



Article in Tertio - Flemish Christian Weekly - [Over Tertio | Tertio](#)

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80 years of Pax Christi: the enduring struggle for peace

The Belgian media is increasingly sounding the call to increase the defence budget without hesitation, not even shying away from nuclear deterrence. In contrast to this increasing disinterest in pacifism, Pax Christi International has been proclaiming its peace message for 80 years - not naively but rooted in the lived values and stories of the Judeo-Christian tradition.

[By Marti Waals](#) - 25 March 2025

The celebration of Pax Christi's 80th anniversary took place at the Europa Chapel, in the heart of Brussels' European quarter. In the face of dominant political trends - such as an emphasis on rearmament, stopping migrants, scaling back international solidarity and environmental degradation - a different voice was heard here. A panel of religiously inspired organisations offered insights on how to contribute to a just and lasting peace.

Civilisation in crisis

Martha Inés Romero, secretary general of Pax Christi International, highlighted the major challenges of our time: geopolitical conflicts, environmental crises and what she calls a 'crisis of civilisation.' The latter is more than an economic crisis; it is the loss of ethical and cultural values. According to her, these values can only be rediscovered through spiritual, cultural, and social movements at the grassroots of society. For

instance, there is the Quaker community, which has been committed to peaceful action to prevent wars since 1661, and a lot of peace initiatives in Africa also serve as an example.

Thanks to moral authority and trust, an extensive network and a holistic long-term vision, social and political forces can be effectively influenced. After all, peace is not only the absence of war, but also the presence of justice and dignity. Religions can play a crucial role in this: they bring social, moral, and spiritual resources essential for sustainable peacebuilding.

These spiritual and ethical dimensions, with their healing and profound effects, can build bridges in conflict zones. Yet religious engagement is often ignored during peace processes. More so: in the current geopolitical context, there is even the threat of a self-fulfilling prophecy: by avoiding dialogue and diplomacy, we reinforce the idea that war is inevitable. So, the question is: can we still opt for a diplomacy where the focus is not “one against the other,” but where common security is the goal?



Guideline

Paul Lansu, priest in Antwerp and Board member of Pax Christi International, sees the encyclical *Pacem in Terris* as his organisation's Magna Charta. This text emphasises the four basic values of a society: truth, justice, love, and freedom. He links these principles to contemporary Catholic teachings such as *Populorum Progressio* (development as the new name for peace) and the social messages of *Laudato Si'* and *Fratelli Tutti*.

Current events, however, stand in stark contrast to these principles. The war in Ukraine, the relentless struggle between Israel and Hamas, the scrapping of development cooperation and the increasingly loud war language in politics and media show how quickly conflict logic can prevail. When grassroots advocacy movements are dismissed as naive, we are in danger of slipping into a world where brute force prevails and displaces human dignity.

Prophetic diplomacy

How can we rebuild bridges and strengthen society in this context? Besides space for open dialogue and debate, where no one should be forced to act against their own conscience, the input of spiritual roots can be of immense importance. Pax Christi International has transformed its fundamental choice for the least fortunate into a global solidarity movement, committed to peacebuilding and political lobbying.

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Within this diplomacy, two approaches are complementary. On the one hand, there is the prophetic message, which provides a moral compass and outlines the ideal outcome, and on the

other, there is pragmatic diplomacy, which seeks feasible steps within existing political structures. While the former is often considered naive and the latter is often seen as a compromise, balancing between the two is essential for lasting peace.

Pax Christi, with its more than 120 member organisations worldwide, has already achieved significant successes, including in nuclear disarmament and political conflict. For instance, a recent letter to the British government led to sanctions against Rwanda. In any case, its voice deserves more hearing in public and political debates on peace and security.