

lion & lamb

WINTER COAT NO. 11



Content

The Politics of Holiness

On the 1st November 1997 ECONI held its fourth annual conference entitled 'The Politics of Holiness'. On the same weekend we invited churches throughout the country to consider introducing this theme into their Sunday morning worship service. The motivation behind these initiatives was to help raise questions about the nature of holiness and in particular to explore what it means to be 'set apart' for God in a divided society.

The Evangelical tradition has tended to view the biblical call to holy living exclusively in terms of avoiding the 'contamination' of the world. This has often resulted in a 'separatist' mentality that sees disassociation from the concerns and activities of the dominant culture as necessary for moral purity and doctrinal preservation. The problem with this solution is its negative consequences - it fosters an incestuous Christian sub-culture; it creates a psychological dualism that is simply bad for your health; it reduces faith to personal comfort and makes it socially irrelevant, and it denies the radical ethical and political praxis of the Evangelical heritage.

In the context of Northern Ireland, the theology of separatism can have more sinister implications. In a sectarian climate, the 'normal' fears and prejudices are greatly intensified when the primary threat to a people's 'purity' is perceived in religious terms - the belief that Catholic faith and culture are essentially idolatrous. When this fear is authorised by apocalyptic rhetoric and justified by righteous conviction then the distancing of ourselves from our 'neighbour' becomes necessary for both spiritual and cultural survival. The history of religious separatism and the antipathy towards all things Catholic has a deep resonance in the collective Protestant psyche.

This issue of Lion & Lamb reflects this concern and invites us to consider what it means to be a holy people in a community that has shown itself capable of the most unholy attitudes and acts. In *A Passion for Holiness or Dangerous Purity*, Bishop Harold Miller confronts us with our potential for domination and violence in the name of religious and cultural purity. By applying the work of the Croatian theologian Miroslav Volf to the conflict in Northern Ireland he challenges us to fulfil the meaning of Christian holiness by sharing our lives in love and service with a hurting community. Heather Morris in *Boundary Markers* considers the relational aspect of holiness and invites us to follow the example of the Apostle Paul as a boundary breaker. And in *Holy Sectarianism* Alwyn Thomson reminds us that it is incumbent on the followers of Christ to reject the 'darkness' that is in the world, but this should not be confused with a rejection of the world which is the focus of God's love.

Derek Poole (Editor)

Winter 97/98

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Cover design: Spring Graphics

Lion & Lamb

Lion & Lamb is a publication of **ECONI: Evangelical Contribution On Northern Ireland**. Editor; Derek Poole. All correspondence should be sent to the address below. Permission to reprint any original article in Lion & Lamb should be sought from the Editor.

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ECONI is a charitable trust registered with the Inland Revenue. Inland Revenue Number XR8080. A member of the Evangelical Alliance



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Comment

Roman Catholic

"Love your neighbour as yourself"

Let me tell you a story.

The Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans. After all, the Samaritans forced the partition of the country. They are devious, deceitful and disloyal. Ungrateful for all that had been accomplished under the Glorious Empire led by David and then his son Solomon, they showed their true colours under Jeroboam. Not content with this they have perverted the truth, abandoned God's Word - other than for an interpretation which suits them - and indulged in idolatry and blasphemy. Good Jews are concerned with Truth and Holiness. Good Jews avoid uncleanness and heed the Word - be ye separate ... touch not the unclean thing. The hostility is visible, tangible. Don't believe me? You try walking through a Samaritan village on your way to your place of worship in Jerusalem. You'll soon see what they're like!

Let me tell you another story.

The Protestants have few dealings with the Catholics. After all, they forced the partition of the country and remain disloyal to the state. They are devious and never to be trusted - never turn your back to one! Let's not forget they are idolaters indulging in their blasphemy. They are devious, culturally inferior, lazy and greedy (they've no work ethic but boy do

they know all about the benefit system). Good Protestants are concerned with Truth and Holiness. Good Protestants avoid uncleanness and heed the Word - be ye

separate...touch not the unclean thing. The hostility is visible, tangible. They

Catholic IRA (well why do they bury them then?). You try walking through one of their villages on your way to your place of worship. You'll soon see what they are like!

On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher", he said, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" "What is written in the law?" he replied. "How do you read it?" He answered, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your strength and with all your mind, and, Love your neighbour as yourself." "You have answered correctly", Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live." But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?" In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho...."

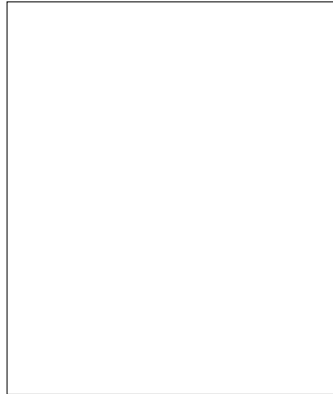
Ah, that troublesome Galilean! Are you surprised we want rid of him? He's lived with Samaritans, he's soft on Samaritans, he even implies that they might inherit eternal life. That's what happens when Truth and Holiness are compromised! Love them like our own? Never! **The most important kind of love we can show them is to make sure they know they're going to hell.**

Crucify him! **Crucify him!** Crucify him!

David McMillan is the Pastor of Windsor Baptist Church, Belfast. He is the chairman of ECONI's Central Co-ordinating Group and a member of the Steering Group.

Biblical background - 1Kings 12, John 4, Luke 10.

From the Director



As commonly understood, the Christian call to holiness appears to be of no immediate relevance to the situation currently existing in Northern Ireland. What has holiness to do with the clash of cultural and national identity in our community? Where is the connection between a church seeking to live in holiness and the political conflict and negotiation we now face?

Yet these questions have always been pertinent to the life and witness of the followers of Jesus. At the heart of our relationship with God is the question of how we then live in relationship to other believers, our culture, our nation and those in the family of humanity who differ from us in their allegiances. Equally our approach to politics and the attitudes we adopt should flow from our relationship to God and our understanding of how he works in our world.

We are thankfully not left without guidance. The celebration of the birth of Jesus draws us back to the heart of our faith - the incarnation. Jesus identifies with us in our humanity yet without loss of his identity as the holy one of God. He is set apart for the redemptive purposes of God in the world, yet he lives and moves among us, touching and being touched by all our frailties and divisions.

One of the most potent symbols of the politics of holiness in the life of Jesus is the table. It is at the table that Jesus eats the food of the socially unacceptable and shares fully in the meal and the life of his hosts. What surprises me is not so much the tables at which Jesus is welcome, but the range of tables at which he is clearly at ease.

