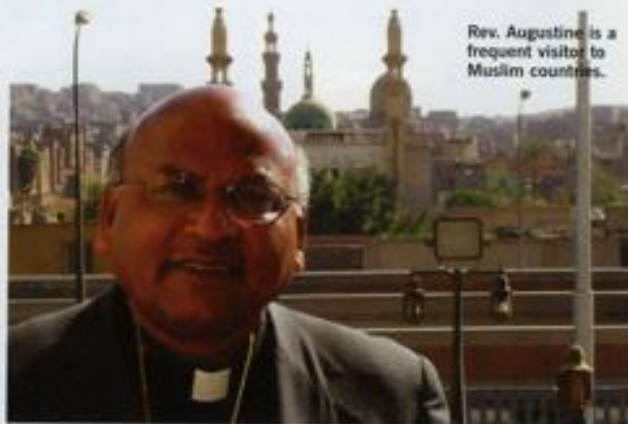
Jesus Christ's followers cannot be passive spectators to or participants in violence. Jesus offers an alternative and expects action: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 4:43-44). This might sound naïve and weak, just as the message seemed ineffective in Jesus' time. True disciples, however, understand that God's ultimate intent is to redeem humanity from the bondage of violence, not to place one group over another. The Church's mission is to proclaim the gospel of release and redemption, even in the face of terror and death. We believe evil shall not prevail. God is sovereign, not Man.

In post-apartheid South Africa, the world expected Nelson Mandela to seek revenge for decades of dehumanization and injustice. Instead, he

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sought to heal his divided land. He appointed Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu to head a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, an open forum for victims and perpetrators to share their pain and tell the truth. "The central concern is the healing of breaches, the redressing of imbalances, the restoration of broken relationships, a seeking to rehabilitate both the victim and the perpetrator, who should be given the opportunity to be reintegrated into the community he has injured by his offense," Tutu said a decade ago. This Commission's work exemplifies the transforming power of the Gospel of peace, forgiveness, restoration, and reconciliation: "In Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself...and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us" (2 Corinthians 5:19).

The Church must proclaim Christ's message of healing and reconciliation. Christ calls us to focus on the two-fold mandate



Rev. Augustine is a frequent visitor to Muslim countries.

to love God and our neighbor. We can do both by recognizing and repeating these truths among people of all faiths, even the faithless.

1. Christian and Muslim beliefs about God are similar in many respects. We should celebrate commonalities and tolerate differences. The purpose of dialogue is to learn and appreciate each other's faith traditions. Catholic theologian Hans Kung said, "There can be no peace among nations without peace among the religions and religious peace can be established only through religious dialogue."

2. Islam and Christianity emphasize worship and prayer as essential elements in faithfulness to God. Followers of Christ should unceasingly pray for harmony and tolerance among our faith communities. Pray for repentance and changed hearts among perpetrators of violence who hurt the children of God. We invite Muslims to pray with us for peace and good will on earth.

3. Christian and Muslims must examine differing approaches to human rights, poverty, hunger, HIV/AIDS, environment, and freedom of religion. Muslims enjoy full freedom to practice their faith in the West. They must appeal to Islamic governments to grant freedom of religion to non-Muslims in Muslim countries.

4. Our churches and homes should be embassies of hospitality: "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares" (Hebrews 13:2). Each one of us should invite Muslim neighbors to share hospitality. Henry Nouwen said, "Hospitality is our vocation: to convert *hostis* into *hospes*, the enemy into guest, and to create the free and fearless space where brotherhood and sisterhood can be formed and fully experienced." In the absence of hospitality, the world cannot know how all God's creation is meant to live in peace.

The Gospel is not a message of violence but of good news for all to live in peace and harmony. God's intention is that we should live in friendship and harmony. Muslims and Christians need each other. In a world where technology draws us ever closer, intertwining lives and livelihoods, it is imperative that we co-exist peacefully in our global village. There are no easy answers or simple solutions but waiting for governments or "someone else" to take steps is fruitless and foolish. Praying and working for peace and reconciliation must become daily activities for each and every follower of Christ. ■

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