

lion & lamb



Content

Christian Citizenship

Christians are by definition a people motivated by a holy discontentment for the future. Not just any future but one promised by God and proclaimed in the life of Jesus. The hope of the gospel is therefore the hope of new beginnings. It anticipates transformation in the life of the individual oppressed by sin (2 Cor.5: 17); in the power structures that govern our world (Lk.1: 51-53); and in the very cosmos as it 'groans' for liberation from decay (Rom.8: 19-22). It is this vast redemptive vision that informs Christian practice and witness in society and gives shape to the paradoxical nature of our citizenship.

Paradoxical, because as Christians our national citizenship is relativised by the eternal perspective of the gospel. We are strangers, aliens and exiles in this world who live in faithful expectation of 'a city whose builder and maker is God'. Yet, biblical hope never allows this reality to degenerate into spiritual escapism and the avoidance of social and political concerns. On the contrary, radical ethical engagement in this world gives authenticity to our eternal hope. For Christian citizenship, fulfilled in acts of compassion and responsibility, is an expression of God's love and care for communities and their social environment. It is a faith assertion that the broken order of this age is to be replaced by a kingdom in which justice and peace reigns.

The Christian's ambiguous status as citizen of two realities is a precarious belonging with profound possibilities. The claim of the gospel puts the temporality of the world's systems into perspective. It saves us from over identification with our national identity and provides a prophetic distance from all cultural and political allegiances. Equally, our conviction that the world is the arena of God's redemptive love demands of us an incarnational engagement with the particular human struggles of our society. Therefore, living between promise and fulfilment, Christian citizens are uniquely motivated by a social vision that is not bound to political ideology nor dismissed by religious evasion.

Although biblical realism never underestimates the flaw at the heart of all our efforts neither does it diminish God's unrelenting love for the spiritual and social wellbeing of humankind. With such a world-view, our citizenship should be marked by courage, commitment and imagination. I trust this issue of *Lion & Lamb* will help to do just that.

Derek Poole (Editor)

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Lion & Lamb

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The X-files revisited

Driving to school with my father was a rather hazardous experience. Innocent pedestrians stepping out onto zebra crossings were unaware of their danger. Other motorists were falsely confident as they responded to green lights. “Red! Red! The lights are red!” I would shriek hysterically and Dad would reply beatifically, “Oh are they? I was just meditating on John’s gospel.” It illustrated for me, at an early age, what Peter meant when he described Christians as aliens and strangers. My Mum’s observation was, “You know your Dad, he’s so heavenly minded that he’s no earthly use.”

The theology I was brought up on taught me that I was a citizen of another country. Like Abraham, here I had no continuing city but I was looking forward to a city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. As a result I retreated into a safe Christian ghetto, whose characteristics were based on the things we couldn’t do, rather than anything positive. It seemed strange then that Christian ‘aliens’ appeared to have stronger ties to this foreign country than its non-Christian citizens. They prayed for the wee province in protective, hallowed tones. Any attack on it had to be resisted as a work of the enemy. Our material lifestyle, and the means to maintain it, had very little of the temporary nature of camping about it. I suppose it was a bit like going on a Eurocamp holiday, with your pre-erected tent and all your mod cons, and fooling yourself that you are the great outdoors type, into camping in a big way!

*By
Priscilla Reid*

When we become Christians the word of God explains that we are born into a new family, the family of God. But coming to Christ and giving our allegiance to him as the one who should now rule every aspect of our lives does not make us disembodied souls, with no responsibility to the community of which we are a part.

Until relatively recently in Northern Ireland, being ‘separate from the world’ was all about externals. The legalism of the Pharisees took over and we lost sight of the liberating and exhilarating grace of the gospel of Jesus Christ. In rejecting this stance, many of us struggled to find a way to express our difference and went for ‘looking the same’. We became self-indulgent, presuming on the grace of God. But it is very evident that in following Jesus we are called to live by the principles of a very different kingdom. Jesus clearly outlines this kingdom’s manifesto in the Sermon on the Mount. It is a call to live for others and not for ourselves. Obviously it can’t mean some kind of holy huddle that makes only sporadic forays into the world when it is absolutely necessary. It is not a monastic withdrawal from society. It is to be actively involved in our world in a way that shows people we are not just about a set of beliefs or a self-help group, but called to a life together, with God at the centre.

Jesus instructed us to pray, “Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” As citizens of the Kingdom of God we are to bring love, mercy, righteousness, justice, peace and compassion into our current sphere of influence. It will affect how we make our money and what we do with it. It will affect our attitude to the environment, our view of social justice and our politics. I hear the earth-shattering clash of two kingdoms in the life of Jesus. In my life it’s more like a whimper, because I’m more comfortable paying lip service to one, but finding my ease in the lifestyle and attitudes of the other. It’s the X-files revisited!

Priscilla Reid is an elder of the Christian Fellowship Church at Strandtown. She is a frequent speaker at conferences throughout Ireland, and is a member of the ECONI Steering Group.

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From the Director

I was struck by the following comment by Jonathan Chaplin, writing in the latest issue of Third Way magazine. Commenting on the justification for political authority he states: "In the Christian tradition, two main (and complimentary) answers have been offered: Catholics have proposed the imperatives of 'the common good', and Protestants the public requirements of 'justice'."

In a way this clarified for me some of the dilemmas we faced in the debate on the Agreement. Those who saw it as evil did so because they saw it as rewarding and not punishing evil. Justice had not been served. Ironically those Republicans who opposed it were equally concerned that their understanding of justice was being betrayed. For others it was an expression of the call to reconciliation, the opportunity to make peace for the greater good. Reached by agreement and respecting the British and Irish identity of both traditions it was considered a just settlement.

Inevitably the cultural framework of the community of which we are a part shapes our approach to life. Not for the first time we must recognise that in Northern Ireland the two religious traditions that have dominated our history contribute significantly to that framework. Our political and cultural conflict is informed by theological principles and this contributes to our inability to understand each other.

Nowhere is this more evident than in relation to the peace process. Who would have predicted that the first half of 1998 would end with an agreement, a referendum and an assembly election successfully navigated by politicians and people alike? The last six months have been truly historic. It has taken five years to get here and now comes the hard part.

We have come a long way since the first public awareness of a peace process out of the embers of the stalled Brooke/Mayhew talks in 1993. Throughout this period the Unionist community, informed by its Protestant convictions, has been sceptical of a process that seemed to place the morality of making peace and ending the violence over every other moral consideration, particularly that of justice. Yet it has been the conviction of Nationalist leaders that the common good required risks to be taken that has driven the process this far.

Of course the dichotomy is not that clear cut. It is wrong to assume Nationalists are not concerned about justice, something Republicans constantly remind us is all they seek. Equally Unionists understand that the common good is best secured by the administration of justice. But again justice can mean different things to different people -

Biblical faith is best served from a position of powerlessness and not domination

punishment of evil or parity of esteem?

Jonathan Chaplin reminds us that the causes of common good and public justice are complimentary. In this surely is the basis for a fresh start in political life in this community fired by and not hindered by people of Christian principle. Could this be the space where despite our legitimate and profound theological differences, Protestantism and Catholicism can each inform the other in laying the moral framework for our future in this society? This is a political necessity for the new dawn of Ulster politics for as Chaplin comments: "Without adherence to clear principles... [national] public policy will lack coherence and will simply reflect the prevailing balance of power."

At the end of the day that is the choice we face. Do we base our future on the delicate balance of demographic numbers, the brutal balance of violence or the enforced balance of cultural and political domination? These are the issues we face in the practical choices ahead. Whether it is about parades, paramilitary decommissioning or political structures in the assembly, the question is whether we will secure our future by the balance of tribal power or co-operation based on a common political principle.

