



# contents

<b>Comment</b> David McMillan	<b>2</b>
<b>From the Director</b> David Porter	<b>10</b>
<b>From Just Us to Justice</b> Duncan Morrow	<b>10</b>
<b>Right Relationships or Justice</b> Brian Lennon	<b>10</b>
<b>The truth, the Whole Truth</b> Alwyn Thomson	<b>10</b>
<b>Walking for Ministers</b> Graham Cheesman	<b>10</b>
<b>Dealing with the pain</b> David Bolton	<b>10</b>
<b>The case for human rights</b> Martin O'Brien	<b>10</b>
<b>What's wrong with Rights?</b> Alwyn Thomson	<b>10</b>

## **Lion & Lamb is a publication of ECONI**

(Evangelical Contribution On Northern Ireland)

*Editor:* Derek Poole

*Assistant Editor:* Ruth Hutchinson

*Design:* Colin Maguire

*Cover:* Spring Graphics, 116 Lisburn Road, Saintfield Tel: (01238) 501708

All correspondence should be sent to the address below. Permission to print any original article should be sought from the editor. We welcome the submission of unsolicited articles, but do not guarantee publication, and manuscripts cannot be returned. Opinions expressed in the magazine are those of the contributors, and do not necessarily reflect the views of ECONI.

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

Howard House, 1 Brunswick Street, Belfast, BT2 7GE  
Tel: (01232) 325258 Fax: (01232) 434156  
e-mail: admin@econi.org www.econi.org

## **Justice**

Over recent months the ECONI staff team has been considering how best to develop the aims and ethos of our organisation as we move 'beyond 2000'. In a past issue of this magazine our director David Porter said, "The road to peace and healing will be a long journey on which some of the most difficult issues still remain to be resolved". For the last three years our aim has been summed up in the phrase – '**Resourcing Christians for a Biblical Response**'. As we look to the future, we hope to consolidate and develop this ministry in ways which are biblically informed, and which help us to engage with the hurts and issues facing our community. The focus can be summed up as '**Thinking Biblically – Building Peace**'.

The theme of this issue is justice. Those engaged in peace building initiatives soon find themselves talking of justice. Many in the community state that there can be no peace without it, but their definitions are often widely divergent. The contributors to this issue have sought to present different aspects of justice. Articles include a piece on dealing with the pain of our shared tragedy, and also two very differing views on human rights. In a lighter vein, Graham Cheesman has some good advice for the holiday season, and David McMillan's comment addresses a subject which has become more and more relevant to summer in Northern Ireland.

Thank you for responding to the Readers Survey which was included in the last issue. We intend to publish a summary of the results later in the year. It is still not too late to send your response, that is if you can find the survey sheet! We shall be pleased to receive completed surveys until the end of July.

**Ruth Hutchinson**  
**Assistant Editor**

## Be not deceived, God is not mocked.

The Chinese Christians in the House Church Movement are denied both civil and religious liberties. The State established a body to regulate and adjudicate on their freedoms and activities, something they consider unacceptable and consequently they are unable and unwilling to comply with its demands.

Visiting their web site I found their 'Official Statement towards the Government, its Religious Policy, and the Three-Self Patriotic Movement'. It reads, in part, as follows:

- Even though we are often misunderstood and persecuted by the government, we do not respond with a reactionary attitude, nor have we taken any reactionary action.
- When house churches (Christians) are persecuted, they do not hate the government, but accept suffering as permitted by the Lord. They endure suffering silently. They yield to the government, intercede for the government and bless it.
- When leaders and evangelists of house churches are persecuted, fined, interrogated, sent to labour instruction camps or labour reform camps, they do not complain. They still love their country and the government, waiting for God to grant them mercy.

This is the proper Christian and biblical response to persecution and the denial of liberties. It is a faithful working out of the instructions of Peter.

*Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men, whether to the king as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right.*

*Show proper respect to everyone, love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honour the king.*

*To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his footsteps.*

*He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.*

*When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats.*

*Instead he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.*

*(1 Peter 2 v 13,14, 21, 22)*

The Chinese Christians behave biblically under a communist, unjust, unfair regime. Jesus is their pattern, himself suffering under an unfair, unjust and ungodly regime. This is the Christian way to behave.

What we have witnessed over the past few years at Drumcree is not Christian. No baptism of impromptu sermons, gospel songs or hymns in the field makes it Christian. No whipped up fears about the loss of religious liberty makes it Christian. One hundred thousand men descending on Drumcree hoping either by force of numbers, intimidation or bloody violence to force a march down Garvaghy Road would be one hundred thousand pairs of feet trampling underfoot the gospel of Christ.

The sanctifying - whether by Protestant or Roman cleric, whether by banner or eucharistic table, whether on the 'hill' or on the 'road' - of the ethnic and cultural hatred which lies under the thin religious veneer is a futile exercise.

"Be not deceived, God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap." (Gal 6:7)

David McMillan is pastor of Windsor Baptist Church.

Daids  
photo

# from the director

david porter

It is appropriate that this issue of lion & lamb takes up the theme of hermeneutics. After ten years this still remains the core task at the heart of all that ECONI seeks to do – the application of biblical principles to the situation in Northern Ireland. Hermeneutics is simply the way we go about understanding what the bible has to say and bringing that to bear on our experience of life and the world in which we live. It is the task of both interpreting the bible and making that interpretation real in our lives and community.

Of course how we go about that task is influenced by the presuppositions we bring, those ideas that we take for granted, about how the bible should be interpreted and how the world around us functions. Consequently, like many things in the Christian life, there is difference and dispute among Christians on this whole topic. Yet the bible remains for us the Word of God, the final authority on matters of faith and practice. As John Stott has commented our problem is not our commitment to the authority of the bible but an authoritative hermeneutic or method by which we learn to interpret it.

What we can agree is that the text records for us the action of God in history. Intervening in the lives of communities, nations and individuals those who encountered God in this way reflected on their experience and began to record in story and song, drama and ritual, history and prophecy, their Spirit inspired understanding of what God was doing. Over the centuries that record has been written down and collated into a text that Christians acknowledge as inspired, a revelation of God.

The problem is, at its closest point, the culture and setting of these stories is now at least two thousand years away from our contemporary setting. While, despite such divergence, much is direct and plain in its meaning, much equally remains obscure and distant to the experience of human beings today. All of us need background information and explanation that is not normally part of our everyday lives to be fully aware of the significance of the stories we read.

This problem of dealing with a text is not of course unique to Christianity. The current problems with the peace process in Northern Ireland are, at one level, a problem of hermeneutics. Since 1995 the political parties have had the experience of encounter with one another in the talks. Of course this for some was but the latest round of such engagement over the last thirty years, so much baggage was brought to the process. Some of it helped in understanding what was happening, some of it was a hindrance as new relationships and understandings needed to happen. In the autumn of 1997 that encounter was broadened and the process intensified with the aim to get a broad consensus on an agreement to put to the people concerning the future governance of Northern Ireland. After months of debate and negotiation a text was finally agreed and in a highly charged political atmosphere a substantial majority accepted it as the basis for a new start. Yet it was hardly off the negotiating table in May 1998 before the debate began on its nature and the meaning of its content.

Now, barely nine months on from that fragile point of consensus, the text has become a focus of dispute and not agreement, conveying blinding clarity to some and studied ambiguity to others. Is its constitutional bias nationalist or unionist? Does it set out specific conditions for setting up the new dispensation of devolved government? Do certain things need to happen and when? Is a required standard of behaviour to be part of the new arrangement?

# from Just to Justice

**duncan morrow**

In one sense or another, we are all Romans - even Ulster evangelicals. The Pax Romana imposed by the Roman Empire on all of the conquered territories imparted a sense of what law is and what justice entails on everything European. The symbol of the weighing scales still presides over our courts, while the notion of the incorruptible judge accountable only to the law of the governing state and people is the core of the system. Justice is measurable and balanced, it is blind and impartial and it carries a sword.

