

Opinion piece for *The Age*

As the tenth anniversary of 9/11 approaches, Bishop Philip Huggins laments the terrorism which can result from religious ideology, and yearns for a peaceful and reconciled human family.

We have endured ten years of terrorism since 9/11 - from New York in 2001 to Norway last month. Innocent people have been murdered with zealous intent: people who were just going about their daily lives - working in the Twin Towers; holidaying in Bali; amidst the bustle of Mumbai; on a summer camp in Norway – and murdered without warning.

Some have shouted a Name of the Most High as they have destroyed innocent lives.

In response, security and surveillance have had to be increased. Daily life, especially travel, has become more complicated.

There have been arrests and trials, including in Australia, as alleged plans of terrorism have been discovered. None of us probably know the full extent of what has been averted.

Lives have thus been saved, even though people with a murdering intent can still find a way. Increased security has not made us feel safer.

As we ponder the ‘religious’ terrorists from New York to Norway, an important distinction must be made. That is, between religion as a faith-journey and religion as an ideology.

Healthy religion is a faith-journey which is always open to the future and to fresh inspiration, wanting to learn from all others and exercising choices which create beauty, and are both truthful and kind. A true faith-journey is marked by humility because part of the journey is recognising our own failures and realising our need for others’ forbearance, forgiveness and imagination. Compassion is also an essential characteristic of a healthy faith-journey, whatever the tradition.

By contrast, an ideology tries to impose an outcome on the future. It seeks to accumulate and hold power so as to pre-determine what should happen. It is a closed-system, seeing potential threats and rivals in those of another faith or tradition.

Religious ideologies are particularly dangerous, and can lead, with euphoric 'religious' fervour, to the cruellest and most brutal things being done to innocent people. Chillingly, we remember the boyish smiling assassins of Bali and the calm, youthful face of Norway's killer.

As we approach 9/11 and pray for all those bereft and grieving, what can we ordinary citizens do?

In the United States it is recalled that the last act of many who died on 9/11 was one of love – a poignant phone call to loved ones.

Accordingly, many are 'Remembering to love' on the 10th Anniversary of 9/11.

It is the Easter faith that love is unquenchable: violence and murder do not have the final word.

The best way to remember is in symbolic and practical gestures of love. So on Sunday September 11 there will be a Service of Meditation and Prayers in St Paul's Cathedral at 1pm, to which all are welcome.

Bells will be rung slowly, prayers offered in worship, candles lit, spring flowers exchanged, and collections taken for works of peace and reconciliation..

Beyond these responses, there lies the careful task of building an international community of peace and reconciliation. Nothing is more important to the future of humanity. What else honours the victims of terrorism and offers hope to the young?

Life is such a precious gift on our tiny planet in an incomprehensibly vast universe. Our human family is of common yearnings and colourful diversity. Australians, who love to travel, know this well. People everywhere yearn that our young may grow up safe, free and flourishing.

The same message comes to us from refugees, many who have had to leave their homes because of local terrorism. *The Age's* research on the Tampa asylum seekers forced back to Afghanistan showed that a decade on 'most are still running' from the Taliban. Those who have survived thus far still have a dogged, unquenchable hope that they may one day be safe and free in a country like Australia. Such is the human spirit. People can be tortured, terrorised, their humanity denied, but still they will yearn to be free.

Healed, reconciled relationships release wonderful creative energy. Conflicted relationships waste energy, dispiriting all involved.

Though it seems a long journey to a peaceful and reconciled human family on this one earth, we must keep imagining the splendid creative energy which will be released as relationships are made healthier.

The Tenth Anniversary of 9/11 is an opportunity to re-imagine a healthier world and then take fresh initiatives in peace-making together.

Bishop Philip Huggins is Chair, Social Responsibilities Committee, Anglican Diocese of Melbourne.