In the homes of Pharisees, publicans and tax collectors Jesus mixed freely, drawing together his followers, critics and admirers at the table of humanity. He relaxed at table in the homes of his friends, or set out table for them on beaches and on mountainsides. For Jesus these were occasions for engagement and relationship, where hard things were said and

One of the most potent symbols of the politics of holiness in the life of Jesus is the table.

surprising things done, but all in the context of this incarnational commitment to meet people where they were.

Indeed it is the table that becomes the metaphor for his redemptive work in this world. It is to his banquet that all the untouched and unclean were invited when the religious guests refused to come. It is to the table that he draws his closest followers apart and

in the act of eating and drinking provides us with that sacramental meal at which all our pretence of self-righteousness is demolished and we are embraced by the holiness of a righteous God.

The love and grace of God is what makes his holiness bearable. It is this that enables us to dwell in the presence of God in order to sit, ourselves, at the table of sinners. For this is true holiness, an awareness of being set apart for a purpose. And that purpose is being sent as Jesus was sent, into a broken world, to identify and sit at table with a frail humanity.

At a time when much political capital is being made of being at the table or not, it is critical that Christians demonstrate the necessity for human contact and engagement if we are indeed to build a better future for all. We may accept the wisdom and merit in certain tactics around the political table. But there can be no room for moralising or the self-righteous denial of responsibility for the pain and violence of this divided community, as a cover for not being at the table.

Above all, when we are at the table we must strive to ensure that it is not merely a table of talking but of meeting. A table of commitment to find the common agenda that will help us build peace together. This is the practical politics of holiness required of us all wherever we find a place of encounter in our community.

David Porter is the Director of ECONI.

Boundary markers

The advocacy of separatism is not consistent with Pauline teaching or practice.

*By
Heather
Morris*

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE HOLY? Ask that question on the streets of Northern Ireland and you are likely to get a wide variety of answers. I'd be willing to hazard a guess that some would have negative overtones. Holiness is associated in many minds with judgementalism, separatism and perhaps even hypocrisy. Is that what holiness is about?

Paul provides us with a number of facets of the nature of holiness. There is undoubtedly a link in Pauline thinking between holiness and separation. Holiness, while ultimately a Divine characteristic, is also both a characteristic and a calling of the people of God. It does not seem to me that Paul makes a plea for separatism. However, he is unequivocal in 2 Corinthians 7:1, for example, in calling Christians to separate themselves from any sin which could retard the perfecting of their holiness. Advocacy of separatism, however, is not consistent with Pauline teaching or practice. Separatism leads to a holiness which is not living and inter-active but dead; a holiness which is essentially flawed because it is isolated and purposeless.

Further light on the question of what it means to be holy is also gained from Paul's emphasis on love. Running as a consistent theme throughout the Pauline epistles is the command to love, even in the face of disagreement. Sadly, it must be admitted that in this province obedience to that command carries with it the risk of being branded weak or open to compromise. However, love and holiness are integrally bound together. Without love, holiness becomes open to pride and self-satisfaction. But with love, holiness develops the potential to reflect the nature of God Himself.

Paul

It is on this point, as Paul explains it in Galatians that the remainder of this discussion will focus. One strand of meaning underlying the use of the Greek *hagios* in the New Testament is sense of belonging to God. The saints, the '*hagioi*' are those who belong to Christ.

Who belongs to God?

There is contemporary controversy concerning the place of "works of the law" to which Paul refers in Galatians 2:16 (RSV), for example. One possibility is that Paul is referring to "works of the law" as boundary markers, rules which determine group membership. Thus for some Jewish Christians, boundary markers like adherence to food laws and circumcision, determine who is inside and outside their group. In Galatians 2 and 3, Paul is arguing forcefully that in Christ boundary markers are swept away, that holiness in the sense of belonging to God is determined not by observation of boundary markers but by faith in Jesus Christ.

This was a crucial issue theologically and pastorally. Would the liberty in which Christ had made the believers free be maintained, or would the church be condemned to bondage and sterility? Paul is convinced that bondage and sterility would be the results of adherence to unnecessary and non-essential boundary markers.

It was also a crucial issue personally for Paul. In Galatians 2:11-21 we see that he was willing to oppose Peter publicly on this issue. Acts 10 and 11 make it clear that Peter welcomed Gentile converts into the church. Indeed when he first arrived in Antioch he shared table fellowship with Gentiles (Galatians 2:12). However, when Jewish Christians arrived from Jerusalem Peter withdrew from table fellowship, not out of theological conviction, but as a result of pressure from the visitors. Paul opposed

compromised the truth of the gospel in that he had placed a priority on outward observance over faith. This was no peripheral issue. Making idols of boundary markers compromised the truth of the gospel. That assertion must prompt evangelicals to do some serious thinking. What are our essentials, and what are simply boundary markers? Have we explicitly or implicitly seen boundary markers as essential?

Despite intellectual acceptance that relationship with God through Jesus is central, rather than adherence to rules of group membership, people who do not conform can set off prejudice in us. We can judge people's holiness and decide whether or not they are 'sound' according to boundary markers. It is more comfortable, and nonthreatening, to be with people who observe our boundary markers. But it seems to me that if, like Paul, we want to have the courage to set boundary markers aside, then as well as appropriating this truth intellectually, there is a need for the Spirit to work with us on our attitudes, prejudices, and inherent judgementalism.

For Paul there was cost inherent in being a boundary breaker. There was cost in terms of popularity, to the extent that his authority was questioned. One of the factors leading to the disputes in the Corinthian church concerned Paul's attitudes to the food laws. The Judaizers felt that his teaching was incredibly weak on this. There was cost too in terms of risk to relationships in that Paul believed that he had to confront Peter on this matter. We should not be surprised if this is a costly road for us too.

The Implications of Belonging

Throughout Galatians Paul uses language of slavery or bondage to apply to those who live in accordance with the law. "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery". (Galatians 5:1)

Paul maintains that to understand the

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of the law leads to sterility. On the other hand those who live by faith in Christ, and who are justified by that faith, are free.

In Chapter 5 verse 9 of Galatians Paul comments that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough. In that context he is speaking negatively, referring to his contention that a small number of people have led the Galatian Christians astray by their emphasis on the necessity of circumcision. But of course Paul's reference picks up Jesus' positive teaching on Christians as leaven and salt. Security in the knowledge and experience that holiness is about belonging to God does at least two benefits in this regard. It frees

clarifies what the gospel is all about in society's collective mind. How often unchurched people respond to questions about church, not with an affirmation of relationships, but more often with an emphasis on what they see as boundary markers.

