

WHERE HAVE ALL THE CHRISTIANS GONE? By Andrea Kleinhenz, CPA Middle East Committee

As Palestinians in Gaza reach a point of extermination, vaporized by escalating U.S. bombs and Israeli military, Christians remain entombed in the rubble of propaganda. Just before the U.S. illegally bombed Iran on June 22, 2025, citing trumped up charges, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth testified about the efficacy of the Pentagon's fiscal 2026 budget on CSPAN. Assistance for reconstruction of war-torn Gaza was not included—unless there is a line item for mercenaries.

As an antidote to the beat of war drums, I thought of Thomas Merton, a Trappist monk and avowed pacifist in the 1960s. Though a prolific and respected writer, he was censored by the Catholic church and the U.S. government for his stance against the cold war and the emerging one in Vietnam. And while his essays were not accepted in major publishing houses, he managed to get them published in scrappy venues like the *Catholic Worker Newspaper*.

Merton was very concerned with the arms race and later the Vietnam war. “This is true war-madness, an illness of the mind and the spirit that is spreading with a furious and subtle contagion all over the world. Of all the countries that are sick, (North) America is perhaps the most grievously afflicted.”

The affliction has only increased, and the quote is as relevant in 2025 as it was in 1962. During a recent Pentagon budget review, Kevin Cramer, R-North Dakota and Dan Sullivan, R-Arkansas, had only glowing comments about Israel's attacks on Iran. Less than two days later, the United States joined Israel's war against Iran.

But this new war—an extension of Israel and U.S. imperialism—is helping to accelerate the genocide in Gaza. With attention diverted to Iran, the Israel Defense Force (IDF) is acting with even more impunity.....by shooting starving Palestinians in food lines and dropping even more U.S. bombs.

To date at least 200,000 civilians have been killed since October 2023, according to former U.S. Col. Lawrence Wilkerson, a statistic considerably more than the 60,000 reported in the U.S. media. And this is not collateral damage, because citizens are specifically targeted by drones and AI. More children are killed or maimed by bombs than anywhere else in the world. The World Health Organization, among others, have recorded an unprecedented amount of multiple amputations per child.

Merton said that atomic wars were chosen in part “for (their) importance in a calculated project of terror and annihilation,” and “the destruction of civilian centers by nuclear annihilation bombing is genocide.”

While Israel hasn't stepped up to the use of the ultimate weapon (yet), it is clearly using its US-supplied weaponry to terrorize the helpless Palestinians.

Yet many people remain untouched by the genocide in Gaza. Why is that?

In addition to the physical erasure of Palestinians, Israel has blocked foreign journalists from documenting these war crimes. **At least 200 Palestinian journalists have been** murdered in their attempts to do so. British plastic surgeon, Dr. Victoria Rose has taken it upon herself to record agonizing scenes of suffering while attending to burn patients—mostly infants and toddlers.

Infants are suffering the most because mothers are unable to breastfeed due to lack of nutrition and formula and bottled milk are unavailable. You would think that such anguish would galvanize the world to a ceasefire, and U.S. citizens to more advocacy and compassion. Yet the level of awareness still seems ambivalent or neutral.

Merton touches on this ambivalence in his book *Passion for Peace* when he says, “The free choice of global suicide made....by the world’s leaders and ratified by the consent and cooperation of all their citizens, would be a moral evil second only to the crucifixion.”

But even the moral depravity of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Finance Minister Bezael Smotrich has failed to make much of an impact on church leaders, despite Israel’s acknowledgement that the end game is to exterminate the Palestinians. In May Netanyahu said: “*Our best friends in the world — senators I know as strong supporters of Israel — have warned that they cannot support us if images of mass starvation emerge,*” he said. *Without international backing, we won’t be able to complete the mission of victory.*”

Smotrich said: “*We are disassembling Gaza, and leaving it as piles of rubble, with total destruction [which has] no precedent globally.*” and Israel must “*stop being afraid of the word ‘occupation,’*” vowing to escalate Israeli acts that have already been deemed illegal.” **Reported in CBS News**

At the end of the chapter titled “*Nuclear War and Christian Responsibility*” in *Passion for Peace* Merton writes “It is no longer reasonable or right to leave all decisions to a largely anonymous power elite that is driving us all, in our passivity, toward ruin. We have to make ourselves heard. Christians have a grave responsibility to protest clearly and forcibly against trends that lead inevitably to crimes which the Church deplores and condemns. Ambiguity, hesitation, and compromise are no longer permissible. War must be abolished....we have still time to do something about it, but the time is rapidly running out.”

Even as this essay goes to press new information has emerged that an addictive painkiller, oxycodone is being added to the little flour starving Palestinians receive to bake bread. This latest action is part of Israel’s plan to decimate and eradicate Palestinian society.

And also troubling is a recent article in Mondoweiss about the collaboration of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) with a pro-Israel advocacy group, the American Jewish Committee in developing an online tool that “aims to define Palestinian resistance as antisemitic.” The 61-page report asserts, among other things, that “accusations of settler colonialism and ethnic cleansing in Palestine are “categorically false, disregarding overwhelming evidence from organizations such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, T’selem and many Israeli historians, even early Zionist figures such as Ze’ev Jabotinsky.”

Why are the bishops so concerned with semantics when they should be shouting from the rooftops that the genocide must end? Why isn’t the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops demanding an end to the killing NOW. According to July 8, 2025 Haaretz News, over 1,580 healthcare workers have been killed since October 7, 2023 and in last month’s UN News, it was reported that the number of aid workers killed in the Gaza conflict has been the most in UN history.

A call to action should be a mandate for us all. There are a number of options. Doctors Against Genocide (DAG) was founded in 2023 by healthcare professionals in response to the ongoing genocide in Gaza. They can be reached at <https://doctorsagainstgenocide.org/>

Another more local and active group is Cleveland Peace Action, also known for its unceasing efforts on behalf of the Palestinians and other marginalized groups. It can be contacted at clevelandpeaceaction@gmail.com