The referendum clearly suggests that the majority of the people desire such co-operation. The assembly election clarifies what I have always suspected - that the majority for co-operation based on the outcome of a 'suspect' peace process, is slim among the predominantly Protestant Unionist community. Inevitably it is those with strong religious convictions, whether from within Evangelicalism or Orangeism, who are most opposed to the accommodation on offer.

It was always going to be a crux decision as to whether in securing the union through the principle of consent Ulster Protestants would be able to accept the legitimacy of the public expression of the religious, cultural and political identity of Irish Catholics. The inevitable 'greening' of society this implies is difficult for those who believe that the only future is 'orange'.

My passionate conviction is that the biblical roots of my Evangelical faith require that I engage in such a radical process of change. Biblical faith is best served from a position of powerlessness and not domination. It is only then that I can draw on the spiritual resources necessary for a credible witness to the Christ who did not exploit his equality with God but emptied himself, and suffered a great injustice for the common good of all who believe.

David Porter is the Director of ECONI.

Outside the Camp

***An
invitation
to new
relationships
and
vulnerable
encounters***

***by
Donald
Watts***

Good Friday 1998 will undoubtedly be seen as one of those pivotal days, when the story of the people of Ireland irrevocably changed. Whatever happens in the future there is certainly no going back to the past, which it is not to suggest that the future is by any means certain. I am writing this article in the weeks between the referenda and the elections for the new Assembly. In the referenda the people of Ireland as a whole spoke very decisively in favour of the new arrangements, but there is still much for the politicians to accomplish before a truly new society begins to emerge. The question that this article seeks to address is how Christians may approach the challenges and opportunities which are now ahead of us.

Perhaps it is important first of all to put the new Agreement in its proper perspective. It is after all a political accommodation, reached after hard negotiations and genuine determination by those politicians who were involved in the process to the end. It sets the framework in which we may begin to build genuinely new relationships, not only in Ireland but beyond. It is, however, without doubt a political compromise, and as such there are aspects to it about which most people - probably everyone - will have reservations to a greater or lesser degree. As citizens we have been asked to make a judgement about the Agreement, and as Christians we have a responsibility to do so in light of biblical

O ur Christian faith is constantly calling us to move beyond our experience and be confronted by the future

principles and our understanding of what Christ expects of us. Not all Christians will reach the same conclusion and we must both expect and respect that. In writing this article I should perhaps declare my own conviction that this agreement is the right way ahead, and opens up all kinds of creative possibilities which are to be grasped in faith. That is not however a theological conviction, but a political judgement based on biblical principles of relationship. As I argue later, we need to move away from a past where political ideologies - Unionist and Nationalist - were given theological defence. We should not move into a present where saying 'Yes' or 'No' to the Agreement, becomes a matter of theological probity.

The writer to the Hebrews is one of the great unknowns of the New Testament, but he paints some marvellous pictures. Towards the end of his letter he is trying to deal with some practical issues which have arisen for the young Christian community to which he is writing. While we know little about that community, it clearly was made up of people who were coming into faith from a strong Jewish background. He reminds them that the carcasses of animals used in sacrifice were always burned 'outside the camp' (Heb.13:11). Then he makes a typically daring connection to the crucifixion of Jesus, where he too 'suffered outside the camp in order to sanctify the people' (Heb.13:12). The conclusion of this writer is that the Christian community must similarly be prepared to move outside the camp, because it is there we meet with Jesus Christ who is 'the same yesterday and today and forever' (Heb.13:8). Now it is clear that in the context of the letter to the Hebrews that was the call to move beyond the camp of Jewish faith and tradition, into a new era of Christian freedom. Yet it is not stretching the argument too far to suggest that it can also be a timeless challenge for the Christian community to move out from the seeming certainties of the past and acquired tradition, into a place of vulnerability, yet freedom, where we meet

with Jesus Christ. So we too are bound to respond in the context of our own time and situation to that magnificent call:

"Therefore let us go forth to him outside the camp, bearing abuse for him. For here we have no lasting city but we seek a city which is to come" (Heb.13:13-14).

I would invite you to keep that picture in mind, with its many stimulating facets, as we go on to ask what it means for the Christian to live 'outside the camp' in the context of the post-Agreement Ireland. It would be facile to suggest that because we live on the one island we all face the same issues and share the same opportunities. That is clearly not the case. Each of us will bring to our thinking about the future a unique understanding of the past and the present, because we all have individual stories to tell. Our Christian faith is constantly calling us to move beyond our experience and be confronted by the future, because the future is God's gift to us. This has been powerfully argued by Wolfhart Pannenberg, who writes: "Rather does the future have an imperative claim upon the present, alerting all men to the urgency and exclusiveness of seeking first the Kingdom of God. As this message is proclaimed and accepted, God's rule is present and we can now glimpse his future glory. In this way we see the present as an effect of the future, in contrast to the conventional assumption that past and present are the cause of the future." (*Theology and the Kingdom of God*, p.54)

For the Christian the past is important, but the future will always contain fresh possibilities and new hope. That is why the writer to the Hebrews encourages us to move out from the security we know and 'seek the city which is to come'.

The writer to the Hebrews was well aware of the challenge he was bringing to his readers. In his time the city, or the camp, was an important place of security. It would seem very strange to be encouraged to move outside. Only the rejects of society would normally be found outside the camp.

because the future is God's gift to us

Yet this writer was deliberately challenging the believers to move away from the apparent security they had enjoyed and valued, so that they might discover the true security of faith in Jesus Christ. If we are to accept that challenge for the time in which we live, then perhaps we should consider the consequences of life 'outside the camp'. There are four which seem to me particularly pertinent as we seek to be faithful to our calling as Christ's followers in Ireland today.

Outside the camp is a place where we are vulnerable and meet vulnerable people

Immediately after the Agreement, like many other people I felt a sense of euphoria and relief. I'm not sure that I really expected an agreement, no matter how much I may have longed and even prayed for some breakthrough to be found. Now that it was signed, the initial stage of the politicians' work was over. But very soon I began to realise the demands that would now be made of me. I would have to decide if this was an accommodation I could live with, despite the aspects of it that troubled me deeply. The challenge was causing me to feel vulnerable and uncertain. Deep down I was convinced that this was the only way forward, but it meant that we would move away from familiar patterns of government into an untried situation. I was moving 'outside the camp' and I could sense that there were dangers abroad.

Yet surely, as the Hebrews writer suggests, Christians should always feel vulnerable in this world, because we are not at home here. For too many years, in Northern Ireland at least, there has been an unhealthy alliance between Christian traditions and political ideologies. As a Presbyterian I have to accept that there were times when my church had far

too easy access to political power. Those days have gone, thankfully, and if it means that I, and the community to which I belong, feel a little more vulnerable and insecure then the New Testament suggests that I should welcome it. In becoming vulnerable to the world we begin to move closer to Jesus Christ who was crucified outside the city. In his coming to the world he 'emptied himself ... humbled himself ... and became obedient to death, even death on the cross' (Phil. 2:5-11). If we have faith in him we can allow ourselves to become vulnerable to the world.

In that newfound freedom we may also find that we are more aware of the vulnerable people around us. Recently I read Sir Kenneth Bloomfield's report of the Northern Ireland Victims Commission. It was humbling reading. How easily we forget. One victim is quoted as saying: "Someone asked me recently who was in charge of my recuperation and, in all honesty, I had to reply that I was". The victims of violence are not the only vulnerable members of our community, but they are important for us. If by moving outside the camp we are reminded of our own vulnerability in faith, then perhaps the experience will make us more sensitive to those who can with good reason feel neglected and forgotten.