If holiness is about observation of boundary markers, then inevitably the Christian will be afraid of contamination and foster suspicion of others that leads to isolation and separation, if not separatism. Holiness is no longer focused on God, but on the belief that I am 'holier than thou'. On the contrary, those who are secure in their belonging to God are free to focus on what is important as they let the Spirit of God develop their personal holiness; they are free to see past the boundary markers, free to be the fragrance of Jesus in society. 'For in Christ Jesus' says Paul, 'neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts, is faith expressing itself through love.' (Gal.5:6)

So here Paul presents us with a context for holiness. Holiness is always personal, because at the heart of God's compassion is the unique worth of the individual. But it is also profoundly social for a relationship based on belonging to God, rather than works of the law, liberates the Christian to make the gospel incarnate. How can we relate to people and perceive the realities which manipulate their lives if our primary concern is boundary markers? How can we hope to be listened to by society, to be seen as relevant if our primary concern is the building of barriers? How can we gain the opportunity to humbly offer our Christian perspectives, if society sees the church as petty? Those who live by faith understand that the essence of holiness is belonging to God. This is both freeing and empowering. It transforms separatist ideas about holiness and liberates the Church to be compassionately engaged in the world.

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A Passion for Holiness.....

The title of this article is, I hope, the creative juxtaposition of two book titles, *A Passion for Holiness* written by Jim Packer and *Dangerous Purity* by Bernard Henri-Levy. I am grateful for the work of these authors and their important perceptions. However, for the insights at the heart of this discourse I am indebted to a marvellous and life-changing book, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness and Reconciliation*, by Miroslav Volf. The significance of Volf's book arises from the rare combination of an able academic, committed to biblical scholarship and applied with the fresh radicalism that the scriptures demand. Volf puts into words so many of the seed-thoughts which have for a long time occupied my mind. He says what I want to say, but he says it as a Croatian who has had to reflect on the painful reality of former Yugoslavia, and the Gospel-issues raised by the violent ethnic divisions there. He is an example of the kind of person we need to be in conversation with in Northern Ireland. People who are exploring what it means to live Christianly in divided communities elsewhere in the world.

Bishop Harold Miller

I want to begin by looking at the concept of holiness and in particular the difference between true and false holiness. Jim Packer points out, by means of caricature, two ways of illustrating false holiness. The first he describes as 'Rhapsody without

Realism', and he explains it like this; *'Here at one extreme are those for whom holy living means what I call "Rhapsody without Realism". Their heart concentrates totally on devotional exercises, experiences of divine love, ecstasies of assurance, expressions of their own love to God, and the maintaining of emotional warmth and excitement in all their approaches to him and communion with him. Of this ardour, they feel, true holiness essentially consists.'*

Now, far be it from me to denounce such glorious experiences. There have been moments in my own spiritual journey when I have been lifted up into heavenlies, and known such closeness to God that I could sing with that awful chorus, '...the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace'. Times like that are vital for Christians. They give an eternal perspective, a longing after the otherworldly, and often the courage and strength to face reality. However, that is not biblical holiness which, as Packer reminds us, is always earthed. It is not seen essentially in ecstatic experiences, good though they may be, but in caring and living and getting our hands dirty in a messy world. James 2:14-16 puts it like this: *'What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith, but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked or lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, "go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill", yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.'*

Packer concludes, *'Holiness requires us to show our love of God by the quality of love for others, whom we must assume that he loves as he loves us. Rhapsody without realism is not Christ-like; it is a failure in holiness rather than a form of it.'* In the context of Northern Ireland I would suggest that holiness means getting our hands dirty in the complex issues of a divided community and a sectarian society. Warmth of fellowship without that kind of engagement is not holiness in any biblical sense.

The other memorable caricature Packer gives us is 'Rule-keeping without relating', referring to the kind of people who are prone to view holiness in this way: *'Their heart glows with love of God's law and the essence of holiness is the keeping of that law. They are meticulously honest in business...meticulously conscientious in shunning evil and avoiding activities classed as worldly...meticulously insistent on maintaining God's truth, and their passion to be correct by the code*

..... or Dangerous Purity?

merits unfeigned admiration and applause. These are perhaps the true blue evangelicals rather than the earlier pietists or Charismatics. They get ten out of ten for correctness in theology, in ethics and in good manners; but if this is what holiness is all about, then we have a sneaking suspicion that it is the Pharisee at the temple who goes away justified. Packer sees this caricature as the person who keeps all the rules but cannot cope with relationships and particularly relationships that might be seen as sully such perfection.

The point that I want to make is that Packer's caricatures of holiness are alive and well in Northern Ireland and have a profound effect on the politics of our situation. Rhapsody without reality becomes escapism, and we have to confess that within the evangelical community we are not short on that. We see escapism in churches which, although geographically rooted in needy communities, fail to notice that the community is there and avoid any responsibility for it. We see escapism in our worship, in the liturgy which never quite connects with the issues around us, and in teaching in which the needs of the world are never mentioned. Even when the most profoundly awful things are happening outside our church door we are tempted to escape into the religious sub-culture with its 'Christian' music, dress and language. When the gifts of the church only function to warm our hearts but never send us out to serve, we are living in pseudo-holiness.

Rule-keeping without relating is also too common in our situation. Packer describes people who are like this in the following way; *'Their problem is that their tunnel-vision makes their passionate grace-given commitment to law-keeping appear to them as the whole of spiritual life. But rule-keeping without relational closeness to God and one's fellow human-beings is not Christ-like, and is a way of missing holiness rather than achieving it.'* This kind of rule-keeping can so easily make us judgmental towards others who don't emphasise and keep the same laws as we do. It can make us hypocritical in ourselves as we seek to give the impression of living good and perfect lives, even

'Mr' and 'Mrs' while the rest of the world is using 'Christian' names. Law keeping keeps us at a safe distance from genuine human encounters. It is afraid of the kind of weakness and vulnerability that are essential if people are to truly meet. It is concerned with keeping everything clean and tidy, and anxious not to be sullied by the messiness of human life.

In our pursuit of holiness we need to avoid these caricatures, the escapism of rhapsody without reality and the self-righteous dangers of law keeping without relationships. In all of this our paradigm is Christ. The New Bible Dictionary reminds us that *'Christ in his life and character is the supreme example of divine holiness. In him it consisted in more than sinlessness; it was his entire consecration to the will and purpose of God.'* In other words, biblical holiness leads in the direction of embrace rather than exclusion. If Jesus Christ were simply a sinless human being preserved in aspic, the task of salvation would not be complete. He was, rather, a sinless human being involved in all the suffering and mess of a needy world. Similarly the Father, whose holy nature does not allow him to live in separation from a fallen creation, reaches out in love to embrace broken people. The same is true of the Holy Spirit, who does not wait for us to be perfect before beginning a work of grace in our lives, but rather enters in to human frailty.