Outside the camp is a place where issues can be discussed without prejudice

Perhaps in the context of our community the challenge we are offered is not so much to move outside the camp as outside the camps. I wonder is there any other community where people are more readily identified as belonging to one grouping or another, and then expected to conform to the patterns of thinking and behaviour associated with that group. It has to be admitted that while this is

true of society in general, the tendency is if anything intensified within the Christian community. We are all labelled and neatly packaged in little boxes from which we are not supposed to emerge. That is convenient, because it means that our ideas do not have to interact and so we are not really challenged by one another. Yet it also means that we do not grow through healthy and informed discussion. I must admit that I become mildly irritated by people who apparently know what I think before I do. I also take some pleasure from the occasions where I can prove them wrong. In encouraging Christian believers to move outside the camp this letter is surely encouraging the interaction of fresh ideas, where the baggage of the past tradition can be left behind in a common striving for the will of Christ.

Outside the camp is a place where our Christian witness takes on a new urgency

In his book *Ireland: Christianity discredited or pilgrim's progress?* Robin Boyd picks up a thought from John Morrow, and referring to churches uses the evocative phrase 'Chaplains to the tribe' (p.50). Now I'm not sure that it has ever been entirely true that churches have simply acted in a chaplaincy role to their own tradition, but there is enough truth in it to make us uncomfortable. That is what can happen when we remain within the camp and do not venture even to have a look outside. Had we taken the courage to notice what is really happening in Ireland over the last thirty years, we would have discovered a growing disillusionment with our comfortable and conventional forms of Christian witness. Outside the camp secularism has taken hold of a whole generation of people who feel disowned and ignored by the traditional churches. Our sectarian divisions have accentuated the alienation felt by many. Ray Davey tells of a teenage girl staying at Corrymeela who went to worship twice each day, but commented to him, "Corrymeela is a great place because there's no religion here" he adds, "to her religion simply meant division and sectarianism" (*Take Away This Hate*). She is not alone in that. We have never quite understood that by showing distrust of one another within the Christian community we have simply added to the number of those outside.

I believe that there is now a critical urgency for the Christian community as a whole to stop looking in on itself, perpetuating its own power struggles, and to move out beyond the camp where people are asking a totally different set of questions to the ones we are answering. Hopefully the new political accommodation will

provide us with the space and the incentive to move out and challenge the marginalised world.

Outside the camp is a place where new relationships are formed

In a previous edition of *Lion and Lamb* (no15), Bishop Harold Miller has discussed the important work of Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*. Central to Volf's thinking is the parable of the prodigal son. 'It was the profound and singularly fecund story of the prodigal son (Lk. 15:11-32) that originally triggered the idea of a 'theology of embrace' (p.156). Volf's interpretation of the parable is tightly argued. He draws a useful contrast between the father, who could embrace the returning son because he had always 'kept the son in his heart as an absence shaped by the memory of the former presence' (p.159), and the older son who 'did not keep the younger brother in his heart' (p.161). He thereby excluded himself from relationship both with his father and his younger brother. The older brother thought in 'moral categories'. Volf is careful not to suggest that moral imperatives are unimportant, but argues: 'Relationship is prior to moral rules; moral performance may do something to the relationship, but relationship is not grounded in moral performance. Hence the will to embrace is independent of the quality of behaviour, though at the same time repentance, confession and the consequences of one's actions all have their own proper place. The profound wisdom about the priority of the relationship, and not some sentimental insanity, explains the father's kind of "prodigality" to both of his sons' (p.164).

If we are to translate this kind of thinking into the kind of living to which we are called as Christians in the post-Agreement situation, the challenge is immense. For too long we have behaved like the older brother, satisfied that we occupy the moral high ground, excluding others. Yet the Christian community exists to build relationships with others and to reach out and embrace, especially those from whom we have felt alienated. Once again we are being invited to move 'outside the camp'. Life will not be easy there and we may find many surprises waiting for us, but so too will our crucified and risen Lord.

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Citizenship

"Give to Caesar what is Caesar's
and to God what is God's."

Ex 20:4

Mt22:21

Acts 5:29

Rom 13:1-7

Eph 2:19

Col 2:8

I Pet 2:13-17

4:12-19

As citizens of heaven, our primary loyalty is to the Lord Jesus Christ. All other loyalties are secondary and must be judged by the values and priorities of this one. It is idolatry to equate God with any one culture or political ideal. It is quite wrong to require allegiance to any of them as evidence of allegiance to Him.

There is no room, therefore, for the identification of either Unionism or Nationalism as being particularly expressive of Christian faith. For too long Ulster Protestantism has passed without question as biblical Christianity when, in many particulars, it owes as much to culture as it does to Scripture. Seldom is it admitted among us that one can be a true Evangelical and not be a Unionist.

There are Evangelical Christians living on this island whose culture is British and whose political preference is for a continued link with Britain. Equally there are those whose culture is Irish and whose political preference is for a united Ireland. From the biblical viewpoint both are legitimate preferences.

Although our true citizenship is in heaven, we are still commanded to be good citizens. Respect for and obedience to government and the law is our normal Christian duty. If we were commanded by the state to act in a manner contrary to the Word of God, non-violent disobedience would be necessary. But as this situation does not apply in the province at this time, our responsibility as citizens is to submit to the duly constituted government and rule of law.

Correspondingly, the government of any state has a responsibility to restrain and punish evildoers. In this it is entitled to the support and involvement of its citizens in the impartial enforcement of the law, in the administration of justice and in the encouragement of law-abiding behaviour and good citizenship.

From the following passages list the priorities and principles of Christian citizenship: Matthew 5:13-16; 22:15-22; Romans 13:1-7; 1 Timothy 2:1-2; Titus 3:1-2, 8; 1 Peter 2:13-14; 4:12-19.

This year ECONI celebrates its tenth anniversary as an organisation committed to engagement with God's word and the hurts facing our divided community. A decade of resourcing Christians to be agents of peace, justice and reconciliation has resulted in a considerable amount of material that individuals and churches have found helpful. We will be continuing to provide considered and relevant resources, and a brochure outlining ECONI's publications and events is available from the office.

*The birth of ECONI was accompanied by the first ECONI publication - **For God and His Glory Alone**. To date over 11,500 copies have been distributed and we are continually encouraged by the positive response we receive to the booklet. **For God and His Glory Alone** is a series of ten studies exploring the biblical themes of forgiveness, reconciliation, citizenship, repentance etc. and their application to the Northern Ireland situation.*

*A new edition will be available in the Autumn of this year but you can purchase a current copy from the ECONI office. The included study on **Citizenship** is taken from the series, and even after ten years it still seems appropriate to the challenges facing our community.*

The following quote from Ronald Sider summarises well ECONI's ethos on the issue of citizenship and offers a helpful model for Christians to consider the nature of our engagement with society.

"Absolutising any political reality is idolatry. Since we know every socio-political order will be very imperfect until our Lord returns we must vigorously apply biblical norms to every social order, that will mean praising the good and denouncing the evil on the basis of biblical values rather than current national propaganda. When Christians do that successfully they offend all contending parties. Partisan politicians want our unqualified endorsement, not limited praise and prophetic criticism. Because the ultimate loyalty of Christians is Christ and his kingdom and because they insist on reconciliation with enemies rather than extermination even of oppressors they will at best fit only awkwardly with partisan political movements, but precisely in that disturbing prophetic presence lies their most significant contribution."

Love

Love is a difficult word to write about because it is used in such a messy way these days. Perhaps this has always been so. It is a sort of suitcase word, into which every generation, culture, even individual, packs what they will, picks it up and goes off on the journey of life looking for, and even sometimes showing that sort of love.

Our generation has all sorts of things in the suitcase; warm feelings, a dose of western Europe's romantic tradition, a colourful package from Hollywood and some of the baggage from how we were loved (or not) as children. So it is ill equipped to read the New Testament on love or put it into practice. But what is Christian love?

A non-emotional love

Emotion often accompanies Christian love - Jesus wept over Jerusalem - but that emotion is not of its essence. You can love without going weak at the knees. After all Jesus said, "Love your enemies". Its core is deeds. We need to dump the sentiment and get on with the actions. Positive actions, that is. For too long, evangelical Christians have defined themselves by what they don't do. Love defines us by what we do.

A love that is persistent when unrequited

It is all very well to admire, even enjoy, romantic unrequited love, but in the real world 'she doesn't love me' is a reason to say

'I won't love her'. No such luxury exists for the Christian because of the way he has been treated by Christ. My attitude to the other person is independent of their attitude to me.

A self disregarding love

Not that we shouldn't love ourselves, but that Christian love is directed towards the good of the other, at cost to ourselves. Marriage is a good example. By all means go to the rugby match, but if that means your wife cannot go to the woman's meeting, you know which one you are asked to prefer. It is not an abdication of your identity, it is the affirming of the priority of the other person, a following of Christ.

A love for God and His kingdom

Paul had rights, to be paid for his work for instance, but he did not work for his rights in Corinth because he judged the Kingdom would be best served by not insisting. At other times, such as leaving Philippi, he insisted on his rights because, once again, he judged this would best serve the kingdom. In love, rights are subservient to what is best for God's purposes.

**Graham
Cheeseman**

an attribute of Citizenship

An unexpected love

This is because it is counter-cultural, and time and again comes as a surprise. Can you imagine the surprise on the face of the Roman soldier, the occupying enemy, when the Christian carried his pack the second mile? Can you see the believer's difficulty explaining to his friends that it was love, not collaboration with the other side?

A love which validates other actions

And if love validates everything else we do, a lack of love invalidates all other things in the life of the believer. Paul in 1 Cor. 13 mentioned tongues, self sacrifice, good deeds and prophecy but he could just as easily have mentioned truth without love, justice without love, Protestantism without love, as all counting for nothing.

Politics and Love

Jesus was particularly insistent about Christians living this sort of love across a political, religious and cultural divide in the story of the good Samaritan. What could that mean in our situation?

Firstly, it could mean working for a new image of our community, in the eyes of ourselves and those of the other community. How do you want to be represented? Helder Camara once famously said, "Love that is not political is not love". In a situation where Christians are represented by politicians, we

ought to insist that 'politics that is not love is not Christian politics'.

Every profession has its temptations which Christians in that profession must resist. In Law, the Christian must be careful to tell the truth. In Accountancy, she must be careful to be honest. In Medicine, you cannot treat the next patient as another piece of meat but rather you must be caring. In Politics, the danger for the Christian is that he or she does not love the other side. But Christians can ask their politicians not only to represent their interests, but also their love. There are some outstanding examples of this in private constituency work but we can ask for more 'surprising love' in public stance and utterance.

Secondly, it could mean a new concept of citizenship, where each group works for its own interests and rights, but also for the interests of the other groups. Love does not mean ignoring your own aspirations but, for the Christian, it means that where a clash between your aspirations and the valid aspirations of another occurs, you work to fulfil the desires of the other rather than your own. Even alone in the polling booth, the Christian loves his enemy before himself. Christian citizenship, theory and practice, is love.

Graham Cheeseman is the Principal of Belfast Bible College. His previous work included eight years in Nigeria teaching theology and service as a Baptist minister in England.

M emory

*The way we
remember the
past shapes
the way we
live in the
future*

**David J
Montgomery**

Depending on who you talk to, they are either sectarian eyesores to be removed, symptoms of the community strife that has existed for centuries on this island, or colourful and valid representations of cultural identity and community history. Of course, a lot depends on context. Painted kerbstones, slogans and intricate murals which were intimidating and sinister in 1993, became important assets of the tourist industry in 1994.

Nevertheless, perspective is also as important as context. While for the neutral tourist many of these artistic creations hold a fascination, for members of 'the other side' certain letters, logos and statements still invoke feelings of anger and fear, stirring memories of death and destruction even in a context of cease-fire. Common to murals on both sides is the word 'Remember'. Remember Bobby Sands, George Seawright, the famine, the Boyne. Remember 1690, 1916.

It has often been said that in Ireland our memories are too long and our perspective on the future too short and too narrow. Leon Uris's well used quote says that in Ireland 'there is no future, just the past happening over and over'. However, to say the sole problem is that our memories are too long, and that all we need is a sudden dose of amnesia, is of course unhelpful and simplistic. Remembering is important. It is good that we remember. The issue is not whether we remember, not even what we remember, but why we remember and how we remember.

Deuteronomy is the biblical book that deals most directly with issues of citizenship by

& redemption

outlining how the Old Testament people of God were to live and structure their community life. In Deuteronomy, the word 'remember' (zakar) appears fifteen times. The implication is clear. Without memory, or with a selective, defective memory, we cannot truly live in harmony with God or at peace with our neighbour. Without memory both our worship and our citizenship will be sadly flawed. Specifically I would like to draw attention to the commands to remember where you have come from, and to remember the Lord your God.

The Reason for Remembering

In chapter 24 the people are urged to remember their history. "Remember you were slaves in Egypt" (vv.18, 22). In the midst of these series of laws and regulations regarding the judicial system, bail and harvesting, the only recorded theological justification is simply, remember what you once were.

The reason for remembering was neither to glory in past victories, nor to indulge themselves in a show of strength. It was to encourage humility. Only once in the book are they told to remember how the Egyptians were defeated. In contrast the refrain 'Remember you were slaves in Egypt' is repeated five times.

The Routine of Remembering

This then is reflected in the routine of remembering. The story of the Exodus is a story of probably the longest marching season

in history. It tells of a forty-year trek from a land where they were oppressed to one that they could call their home. And each year they relived it. But they did not relive the crossing of the Red Sea, nor the triumphant marching in to take the land of Canaan. Instead they remembered God's goodness in allowing them to escape Egypt, and they remembered it in a simple family meal - the Passover - with lamb, unleavened bread and storytelling.

The Result of Remembering

Their remembering had of course both private and public consequences. The joy, the glory, the thanksgiving, the celebration, the feasting, the re-enactment were all done privately in the home. The public demonstrations were the acts of justice and compassion towards other nations, the generous leaving of parts of the harvest, the looking after the poor and marginalised.

When the people of God remember, God's justice is seen in how they live as a community. There are economic, political, judicial, ecological, and sociological consequences to a right remembering. The memory of their former status as slaves caused them to have compassion towards those who are disadvantaged or on the periphery. The memory of the injustices they suffered inspired them to seek justice for all, fellow-citizens, neighbours and strangers. Any foreign peoples under their care or responsibility were not to endure the oppression they suffered at the hands of the Egyptians, and that would by implication include extending justice to their former oppressors.

In Northern Ireland we remember past injustices. Stories of hunger, discrimination and loss of citizenship are part of the folk consciousness, but our remembrance should inspire us to work all the harder for true justice for everyone, rather than try to reverse the tables and so be guilty of the same sin ourselves.

We remember past atrocities. The sites of indiscriminate bombings and shootings acquire so much emotional significance. But this can result in intransigence, making us eternal slaves to the past, or it can lead to a sober determination to ensure that no more names are added to the litany.

We remember past victories and celebrations, be they of long-gone battles, or recent electoral successes. But our celebrations can be characterised by exclusion and triumphalism. Have we anything to learn from the people of Israel? Their victory-celebrations were acts of humble thanksgiving to God, resulting in outward acts of compassion. They cared for the outsider, the stranger, and those from whom they were culturally and religiously alienated.