In seeking to understand the nature of holiness the metaphors of 'exclusion and embrace', used by Miroslav Volf, are extremely helpful. There is a kind of holiness which can only exist by excluding, and another kind of holiness which wants to embrace. By appealing to the concept of embrace I do not want to imply an extreme universalism that diminishes the place of repentance, for undoubtedly the Gospel is such that people do at times exclude themselves. However, I believe that overall the approach of Jesus in the Gospels is one of embrace and openness to people. He breaks down every dividing wall of partition and is found among those condemned as unsound, dirty, sullied, or outside of God's plan; the Jews and the Gentiles, men and women, the religious and the 'sinners', masters and slaves. Jesus reaches out where the world of his day excludes.

Miroslav Volf speaks of a perverted holiness that separates us from others. He argues that in the pursuit of false purity the central aspect of sin emerges. *'That is the enforced purity of a person or a community that sets itself apart from the defiled world in hypocritical sinlessness and excludes the boundary-breaking other from its heart and world. Sin is here the kind of purity which wants the world cleansed of the other, rather than the heart cleansed of the*

I am convinced that the issue at the heart of the Irish question is the issue of cultural superiority expressed in political power.

evil that drives people out by calling those who are clean 'unclean' and refusing to help make clean those who are unclean.'

Volf suggests four different ways in which we can engage in the 'dangerous purity' of exclusion and separation from those we consider unclean and I want to apply these to the situation in Northern Ireland. Although it is always tempting to highlight the theologies and practices of exclusion within the Catholic church, biblical integrity requires that as evangelicals we examine ourselves and seek to put our own house in order.

Assimilation

Firstly, assimilation, which Volf describes as, '*You can survive, even thrive, among us, if you become like us; you can keep your life, if you give up your identity.*' Or put even stronger, '*We will refrain from vomiting you out, if you let us swallow you up.*' Now we all know this particular way of excluding once it is named. We know it in our evangelical churches; the Jewish Christians in the early church knew it when they argued for circumcision and Jewish food laws as a requisite for Gentile inclusion; the Protestants in the Republic of Ireland have known it as a 3% minority. Irish people in England have known it, and tried to become 'anglicised'; and nationalists have known it for many years in Ulster. In so many situations the unspoken condition for acceptance is to merge into the predominant cultural group. My own mother, who worked all her life in the Ulster Unionist Headquarters in Glengall Street, would speak in hushed tones of the fact that her father (who died when she was 5) was a Roman Catholic. She had imbibed a message that this kind of information was best kept secret.

churches to the outsider or fringe observer is 'become like us and we will accept you'. Become a bit more middle class; use the shibboleths - 'saved', 'born again'; sing our kind of songs; don't challenge our politics; and you will be welcome among us. We also transfer these expectations onto Roman Catholics. I for one am very grateful for the last edition of *Lion and Lamb* and particularly for opening up the discussion about Evangelical Catholics. I don't necessarily agree with all that has been said, but I do agree that we need to embrace, at least as fellow human beings, Roman Catholics who do not agree with our evangelical presuppositions, and not simply relate to those who more fully agree with our theology. Don't get me wrong. I am thrilled when Catholic Christians understand justification by grace through faith, but I do not require them to try to be assimilated before I move towards them.

Domination

A second form of exclusion, defined by Volf, is domination. He describes this in words which some of the minority population in this province might claim to have historical resonance for them. '*We are satisfied to assign 'others' the status of inferior beings. We make sure that they cannot live in our neighbourhoods, get certain kinds of jobs, receive equal pay or honour; they must stay in their proper place, which is to say, the place we have assigned to them.*'

After my address at this year's Down and Dromore Diocesan Synod, I had a phone-call to correct me on comments I made about Harryville. I had praised the priest and people of the Catholic parish for giving space in a heated summer by forgoing their Saturday night mass during July and August. The tenor of the phone call was that this was a predominantly (97%, I think) Protestant area, and the Catholic Church had no right to be there - it was the wrong place to have a 'chapel'. By the same argument, of course, there would be no Protestant churches in the whole Republic of Ireland!

However, the point was that 'they' had invaded 'our' space and it is 'our' space because we are in the majority and are therefore authorised to define 'their' appointed place. This attitude finds its justification not in some distorted notion of democracy but in the sense of superiority that is at the heart of all forms of domination. Whether it is the domination of male over

British over foreign a sense of superiority is always present and with it the will to power. In the story of the Samaritan woman, Jesus cuts through this mentality. She qualified in every way for the status of 'inferior being'. She was a Samaritan, with whom the Jews had no dealings; they worshipped on the wrong mountain, and had bad theology. She was a woman, and as the old Jewish prayer went, 'Thank you, Lord, that you have not made me a Gentile or a woman!' She was an 'unclean' woman who had many husbands and a reputation. You don't shake hands with someone like this, let alone accept a drink from her! However, Jesus gets right alongside her. There is no hint of domination or put down, no subtle threats or derisive innuendoes. Nothing is said or done to reinforce any sense of inferiority.

I am convinced that the issue at the heart of the Irish question is the issue of cultural superiority expressed in political power. In a thirty-two county Ireland, where Catholics are in the majority and in a six county Ulster where Protestants have had predominance, the story is the same. We have both been driven to dominate, to keep the minority in their place and to suppress the others' rights. A so called 'realist' might argue that this is the way of the nations and that domination is the way of the world. But as Christians we must proclaim the song of blessed Mary, 'he puts down the mighty from their thrones and raises up the poor and lowly'.

Abandonment

The third form of exclusion highlighted by Volf is exclusion by abandonment. Although he applies this category to relationships between the suburbs and inner cities, it is applicable to the class dimensions of the N. Ireland conflict. Exclusion by abandonment speaks to that middle class super-cleanness in us that consigns the cultural and sectarian problems of our conflict to places like the Falls and the Shankill. Here's what Volf says, *'Like the priest and the Levite in the story of the Good Samaritan we simply cross to the other side and pass by, minding our own business. If others neither have the goods we want nor can perform the services we need, we make sure that they are at a safe distance, and close ourselves off from them so that their emaciated and tortured bodies can make no inordinate claims on us.'* As Christians we need to be very careful that we do not abandon areas we consider to be 'unclean', under the pretext of preserving our spiritual purity and theological integrity. By perpetuating the myth of holiness by separation, we not only disguise the class issues in our social divisions but assist in the exclusion of marginalised people by abandonment.