In Northern Ireland coloured kerbstones, flags and emblems are symbols of exclusion, used to make others feel uncomfortable and unwanted. Can we learn something from the people of Israel? They too once identified who they were by painting their doorposts. But that was part of their slavery in Egypt, on the eve of their exodus, and was never repeated. Instead the event was remembered in quiet gratitude and worship.

If I can make an anachronistic parallel, they did not eulogise Moses, or write all over the land of Canaan 'Remember 1280', if that's when it was. (If they had, it perhaps would have saved modern scholars a lot of wasted ink arguing over the exact date of the Exodus!). Those things were not important. They were not to use their deliverance as a weapon. They were to remember where they had come from, but only as a motivation to do justice and righteousness, and thus forge a closer identification with the God who delivered them.

Remember the Lord Your God

For the New Covenant people of God, the church, there is a direct line of continuity here, in that Christ himself initiated with his disciples the transition between Passover and the Lord's Supper with the significant words,

"Do this in remembrance of me". Christians too remember what we once were in a simple meal. As we break bread together we recall the spiritual deliverance won for us by Christ who, with compassion and mercy, became our sacrificial lamb. We do so with humble gratitude, and the expectation that the Spirit of God will meet with us as we celebrate, and empower us to perform similar acts of compassion and mercy.

The second aspect of remembering to which I want to draw attention comes from chapter 8. Verse 2 reads: 'Remember the Lord God who led you those forty years to humble you.' Then in verse 18, at the end of that discourse, we read, 'Remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth'. Remembering God in these ways completed the process, for here the people were given a view, not of where they have come from, but of who they are and what they have the potential to be.

Remember who you are

Chapter 8 begins, 'Be careful to obey every command I am giving you today that you may live....' Remembering how God had brought them thus far gave them a perspective on who they were. The motif of a chosen people is a much-misunderstood one because, without a grasp of God's grace and a humble spirit, it can so easily be perverted and twisted into a reason for pride, exclusion and superiority. Deuteronomy chapter 8 and many of the later prophetic writings make it clear that Israel was chosen, not because there was anything at all to merit their election, but solely that they might be a channel of blessing and shalom to the nations.

Rightly understood, the biblical concept of being chosen by God inherently implies natural unworthiness and inferiority, because right through history it is within God's nature to work with the weak, the despised, the rejected and the apparently foolish. Hence we have little Israel, then the believing remnant of the exiles, then a humble Nazarene carpenter (a crucified preacher), then a motley group of fishermen, taxmen, and paramilitaries. Hence we have the church.

The people of Israel were reminded that their very existence was due to the grace of God, grace that sustained and protected them through forty years in the wilderness. Do we also not need to recognise the importance of the grace of God? Grace which has prevented us from going down the spiral of violence to self-destruction.

Remember what you have the potential to be

They were also told to remember what they had the potential to become. Later in the book, in what is a key passage, Moses says to the people, "I lay before you two paths, death and life, now choose life." (30:19). The people's future lay in their own hands. In chapter 8 the choice is the same. What they would become depended on their willingness to obey. It was God who would give them the ability to produce wealth.

We noticed earlier the continuity between the Old Testament Israel and the New Testament church in their remembrance of the past through celebrating the Passover and the Lord's Supper. However, the promise of wealth in chapter 8 is one of the clear instances of discontinuity between the testaments. In spite of what some offbeat religious groups would assert, wealth for the Christian is spiritual not material.

The promise of Deuteronomy still stands but, interpreted through Christ and Paul, we see now the primacy of spiritual riches and Christian character. We are warned against storing up treasure on earth, we shiver at the parables of the rich who were selfish and greedy and ended up in hell, and Paul constantly refers to the riches of Christ even when he is experiencing imprisonment, poverty and persecution.

And yet the promise of Deuteronomy 8 still has relevance. For if we are to become a people characterised by such spiritual wealth, we must remember the Lord our God. Our unquestioning obedience to him and to his values will produce spiritual fruit such as love, peace, faithfulness and self-control.

What will we as a Northern Ireland society become? What will we as the church become? In a climate of political fear, competing allegiances and conflicting histories, have we forgotten the Lord our God who calls us to choose life?

When Israel rested smugly in their self-satisfaction, using their chosen people status as an excuse for careless living and sectarian superiority, they were remembering wrongly and they suffered the judgement of war, internal division and eventually exile. They lost their political security, and almost lost their national identity.

The Christian church that has identified too closely with one political regime, or rested too comfortably on its established status, glorying

Wrong remembering holds our lives captive to the past and makes us irrelevant in the present

in its numerical majority or its cultural influence, has remembered wrongly and has suffered the judgement of corruption and compromise. It has lost its distinctiveness, becoming salt without any taste.

Individual congregations that cling to the glories of former preachers, powerful personalities of the past, or bygone revivals, remember wrongly and are in danger of suffering the judgement of irrelevance and closure.

Such wrong remembering has nothing to do with inaccurate facts. What was remembered probably happened. But it has everything to do with the attitude in which the remembering is done, and with its effect on the present.

Yes, battles have been fought and won, atrocities have been committed, governments have made mistakes and innocent people have suffered. Yes, there has been oppression and violence, and the guilty have often gone free. But the question for those of us who wish by God's grace to be good citizens is this. Will we allow such remembering to transport us into the past and keep us there, or do we have the courage to let our memories motivate us to serve the future interests of all? Only if we have the courage to do the latter, will we be remembering rightly, for then we will be remembering the way of the Lord our God.

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Holy

As Holy Nation the church uses the language of peoplehood, of being a pilgrim people, strangers and aliens in the territory in which they find themselves, citizens of the reign of God. The church is not the reign of God, but points to the reign of God. It is a preview of the reign of God. The church as 'holy nation' comes from 1 Peter 2:9, which itself paraphrases Exodus 19:5-6. This was the Jewish self understanding, and the early Christian church took for itself the idea of nationhood and opened it up more radically to include Gentiles and well as Jews.

The New Testament uses a lot of political language for the church. A frequently used word is 'kingdom'. The centre of Jesus' message was the kingdom of God. This preaching of the kingdom or reign of God was continued by the early church (Acts 8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 20:25; Heb. 1:8; 12:28; Jas. 2:5; 2 Pet. 1:11; Rev. 1:9; 12:10). Jesus is given the title 'King' or 'King of kings', and in Revelation, the saints are called 'kings' as well (Rev. 1:6; 5:10). Even the title 'Lord', as given to Jesus, is a political

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title, since in the first-century Roman Empire it was expected that one would call Caesar 'lord'. The word 'church' has a political connotation. The Greek word for church often meant an assembly gathered for decision-making, a town meeting. Thus the church is that gathering of the reign of God assembled to be a sign of the reign of God, to proclaim the word of God in word and deed, to make decision, and to give allegiance to their Ruler.

The New Testament also claims that, in Jesus' death and resurrection, Christ has defeated the 'principalities and powers', translated 'rulers and authorities' in the NRSV. Colossians 2:9-15 claims that Christ has disarmed these and made a public example of them, leading them hostage in triumphal victory procession. In fact, Christ is now not only head of the church, but also head of every ruler and authority (see Eph. 1:20-23). Part of the task of the church is to make known the wisdom of God to the rulers and authorities (Eph. 3:10).

Such language is a dramatic challenge to the powers, governments, authorities, and institutions of the world. These political claims for Christ and for the church as the people of God demand that people make a choice of allegiance. The 'holy' people will be those who have been set apart for Christ's service. They are a people different from those around them, different because they have given their ultimate allegiance to God through Jesus as Lord.

In every cultural context, no matter how benevolent or hostile the governments and societies around it, the church is called to demonstrate an alternative culture and an alternative politics, an alternative ethics, in dialogue with the surrounding cultures. The Letter to Diognetus (c.2nd C) describes the early church: *'For Christians are not differentiated from other people by country, language, or customs; you see, they do not live in cities of their own, or speak some strange dialect, or have some peculiar lifestyle.... They live in both Greek and foreign cities, wherever chance has put them. They follow local customs in clothing, food, and the other aspects of life. But at the same time, they demonstrate to us*

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the wonderful and certainly unusual form of their own citizenship. They live in their own native lands, but as aliens; as citizens, they share all things with others, but like aliens suffer all things. Every foreign country is to them as their native country, and every native land as a foreign country.'

In the Anabaptist tradition this model has often been associated with the concept of separation from the world, or more precisely separation from the evil of the world. This does not mean geographical isolation from the world, or ignoring the world. It means nonconformity to the ways of the world. It means that Christians are supposed to behave differently from the standards of the dominant culture. In and of itself, this nonconformity does not mean disengagement. It simply means a different set of rules, a different way of life. In this peoplehood model of the church, the primary verb is 'to be'. We are the church.

No one model of the church requires Christians to withdraw completely from the political life of the state. But each model of the church does make a difference in how the church relates to government.

Constantinian models of the church and government.

Some say the church should stay out of politics, or not attempt to influence the political process. Or the church should just ignore government. But often this is simply a philosophy of separation of spheres. In other words, the church as an organisation should stay out of politics, but Christians individually should participate in government. And somehow, Christians working from this understanding of church and state usually end up supporting the status quo.

The word most used with regard to Christians and government is 'responsibility'. Responsibility often becomes the justification for compromising Christian faithfulness in relation to government. The argument usually is that our responsibility to government and neighbour has such priority that it is inevitable that one will have to get dirty and do some things that are in conflict with following Jesus. Virtually every Christian public ethic that

justifies behaviour that runs counter to the example and teaching of Jesus does it on the grounds of 'responsibility'. In many cases, the critics admit that following Jesus would mean something quite different from what they are proposing. But Jesus' example is deemed irrelevant or irresponsible. And if an action is not 'responsible' then, these critics imply, one must of course not do it.

The best rejoinder to such arguments is, "Responsible to whom?" Is a Christians' primary responsibility to the dominant society or to the government? Or is a Christians' primary responsibility to God and to understandings of life among the people of God? If one's primary commitment and allegiance is to God, then responsibility is defined by the covenant between God and the people of God. Allegiance to God as Ruler and a commitment to following Jesus may at times require Christians to act according to understandings of responsibility that are different from those of the surrounding society. If the church does not let itself be held captive to the state, it will take most seriously its responsibilities to the reign of God, present and future.

Some may say that Christians should get into government and do it right or at least, do it better than non-Christians would. Here there is very little separation of church and state, and one expects that the two will generally support each other.

Church as holy nation in relation with the nations.

Let me now outline what I see as five tasks for the church as holy nation in relationship with government.

1. We need to discern the nature of the principalities and powers in our context. The powers (spiritual and material, abstract in institutions and represented by particular individuals) are not evil in and of themselves. Sometimes the powers act for good and sometimes for evil. They have been ordered by God for the purpose of doing good. But the powers tend to become idolatrous, to set themselves up as gods.

One of the tasks of the church is to discern the nature of the powers in each context.

The context in which the church receives non-profit tax status or is consulted by governments is quite different from a context in which people are being killed for their faith. The sharp black and white divisions between church and government which some of the sixteenth-century Anabaptists experienced is going to be different from the experience of most Western Christians in the twentieth century.

However, we should not be too quick to think that persecution of the church is far from our experience. Government is not always on the side of the church.

2. We need to discern the critical points of dissent from government and the culture that supports it. No state can be wholly Christian, because modern nation-states are defined by their territory, and all territorial governments are based on coercion. Most people don't have much choice about their citizenship. When you have citizens who are not voluntary, governments have to use violence to maintain order, at least as a last resort. It is only a community following Jesus that can be completely non-violent. The only Christian nation is the church of Jesus Christ.

So there will always be points of dissent. The task of the church is to discern the points of dissent. You don't have to dissent from everything in order to make a witness. In fact, it is necessary to dissent only at a few key points in order to make a significant impact.

The clearest point on which Mennonites over the centuries have chosen to dissent is the refusal of military service. The restorative justice movement also represents a dissent from the mainstream of the justice system. All of the justice systems of the Western world are based on Aristotle's definition of justice that each person will get what he or she deserves. Biblical justice, on the other hand, means restoring right relationships and caring for both victims and offenders.

This is why we have to keep on doing theology over and over, why we can't just settle it once and for all. Theology is the task of discerning our situation in the light of the gospel. The gospel doesn't change, but our situation changes. The church's task is to know

the gospel very well and to know its context very well, and in the light of those, to discern the key issues.

3. The third task of the church is to be a model of peoplehood under the rule of God, to be that preview of the age to come. If we believe that peace is the way, then our ways should be ways of peace within the church. If we believe in justice that restores relationships, then discipline in the church should be restorative. It is not necessary for the government to approve or to adopt Christlike ways in order for the church to begin living that way now. Neither does the church need to turn over all peace and justice and social welfare concerns to the state. If the church is a holy nation, it will be doing many of those things itself. There will always be a place for church-run agencies that model peace and justice in ways that the government is not ready to do.

4. The church is not only called to be it, but to say it, and to say it publicly. A New Testament image of the church's public witness is that of 'ambassadors of reconciliation' (2 Cor. 5). The church is an embassy sent to the other nations with a message. It is possible to speak to government without operating on the government's terms. Menno Simons in the sixteenth century unapologetically wrote to rulers trying to persuade them not to practice capital punishment on people they thought were heretics.

This kind of public witness is really what the New Testament means by 'preaching'. Preaching is actually a rather political word. It means to announce or to proclaim publicly. It was sometimes used in a political context, as with the official runner who comes into town ahead of the rule with the message, "The king is coming!" To preach, then, is to announce good news, public good news for the community.

This preaching in public is far more than attempting to influence governments to enact the right legislation. The real centre of power is in the reign of God and in the church as its representative. Ephesians 3:10 claims that it is through the church that the wisdom of God will be made known to the rulers and authorities. The task of announcing the reign of God will mean getting out of the four walls of

the church building, out of the safe group of people who know and love each other, into the public square.

What standard of behaviour do we have a right to expect of government? First, God does not have one set of rules for governments and another set of rules for everybody else. God has one will for all people. God wills that all people come to salvation, peace, and justice and enter the reign of God. At the same time, we should not expect that territorial states are going to be able to act in Christian ways, ultimately. But we can speak to government in the hope that it can move from where it is now one step closer to the will of God. Our job as a church is to be ambassadors, to carry God's message to the other nations, and to do this with integrity and clear loyalty to God's nation.

5. Finally, we are called not only to be it and to say it, but also to do it. What can we do together with secular governments? Where can we work together with integrity? This depends on our context and the critical points of dissent that we have discerned. The church will need to discern where it can co-operate with government faithfully, without letting the church get absorbed into government. The church will need to practice being different from the state and staying connected. Or there may be times when one has to disconnect particular projects or to suffer for righteousness' sake.

All that the church is, says and does in the public arena is to be done out of the conviction that one day the whole world will acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord, and even the rebellious powers will bow before Christ. So, every way in which justice and reconciliation happen in the world becomes a sign of the complete justice and reconciliation in the age to come.

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Grace Healed Eyes

I saw him in the distance
I wasn't going to get too close
You don't take any chances with leprosy
Unless your him I suppose
He could have shouted from a distance
Said your healed and then dismissed them
But this guy went and sat among them
And before he left he kissed them
Like an angel with risky wings
In a world the world despised
He seemed to see everything different
Like he looked through grace healed eyes.