I am personally conscious that the predominance of middle-class people in the Church of Ireland can produce a reasonably liberal approach to politics, and consequently I won't get too much hassle for some of my views. However, our danger, along with the middle-class profile of most Protestant denominations, is the creation of neat and tidy spaces that exclude those who are different or socially unacceptable. The modern equivalent to tax collectors and sinners have been abandoned by our comfortable society and by the church community. We are still apprehensive to make a place for them at our table.

Elimination

The fourth means of exclusion considered by Miroslav Volf is the one we don't wish to hear. I almost tremble to mention it for it will elicit in all of us a strong sense of denial. It is exclusion by elimination. Volf argues that in extreme cases we will remove the threat of difference by driving people out of our area or even killing them. Moreover, says Volf, *'to ensure that the vengeance of the dead will not be visited upon us in their progeny, we destroy their habitations and their cultural monuments.'* This is the most fearful working out of dangerous purity.

In this century we have seen the genocidal impulse of different ideologies in their attempt to cleanse the world. The atrocities of Nazi Germany continue to haunt us, both for the systematic evil of the regime and, as we now know, the passivity and collusion of ordinary people that made it possible. What is so surprising about a visit to Dachau near Munich is its incredible ordinariness. You can hardly believe that this little village was the place where so many were eliminated to fulfil Hitler's vision of racial purity, and that local people continued with their lives as though nothing were happening. We must never discount our capacity to violently eliminate those who threaten us with what we perceive as political, cultural or religious 'contamination'. And we must not underestimate the collusion of 'good' people in the process of ethnic cleansing.

The concept of ethnic cleansing has been invoked in the N. Ireland context by both communities and in the light of the horrific experiences of the last twenty-eight years it could be argued with some justification. I recently read on a Belfast wall a piece of graffiti that said, *'Keep Britain tidy - Kill all Taigs'*. Now it is evident that there are people in our society who have become so possessed by the fear and anger of sectarianism that the physical destruction of their enemies is not only possible but desirable. However, the actual killing of people can only happen when a society has gone through the de-sensitising process of de-personalising and demonising our enemies.

The process of elimination begins with the use of certain kinds of words. James is right when he says, *'the tongue is like a spark that can set off a forest fire'*. Miroslav Volf gives us some examples of the kinds of words we use when seeking to damage or destroy

others. If they are outsiders, they are 'dirty', 'lazy' and 'morally unreliable'; if women, they are 'sluts' or 'bitches'; if minorities they are 'parasites' and 'vermin', etc. We could easily list the litany of abuse that is common currency in our sectarian society.

The habitual use of debasing language diminishes the value of people in our eyes. It removes from our vision the essential humanity of the person and assigns to them a non-human status that makes them expendable. It creates a climate in which we excuse prejudice, injustice, discrimination and even atrocities committed on our enemies and this in turn leads to an inexorable decline in the value of life in that society. Through the process of dismissing people by our words we create an environment in which it is possible to eliminate them by violent action, for abusive language not only demeans others but also brutalises ourselves.

The Gospel Alternative

These means of exclusion - assimilation, domination, abandonment and elimination - are familiar methods of dealing with cultural and political conflict in the world and who in this Province hasn't seen all four at work? But the gospel of Christ invites us to an alternative vision of how we might live in society and be agents of hope and healing in our divided community. At the heart of this vocation is a call to holiness. However, as we have seen, biblical holiness is an invitation to share our lives in love and service rather than to isolate ourselves from the painful and sinful realities around us. The calling that sets us apart for God is also for the world's sake. The kind of holiness that creates unnecessary barriers and cultivates a separatist mentality is at odds with the Word that became flesh and dwelt among us.

Much of the theology of separatism which we have inherited in Ulster is spuriously based on Paul's quotation in 2 Corinthians 6:17-18, 'Therefore, come out from among them, and be separate from them says the Lord.' Here Paul is speaking of gross wickedness and idolatry, into which believers are being drawn. Calvin rightly points out, however, that those who have been redeemed and rescued from the world are not meant to turn their backs on life, but rather to avoid all participation in the world's uncleanness. Salt only flavours when it is at least contiguous to the food, light only enlightens when it is in the midst of darkness. In the world, but not of it; sharing space with others, not separated from them; open to embrace lives destroyed by sin, rather than excluding them.

The evangelicalism of N. Ireland doesn't make this easy for us. Our propensity for demanding conformity to 'my' views is considerable and we have inherited an ecclesiology which says that we must get out of a church if something in it is wrong. The Churches page in the *Belfast Telegraph* reflects this attitude with its plethora of adjectivally described churches - 'free', 'independent', 'evangelical' and sometimes all three. This reflects our ability to fragment over some finer points of doctrine, ethics or church government. We live in a society where a handshake can be a dangerous and sullying thing, and where being in the same room with the 'wrong' people suggests a moral duplicity that must result in compromise, betrayal and contamination.

I have written this article under the title *A Passion for Holiness or Dangerous Purity*. I believe that a passion for authentic biblical holiness is essential for the witness of the church in our community but that this holiness is the kind that gets its hands dirty. I also believe that we need a passion for dangerous purity; the purity of an undivided heart in the service of God and dangerous service that puts us in touch with the lives of 'unacceptable' people and engages with the realities of a broken world. This is the way of Christ and it provokes misunderstanding and condemnation. The alternative however is a safe separatism that is both socially irrelevant and spiritually bankrupt.

Harold Miller is the Church of Ireland Bishop of Down and Dromore. His previous appointments include membership of the staff of St. John's College, Nottingham, chaplaincy at Queen's University, Belfast and before his current position he served as Rector of Carrigrohane, Co. Cork. He now lives in Belfast with his wife and four children.

The kind of holiness that creates unnecessary barriers and cultivates a separatist mentality is at odds with the Word that became flesh...

In The Flowing Tide

Steve Stockman

I see the dark
But where's the light
Shining in the day
Away from the light
I hear the sick
But where are the well
Too near to heaven
Too far from hell
We gotta climb out of these trenches
Where we sit in comfort and condemn
We were not called to be their judge
We were sent to go and love them
There where evil fights the good
There where no one believes
There where the city gambles
There among the thieves
There where blameless blood is spilled
There where the innocent dies
Out there where the world is changed
In the flowing tide.

I hear the cries
But where is the shoulder
Warming the heat
Leaving the cold to get colder
I see the lonely
But where is the love
Too busy to care
With those who have enough
We gotta grab apathy by the throat
Shove respectable against the wall
Open our hearts to a dirty world
Listen to their voices call
There where evil fights the good
There where no one believes
There where the city gambles
There among the thieves
There where innocent blood is spilled
There where love violently dies
Out there where the world is changed
In the flowing tide.

Steve Stockman is a member of the Presbyterian chaplaincy team at Queen's University, Belfast. He is a frequent speaker at churches, universities and conferences and the host of BBC's Radio Ulster programme 'Rhythms of Redemption'. He is also a member of ECONI's Steering Group.

'In The Flowing Tide' is taken from 'My Mystery, Her Beauty and His Holy Ghost'. His latest collection of poetry 'skeletons' is available from Family Books, Belfast.

Holy *Sectarianism*

Times were difficult for Simeon, indeed for all the Jewish people. It was only ten years since the Jewish uprising against the Romans. The city of Jerusalem was desolate, the land scarred, the Temple lay in ruins. Could the Jewish people survive such a blow?

Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai and Rabbi Gamaliel II were determined that the people would survive. The need of the hour was consolidation around a clearly defined Jewish belief and practice. Judaism was too diverse, there were too many extremes, too many dubious beliefs and practices. What the people needed was a single clear understanding of the faith, taught through the synagogues. Only in this way could the nation survive.

Simeon could understand - even sympathise. The trouble was that those who did not conform to the Rabbis' definitive teaching were to be expelled from the synagogue - effectively cut off from their roots, their families, their community. They would be declared non-Jews. Already the synagogue liturgy had been adapted to make it harder for those who did not share the Rabbis' beliefs to say the prayers.

For most it presented no problem. For Simeon and his friends however, it was a huge problem, for they were Christians. The promise and covenant, theirs as Jews,

had reached their fulfilment in Jesus. But now, others were trying to exclude them from their heritage. The rabbis were saying clearly - "you do not belong to Israel".

Simeon and his friends needed guidance. What should they do? For that they turned to John, their pastor, and he taught them. John, whose mind and heart and life were shaped by the mind and heart and life of Jesus, his Lord, told them the story of a world divided and a Christ who divides.

Light has come into the world, he said, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Those who do evil hate the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed.

It was uncomfortable but it was the truth. God had sent his light into the world, to his own people, the people of Israel, yet they did not receive him. Yes, the law was given through Moses, yes, salvation is of the Jews, but when the Father sent his Son into the world bringing grace, truth and light, bringing that salvation, the world turned on him and killed him.

Yet, though the world was in darkness, there was light. God in his grace had called his own people out of the darkness into the

light, out of the world into a new community of love and service. The world, their own people, the synagogue leaders had expelled them and rejected them, declaring them outside the bounds of God's covenant people.

**Alwyn
Thomson**

God, in Jesus Christ, had made them branches in the true vine, had placed them in a new community, a community in which Jesus remained with them through the gift of the Holy Spirit.

In Jesus they had come to know the bread of life, the light of the world, the good shepherd, the resurrection and the life, the way the truth and the life, the true vine. In Jesus they had come to know the one who fulfilled all the hopes and expectations of God's people. The tragedy was that so many had failed to recognise him. The challenge John set before his congregation was to hold on to Christ, to stay in the light instead of seeking the comfort and security of the familiar darkness.

John's words were words of hope, comfort and security; they were also words of warning. There was a starkness, a rawness in his words. He pointed them to a world divided, a world in darkness, a world of hostility, a world of hatred that hated Jesus before them and that hated them now.

What were they to do? How were they to live in such a world? Their Jesus demanded response, demanded absolute allegiance. There could be no going back, no compromise. In a world of darkness, where all around Jesus was rejected and hated, where they were only a few and often subjected to hostility, where the comforts of community, tradition, identity were being denied to them they had to hold on to Jesus and to one another. The world was dark, the world was hostile. They were the community of life, the community of light, the community of truth.

This community of Christians had some choices to make. Faced with hostility the easy option would have been to retreat from this world and slam the door behind them. They could have proclaimed themselves the only bearers and defenders of truth. They could have adopted an attitude of suspicion towards everyone and everything in order to maintain their purity and preserve themselves and the gospel.

But this temptation carried with it tremendous risks.

In a world of hatred:

This community was to be measured by its difference. In a world of hatred it was to be a community of love. John wanted his church to be aware of the world's hatred and to be prepared for it. He did not want it to reflect that hatred in its own life. Fear and suspicion could too easily have given rise to hostility and hatred.

In a world of darkness:

These Christians might have been tempted to assume that only they had come into the light. They might have assumed and proclaimed that there was any truth to be found beyond the boundaries of their community. They might have rejected the possibility that they had anything to learn from others.

In a world of falsehood:

They might have been tempted to protect the truth by codifying it until the formulas themselves became the objects of their belief.

Given the risks of John's strategy, should they have adopted a more 'enlightened' view of the world? Should they have rejected the absolutes of truth and falsehood, darkness and light? Or is there a legitimate kind of sectarianism - a 'holy sectarianism'?

Is John a Sectarian Gospel ?

A Radical Challenge

Before pursuing this line of thought we need to define what we mean by that much used - perhaps overused - word, 'sectarianism'. I take it to refer to a group with a strong sense of identity, part of which is defined with reference to a hostile world. In this sense a number of writers on John have indeed concluded that John's church is sectarian: They are "a small group of believers isolated over against 'the world' that belongs intrinsically to the things below". (Wayne Meeks)

It is a community marked by "a sense of exclusiveness - a simple delineation of the community from the world". (D Moody Smith)

It is "an embattled brotherhood" that "withdrew further from the world and clung to the new commandments of its Lord". (R Alan Culpepper)

"The gospel is a 'sectarian' document and the Johannine community a 'sectarian' group." (Fernando Segovia)

Yet this profound sense of otherness, of separation from the world, need not necessarily lead to the kind of consequences noted above. This sense of separation, this identity in conflict with the world can be a positive and constructive thing, for, as David Rensberger argues "precisely because it sees itself alienated from the world, its commitment to the world is attenuated".

A church that is too at home in the world, too comfortable with its situation,

too compromised in its relationship is in grave danger of becoming an upholder of the status quo. Such a church, because it has a stake in the political, social or religious order of society, is in danger of losing its prophetic voice. Such a church is in danger of seeking the favour of human institutions rather than God. Such a church is in danger of allowing the voice of the world around it to drown out the voice of the Spirit.