I was there right in the middle
I was helping make up the jury
We dragged her from her iniquitous bed
With the brute force of righteous fury
And there she stood full naked
Exposed in her flesh and her sin
He said he'd come to judge the world
Let the lightning strikes begin
"He who is perfect then cast the stone"
He knew our blood and guilt would rise
Left alone. at last he looked at her
Forgave her with his grace healed eyes.

One day at last I met him
We stared through the crowd face to face
if he was the way to eternal life
Then how could I pick my place
Have you kept all the commandments"
I assured him of course I had
"Sell all you have give it to the poor"
I'm telling you this man is mad
I stormed away my soul in torrnail
Like some antagonist to be defied
Yet I felt his heart yearning after me
Haunting me with his grace healed eyes
He haunts me with his grace healed eyes.
He haunts me with his grace healed eyes.

Steve Stockman

Negotiating

Towards a process of forgiveness which frees the future from the legacies of the past

I have often pondered if Northern Ireland is really a Christian Society. While no serious analysis would say that our conflict here is a religious war, it cannot be denied either that religion is a significant factor in the relationship between the two communities.

Learning about religious traditions and cultures begins early in our families, and while the problems are many and complex, some of our religious traditions have reinforced the divisions in this community and fuelled the myths on which the 'troubles' thrive. Owning one's identity and roots is a good and noble thing in itself. However, the over identification with one community instead of another, tends to obscure the Christian message 'Love your neighbour as yourself'.

One of the disturbing aspects of ongoing civil unrest is the message that is being conveyed to the younger generation, many of who now use the phrase: "It's cool to hate." The example of years of hostility and intransigence has left its mark on their

impressionable lives. What we need now more than ever is courageous leadership, which will mount a challenge to the fear that is endemic in our community and model a different kind of engagement.

We have however persistently stifled good leadership because of our fear of change. But fear is worse than the risk of change, because where there is fear, the transforming work of God is dismissed and evil is boundless.

Deirdre Mullan

Courage on the contrary, is a response to fear and is not just the responsibility of leaders. We each have daily choices to make between fear and courage if we are to see a society develop for the greater good of all.

Fear breeds hatred, and hatred is not cool but evil. The two go hand in hand and share the same source. The problem is that sometimes evil is not done in its own name but in the name of love. Elie Wiesel, author of *Night* was sent as a child to the Nazi concentration camps of Auschwitz and Buchenwald. In an interview with Philippe de Cheron when asked the question, "What was God doing while His children were being massacred by others of his children?" Wiesel suggests that had Jesus known what his disciples would do in his name and the blood they would spill, supposedly for him, that he (Jesus) would have regretted it.

This is an important suggestion for all of us who share or claim allegiance to the Christian faith in Ulster. What Christians do and continue to do both to each other and to other human beings brings a sense of anguish and sadness. Ours may not be a religious war but it is a conflict built and sustained by fear.

It is in vogue to compare and contrast what is happening in Northern Ireland with other areas in the world where there is conflict. South Africa is one such comparison. A minority of the unionist community has been likened to the Afrikaner style of leadership, which asserted that the only way to protect ones identity and traditions is to exclude all that are different. The honourable objective of the unionist family is to protect their heritage and their links with Britain; the question however is how is this to be done - by some form of apartheid? The challenge for the Unionist leadership is to help

the Future

people to come to a realisation that their rich cultural heritage can be shared with all who live in this place. Equally, the honourable objective of the nationalist community is to see a United Ireland. This group too needs to re-examine its mindset, which says: "This is our land and you unionists have no right to stop us getting what we want, namely a United Ireland."

The discovery of mutual South Africanness is an interesting example for us but is possibly unworkable in this land because of the way our people see their identity. As one commentator put it: "The diversity of South Africa makes victory impossible for any party, and therefore makes compromise inescapable for all parties." (Tertius Myburgh)

We live in a situation where it is so easy to get elected to public office by negatively exploiting the past. While I agree with the argument that we need to respect the past, I believe that it has been used to create many present problems and we need to move beyond it if we are to prevent it from paralysing the future. Our challenge is therefore to find ways to use the past not as propaganda but to build understanding and a better Ireland.

Thirty years of violence and protests have painfully taught us that any form of force or coercion cannot solve our divisions. It can only be solved by the kind of agreement we have now voted for. With the election of a new Assembly, the unionist majority can no longer run to London to make sure that the union is safe or hide behind the negative politics of always saying no. There is a similar challenge for Nationalists who have to come to terms with the reality of Unionist identity and political allegiance. The best guarantee that we can give each other for the future is to abandon the politics and language of victory or defeat as if these were the only alternatives.

Both sections of our divided people must begin the awesome task of dismantling the

barriers of distrust which centuries of fear have erected. The lessons from around the world are clear. Conflict resolution requires dialogue and negotiation. The problems of contested parades is possibly a touchstone for this and it is certain that these conflicts will not go away until we find ways to create compromise where freedoms collide.

From the perspective of my own work as an educator, several things are needed to help us move forward. First and foremost, there is a need to begin to use language that is both neutral and respectful. Following this, there is a need for honest dialogue. More effort is needed to work through the sectarianism that infects our lives. All of us who claim to be Christian have a responsibility to 'mend the world'. The common exclamation that too much has been given is an attitudinal barrier, and serves no purpose. Thirdly, we need to develop and create rituals that encourage tolerance and respect. Such rituals would enable participants to deal with the past and with one another, in order to move away from the violence. If we are committed to honest dialogue and respect, and open to the risk of change we have every right to anticipate a different kind of future.

The question of how to decommission the mindsets of a new generation away from the legacy of 'us' and 'them' has preoccupied me since I heard one young person say, "It's cool to hate." There is no intellectual or imported solution to this kind of animosity. We have to work together to achieve a consensus for inclusion and mutual respect among ordinary people for whom the complex political questions can be of little interest in the day to day survival of living. We must be involved in healing the divisions and hurts of the past by building inter community trust. If our Christian beliefs are to have any credibility we must begin this healing process with forgiveness, for forgiveness alone frees the future from the haunting despair of the past.

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reviews

Transforming the World?

The Social Impact of British Evangelicalism

David Smith

Paternoster Press, 1998 £14.99

Transforming the World? Not us! People were singing and dancing on the deck of the world as it sailed on to hell. We were in the lifeboat shouting out our warnings. From time to time the message got through and we dragged rescued souls from the icy waters as they abandoned ship. Transforming the world? Not our responsibility! God would transform the world with the fire of his judgement. Our task was to call as many as possible to salvation before the judgement fell.

That was my experience growing up and I suspect it was the experience of many others in the same circle of mission halls and tent meetings. Transforming the World? No. More a case of Manning the Lifeboats.

Others saw it differently. Yes, the world was going to wrack and ruin, but Christians, by their good living and example, could mitigate the worst effects - for a time anyway. Transforming the World? No. More a case of Holding the Fort.

But, argues David Smith - Principal of Northumbria Bible College - the eighteenth century revival gave rise to an evangelical movement which was 'world-transformative' (ix) - that is, evangelicals believed that the spread of the gospel would

transform not only the individual but society. The book is an exploration of the success or failure of succeeding generations of evangelicals to live up to the vision of those early generations. While this may sound like a heavy read Smith constantly relates his argument to the heroes of evangelicalism - Wilberforce, Booth, Spurgeon, Lloyd-Jones.