John's church, having no stake in the world, possessed a radical freedom to criticise the world and proclaim to it the challenge of Jesus Christ.

A Radical Commitment

At the heart of John's church and at the heart of its difference from the world was its commitment to Jesus Christ. In the gospel Jesus constantly confronted men and women with the need for decision. They could believe and accept the gift of eternal life, or they could reject and place themselves under God's judgement.

The absolute demands that Jesus made were too difficult for many people. Yet absolute demands were the only kind that Jesus made. Inevitably, faithfulness to Jesus resulted in separation from the world.

Moreover, this community's focus on Jesus is reflected in the depth of understanding of Jesus portrayed in the gospel. Jesus was the One sent from God, the Word made flesh, the Son of Man lifted up, the bearer of light, life, truth, glory, the bread of life, the vine, the saviour of the world.

The Jesus these Christians worshipped was no dogma but the living reality at the heart of their world. Their Jesus could be expressed through a host of images and metaphors but he could never be reduced to any one of them, nor could all of them together fully express him.

The living reality of Jesus in their midst freed this church from the need to find its meaning or reality in the world. They were a separated community, called into relationship with Jesus, taught and sustained by the Spirit.

This community's deep insight into the

person of Jesus and its absolute commitment to him set it apart from the world and enabled the community to challenge the values of the world.

A Radical Mission

Clearly, though, this church still had to live in the world. How were they to do so? Should they huddle together behind the walls, occasionally throwing open the doors to launch a raid on the world outside? Should they rush out proclaiming the world's doom and calling men and women to salvation and then retreat once more to the place of security - displaying their trophies - and slamming the door behind them?

No. This is not Jesus' way, nor is it John's way. Here is how disciples are to live in a hostile world: as the Father sent the Son into the world to save the world (3.17), so the disciples are sent into the world (17.18). As the Father testifies to the Son (5.37), so the disciples testify to the Son (16.27).

Jesus himself is our model of how we must relate to and live in a hostile world. And who is this Jesus to whom the disciples must bear witness and in whose name they are sent into the world?

He is the Son sent from heaven at the gracious initiative of the Father breaking down the barrier between God and humanity, bringing those who were in darkness into light through believing in him.

He is the saviour of the world who broke down the sectarian barriers between Jew and Samaritan (4.1-16,39-42), barriers that were not just spiritual but social, political, economic.

He is the one who broke down the barriers between those considered faithful Jews and those considered compromisers who had gone to serve at the court of the Roman stooge, Herod (4.46-54).

He is the one who broke down barriers between those considered faithful Jews and those considered sinners (9.1-2).

He is the one who broke through the geographical barriers between Judaea, Galilee and Samaria.

In his life and teaching Jesus was uncompromised and uncompromising. He was ever aware of the hostility of the world towards him, towards his Father and towards his message. Yet Jesus was not an isolationist, his life was not marked by fear suspicion or hostility. Jesus was sent by God to a world that God loved. In a world marked by hostility and division - personal, ethnic, political, economic - Jesus broke through the barriers that men and women built. As he is sent, so we are sent.

Not only did Jesus break the world's boundaries, he also challenged the tendency of his own followers to build barriers. Even within the community of faith darkness could still work its evil. Against this Jesus provided a model for his followers of love resulting in service (13.1-11) and challenged his disciples to display this kind of love and service in their own relationships (13.12-17; 15.12-17).

Moreover, there is an intimate connection between the internal relationships of the community and its relationship with the world, for it is by the love that the Christians have for one another that the world will know and recognise the presence of Jesus Christ (13.34-35).

How then should we live? Simply by being the church - a community distinct from and freed from allegiance to the world; a community centred on Christ; a community marked by love and service.

There is a fundamental separation in John - separation from unbelief, from darkness and evil. But that separation is not the kind that marks the sectarianism of Northern Ireland. The community of Christians in John's gospel are sent as Jesus is sent, to testify to the love of their Lord, and to break through the same boundaries as he did.

Hatred, says Jesus, is of the devil (8.44). Christians are to separate themselves from it. Instead they are to be a community of love, loving one another and loving a world that hates them and hates their Lord.

Alwyn Thomson is Research Officer with ECONI and is currently involved in the 'God, Land & Nation' project. He is author of a number of ECONI publications including his most recent book, 'The Fire and the Hammer'.

reviews

Them and Us? Attitudinal Variation Among Churchgoers in Belfast

FW Boal, MC Keane,
DW Livingstone

Institute of Irish Studies, 1997 £6.95

THIS STUDY is an investigation of “the opinions of both Protestants and Catholics on a wide variety of social, political, and religious issues.” Preface

In their introduction the authors note the prevailing tendency to see Northern Irish society as consisting of two monolithic blocks. This is a view they wish to take issue with arguing that “such stereotypical portrayals fail to do justice to reality.” (3) Their argument is based on an extensive survey of attitudes among Protestant and Catholic churchgoers in Belfast - a survey not limited to religious belief and practice but dealing with moral, social and political views also.

Much of the book is taken up with presentation and analysis of the data from the survey. Chapter 2 deals with Catholic churchgoers; chapter 3 with Protestants, while chapter 4 attempts a comparative analysis. If at times the charts, figures and statistics get a little overwhelming the reader can cheat and jump forward to the conclusion of each chapter.

Different readers will be struck by different aspects of the survey. Two elements that I found interesting concerned Protestant attitudes towards joint religious activities and Protestant attitudes towards a united Ireland. On the former the authors found that 27% of those defined as ‘conservative’ had “participated in an ecumenical worship service” (102) and that 19% of the same group were “happy to participate in such ventures.” (103). Moreover, they found that 30% of conservative Protestants were “supportive of greater social and religious co-operation between Protestant and Catholic churches.” (103) These seemed to me to be incredibly high figures. On the question of attitudes to a united Ireland the authors found that fear of the influence of Catholicism is still a significant factor shaping Protestant views - indeed it is the most significant factor. Of the five options offered in the survey question, this was the one most commonly selected.

However, the most significant finding of all is that, despite all the diversity of belief and practice among both Catholic and Protestant churchgoers, on the constitutional issue there is almost no difference within either Protestant or Catholic groups and almost no agreement between Protestants and Catholics. In their conclusion the authors recognise this deep gulf on the constitutional issue while arguing that in many

other areas there are variations within each group and similarities between the two groups.

Having read this book two questions came to mind. First, are some of the shared values and practices a basis for hope that the disagreement on the constitutional issue can be effectively addressed, or is the latter the defining reality for both Protestants and Catholics? Second, what would a similar survey comparing churchgoers and non-churchgoers come up with. On matters of politics and identity might it show that Christian commitment makes little or no difference?

Don't let the numbers and diagrams put you off. This is a book worth reading, worth thinking about and worth talking about.

Culture and Policy in Northern Ireland: Anthropology in the Public Arena

Edited by Hastings Donnan
and Graham McFarlane
Institute of Irish Studies 1997 £9.95

THIS BOOK is a collection of essays from practising anthropologists addressing the role of anthropology, with its focus on the significance of culture in analysing and shaping public policy. The introductory essay by the editors, dealing with

some of the debates within their discipline, and the concerns that gave rise to the book, can be a little off-putting for non-practitioners. However, it is worth persevering, both with this essay and with the book.

The essays which follow deal with a host of concerns - access to the countryside, rural development, coping with miscarriages, counselling the unemployed, education policy, fair employment legislation and more.

Colin Irwin's contribution compares education policy in Northern Ireland and Israel. Having described the difficulties, dangers and failings of education policy and practice in the two states, Irwin argues that "if individuals...are willing to use education as a means to peace-making, then public policy must provide them with every possible opportunity to do so." (112)

Gordon McCoy's piece looks at the relationship between the British Government and the Irish language movement, as well as analysing the differing attitudes to the movement both among Irish speakers and in the wider nationalist and unionist communities.

The final essay comes from the ever-productive Bryan and Jarman on the issue of parades. What is of particular interest here is the very clear way in which they explain the interaction and relationship between their anthropological theory and method and their social policy research on the parades issue.

While for those of us whose knowledge of anthropology doesn't extend much beyond how to spell it this book can seem a little heavy going at times, many of the individual contributions are very valuable.

Enniskillen: The Remembrance Sunday Bombing

Denzil McDaniel
Wolfhound Press £8.99

'All of a sudden an explosion went off. It was a horrendous noise...The next thing I remember is being pulled out of the rubble. I couldn't see a thing....I just remember putting my hand in my mouth and finding that most of my front teeth had gone. I tried to open my eyes but I just couldn't see anything; all I could do was hear the noise, taste the dust - that gritty cement dust - taste blood in my mouth. All I could hear was people screaming and shouting' Stephen Ross (15)

The great strength of this book is that it allows the ordinary people of Enniskillen - victims, families, rescuers, carers - to tell the wider story by recalling their part in it.

As well as recording these stories McDaniel's book also addresses a range of other concerns, including the how and why of the IRA attack, the political fallout, especially for Sinn Fein, and the impact on the wider community in Enniskillen.

However, the heart of the book is the story of the people. Time and time again what comes across is the sense of dignity, integrity and Christian faith displayed by these ordinary folk caught up in these horrific events.

Two things in particular stand out: First, what I can only describe as the 'bigness' of these folk, a 'bigness' moreover, that throws into sharper relief the 'smallness' of the terrorists responsible for the attack. Second, the clear Christian

faith of many of those most deeply affected. As Noreen Hill said 'I always said that Satan caused the bomb, but the Lord chose the people.'

In chapter 3, McDaniel tells us the stories of the dead - among them Johnny Megaw, an open air preacher who visited the sick and elderly in the local hospital, buying them Christmas presents; Wesley and Bertha Armstrong, reading the Bible with their grandchildren; Sammy Gault, retired policeman and Red Cross worker, who was saved at a gospel mission in Lisbellaw.

McDaniel also tells us the story of those who survived but whose lives were changed for ever (chapters 8 & 9). The same Noreen Hill has nursed her husband Ronnie for ten years as he lies in a coma - Ronnie, former Headmaster of Enniskillen High School and Bible Class Leader in the Presbyterian Church, another man of faith.

I came away from this book reflecting on three things - the depths of human evil, the heights of human dignity and the amazing grace of God.

McDaniel's and Wolfhound Press are to be commended for this sensitive contribution to the experience of 'Enniskillen'. It is a fitting record of the events and consequences of that terrible Remembrance Day.

Alwyn Thomson

Alwyn Thomson is Research Officer with ECONI and is currently involved in the 'God, Land & Nation' project.

NEWS & events

Journey In Understanding

Tues: 27 January - 3 March.

£15 (Concession £8)

A six week course exploring the influence of Culture, Politics, History and Religion in shaping our identity

Journey in Understanding is designed to help participants consider the nature and consequences of division and conflict in our society. Through biblical reflection, group discussion and guest input participants will seek to understand the dynamics of personal and group identity and explore the implications for an authentic Christian witness in a divided community. We have now completed three of these events and the next course is on Tuesday evenings **27 January - 3 March**. For details and a booking form please contact Earl Storey (01232 325258).

Bridge Builders

Thurs: 22 January - 26 March

£25 (Concession £12)

A ten week training course to equip and empower Christians to be bridge builders in Northern Ireland.

Bridge Builders aims to motivate and equip Christians to engage with the hostile and sectarian realities of our divided community. The goal is to resource the participants with skills and insight for an imaginative involvement in peace building and to be a catalyst for others to become similarly involved. The course will include informed perspectives from guest speakers, biblical reflections and group interaction. This is the second Bridge Builder event and we anticipate considerable interest - so book your place soon. For details and a booking form contact Earl Storey (01232 325258).

Christian Citizenship Forum

Negotiating the Future

Our Forum continues in 1998. Please see the enclosed leaflet for details or contact the ECONI office.

Transforming Bible Study

Faithful Reading for Faithful Living

Friday 6 to Sunday 8 March

***Childhaven Centre, Millisle, Co. Down
Residential £40 (Concession £25)***

The focus of this event is to consider how we might read the bible with integrity in a divided society. This initiative emerged from a growing conviction that the hermeneutical question is a vital one for Christians in N. Ireland and we have planned a substantial conference programme that will provide a meaningful engagement with this important subject.

Guest speakers will include: David Bruce, Fran Porter, Brendan Devitt and David Porter, and members of the ECONI Development Team will facilitate discussion and group work.

Back to the Future

A Second Look at Protestant Culture

Friday 10 - Tuesday 14 July

**Belfast Bible College (kindly granted)
Residential £95. Non-residential £50**

For concession rate please contact the office

This event was so successful last year that we are running it again this coming July. The conference will consist of a four day residential involving Bible reading, workshops and field trips. The programme is designed to help people reflect biblically on themes relating to religion, culture and identity. The event facilitator is Derek Poole (ECONI's Development Officer) and we will be able to announce the main speaker and invited guests shortly. A full brochure and booking form is available from the ECONI office.



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