After discussing the early period Smith assesses the impact of the rise of modernity on evangelicalism. Did evangelicalism transform the culture of modernity, or was evangelicalism itself transformed? Sadly, Smith finds that modernity had the greater impact. Despite a few shining examples, nineteenth century evangelicalism abandoned its vision for the world and society, and retreated into other worldliness or cultural captivity. "Evangelicals frequently lost sight of this vision," writes Smith, "treated conversion as a means of escape from the present, and adopted attitudes toward social and political tasks which would have baffled Jonathan Edwards or William Carey." (2)

Later chapters assess twentieth century developments and ask if evangelicalism can recover its world transformative vision. Evangelicalism is stronger in the late twentieth century than it has been for a long time. Changes in society have created new opportunities for evangelicals. However, Smith suggests that "the jury is still out on whether evangelicals in Europe and North America can recover the world transformative vision of the founders of this tradition and so play their part in the development

of a truly critical and missionary engagement with western culture". (xiii) The only other option open to evangelicals is "the continued privatisation of religion and the acceptance of an ideological role in justifying things as they are". If it chooses that path, argues Smith, "evangelicalism will have betrayed those who founded the tradition two centuries ago, and will have shown that it no longer shares the divine concern for those who are sickened and wearied by life in the far country because, like the elder brother in Jesus' parable, it has yielded to a spirit of slavery and become blind to its own need of grace." (125)

Unfortunately Smith focuses only on Britain so we get no indication of how his thesis applies to Ireland. It would be interesting to know if the self-perception of Protestants and evangelicals in Ireland and their perception of Catholicism inhibited their commitment to a world transformative vision. Were they too busy holding the fort culturally and politically to work out the full implications of evangelical faith? And what of the future? In a period of transition for Northern Ireland, do evangelicals - out of the wealth of resources available in the tradition - have anything to offer? Or are Ulster evangelicals huddled in a political lifeboat as much as a religious one?

Alwyn Thomson

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Adventures in Reconciliation:

29 Catholic Testimonies

Ed. P. Monaghan & E. Boyle

Eagle Publication, 1998 £4.99

At a recent church Bible Study we were challenged by Paul's testimony before King Agrippa as recorded in Acts 26. In a subsequent group we attempted to apply these principles to 'telling our own story'. Some older group members recalled testimony meetings they had attended where the structure and evangelical language used were almost unvarying from one participant to the next. Without denying the sincerity of those who find rigid formulae helpful, it is our task as believers to 'tell our story' in as relevant and meaningful a manner as possible.

Much is to be gained or lost by how, or indeed whether, we tell our story. This was what guided the direction of my thoughts when I was given a copy of *Adventures in Reconciliation: 29 Catholic Testimonies*. Personally I found that the twenty-five pages of commendations, foreword and preface held up my progress in getting to what the title had promised. While interested to read the stories of those who commend this book, I was surprised to find the preface by Cardinal Daly less than enthusiastic. Despite his admission to a feeling of unease with many of the overt expressions of experiences as they are recounted in the book, the cardinal affirms 'that the experiences themselves and the underlying realities which are their content are fundamental elements of Christian and Catholic faith and Life' (p12). However, he then proceeds to justify his unease by insisting that personal faith cannot be separated from life

within the visible Church and refuses to 'distinguish between "baptism in the Spirit" and growing awareness of the reality and power of sacramental baptism, and of its implications for my personal life' (p12). The testimonies which follow do not seem to me to interpret baptism in the Spirit in such a manner, except in the case of some of the priests included. All in all, I feel the cardinal's contribution is guarded and not entirely favourable to the cause he commends.

Having reached the testimonies, I experienced joy, sadness, admiration and humility as I read moving stories of dramatic 'Damascus Road' encounters with God. They told of gradual awakenings to God's love, accounts of deep personal and family suffering and many expressions of praise to the God, who is the answer to each human need recounted here. I had expected this book to contain testimonies without stereotypical language, structure or formula. The accounts were refreshing, though I found it interesting to discover a common language and structure not previously familiar to me as a conservative evangelical. I have to admit to a certain amount of confusion about whether conversion or a Charismatic understanding of baptism in the Spirit was being described in some of the testimonies.

In addition to telling his personal conversion story, Paddy Monaghan (one of the book's editors) traces the formation and growth of the Evangelical Catholic Initiative - a group which seeks to promote reconciliation between, and renewal within the Christian churches. This aspect of the book's purpose - an 'adventure in reconciliation' - now becomes clearer. Several of the book's contributors point to their joy when they are accepted as fellow-

believers by those from Protestant denominations. A few express frustration that this is often not the case, and that they are sometimes expected by Protestants to leave the Roman Catholic church following conversion. Whether this book will in any way alleviate that situation, or succeed as an 'adventure in reconciliation' depends in my view on at least two factors. Does it adequately address theological concerns raised by evangelical Protestants, and will it be read beyond its sympathetic audience?

The book's three appendices attempt to tackle the issue of theological concerns. The second and third of these present reasons for reading the Bible and an ABC of salvation which would, I suspect, be most acceptable to any evangelical Protestant reader. The theological stance of the individual contributors varies widely, as will that of the readership and they must make their own judgements.

Speaking personally, I believe the testimonies would have spoken more powerfully as sincere records of God's dealings with ordinary individuals without the aid of the introductions or the specific agenda of reconciliation. Despite this, I hope that this book will be read by many evangelical Protestants in a spirit of openness to see what God can do today in the lives of the people of our land. As Sr. Brigid Dunne reminds us: "God is still 'up to something', and He still calls us to reach out to Him and to each other. I intend doing just that until He calls me home!" (p 152)

Dorothy McMillan

Dorothy McMillan is a member of Windsor Baptist Church where her husband David is Pastor. She is also a member of the Baptist Women's Board and a part-time teacher.

NEWS & events

ECONI Conference

Saturday 14th November
(Stranmillis College, 10.00am - 3.00pm)

A Time to Heal

*The Church as a Community of Peace, Justice
and Reconciliation*

In the light of the historic political events of this year, ECONI's annual conference will explore a biblical vision of social transformation that challenges Christians to consider ways in which we might be agents of hope and healing in our divided community.

Dr. Stanley Hauerwas has accepted our invitation to be our keynote speaker. A detailed brochure and registration form will be available in the next issue of *Lion & Lamb*. In the meantime note this important date in your diary and watch this space.

Catherwood Lecture

Thursday 24th September 7.30pm

A Vision for the Future

Sir Frederick Catherwood

As part of ECONI's tenth anniversary celebration we are inaugurating the Catherwood lecture series. Beginning on 24th September with Sir Frederick Catherwood as our invited guest, the series will look at issues relating to Public Theology.

Future lectures will consider issues ranging from a theology of economics to a critique of theocracy. Details of the venue for this series will be published shortly. Alternatively, phone the ECONI office at 01232 325258.

**Resourcing Christians
for a Biblical
Response**



ECONI Sunday

Sunday 15th November

A Time to Heal

*Peace, Justice and Reconciliation in the
Local Church*

As in previous years ECONI Sunday will develop the theme of the Annual Conference: **A Time to Heal**. This is an opportunity to consider, in the context of a Sunday service, the issues of Peace, Justice and Reconciliation and their meaning for Christians in a divided society. Each church that registers will receive a resource pack designed to help congregations plan their service. Last year 60 churches took part and ECONI staff and Steering Group members spoke in different services around the country. To register please contact Gladys Swanton and ask for details.

New Publication

Politics of Holiness

Alwyn Thomson

It is not every day that someone applies the concept of holiness to community relations. In this important book Alwyn Thomson raises many neglected issues and invites us to consider the biblical call to holiness as a passionate engagement with a hurting world.

A comprehensive series of Pathways books are available covering a variety of themes pertinent to faith, culture and politics. If you would like a copy of our publications list we will gladly send it to you on request.

guests who will help us explore the issues together. A full brochure and booking form is available from the ECONI office.

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