## The Justice system

This justice is first and foremost a system. Its impartiality and its blindness amount to two sides of the same coin. The law should care less about the connections of the person who committed a crime or why it was committed than about establishing that it was done and by whom. Justice involves the conviction of the guilty and the exoneration of the innocent, whoever they are or in spite of their reasons for action. At the core of justice is the notion of a system of payment - overstepping the rules requires an appropriate payment in kind. The word 'retribution' comes from the Latin meaning 'to give back'. Until the scales are balanced, everything is injustice. Indeed, what we call our sense of injustice is a gnawing and pernicious sense of imbalance, an outrage to our sense of mutuality, which is the foundation of a human civilisation.

Rene Girard, a French Catholic thinker, suggests that while justice systems are a huge human advance, they remain rooted in the very violence they aim to quell. According to him, our potential for limitless and random violence is the ultimate threat to successful human community. It is therefore crucial to human survival that cycles of revenge are arrested before they can escalate into forces that threaten to destroy the entire community. Successful political

systems are those systems which achieve what Max Weber called 'the monopoly of legitimate violence'. Justitia continues to wield her sword. Justice is the controlled alternative to a destructive and unregulated violence. When it is truly successful, this monopoly is actually experienced as something quite different from violence: as the operation of a blind and impartial justice.

## Criminal Justice

Criminal justice, in this understanding, breaks any cycle of revenge at two decisive points. In the first instance, it demands individual responsibility. People are criminal only when they act personally, not before or after. In consequence, each criminal is 'an individual', isolated from all and facing a justice system acting on behalf of the community. Further violence on behalf of the criminal is therefore both hopeless and containable. At the same time, the judicial system, in acting on behalf of the community, claims a monopoly to decide and impose retribution. The victim or their family has no direct part in the trial or the sentence. They must rely on the courts to find in their favour, and the judgement of the court is final. Any further act of revenge by the victim party is itself a criminal act.

Understood in this way, the justice system seems less concerned with rectifying injustice as such, than with the need to ensure that cycles of revenge have no chance of emerging. The problem with injustice is not, in the first instance, the suffering of the victim or their relatives, but the potential inherent in their anger and resentment for further violence. Punishment is aimed less at forcing the perpetrator to pay than on mollifying the resentment of the victim or their kin and thus pre-empting the emergence of new perpetrators motivated by a desire to balance the scales through revenge. This shift is not just a matter of philosophy or semantics. It turns out that the justice

# from Just to Justice

system is concerned less with individual victims than with stopping the production of new perpetrators. Punishment is the minimum price which the justice system extracts to achieve that end.

The use of controlled fire to fight uncontrolled fire has considerable advantages. The ritual procedures of law ensure that the randomness of revenge is replaced with a systematic, limited and measurable system. The insistence on individual responsibility limits the number of people subject to the system's revenge and provides a direct and traceable path between each crime and each punishment. The existence of law allows us to distinguish between a perpetrator and a victim. Where it works, it establishes the fundamental possibility for social peace.

## Legitimate Justice?

Tragically, of course the state in Northern Ireland has not yet enjoyed a full monopoly of legitimacy. Although we can argue endlessly about the extent of disaffection from the law between 1921 and 1969, there is no doubt that the fundamental question mark underlying the state's authority in certain cases has never fully disappeared. For those who opposed the very existence of Northern Ireland, the law as directed against Irish nationalists, and by rapid extension, against Catholics, was not the ritual operation of blind justice but the deliberate exercise of violence against the oppressed people. In this view, the law is a charade, the violence of one group claiming only a spurious precedence over the violence of another: in other words, it is not and cannot be justice.

The crucial and critical factor here is not philosophical but practical. When the law is seen sufficiently widely as one of the weights rather than the balancing factor in the scales, it can no longer undertake its primary task - the elimination of revenge. Legal attempts at 'justice' are viewed as part of the violent cycle, demanding revenge. The sword of justice starts to look like another weapon of war.

Under these circumstances, any legal attempts to criminalise may fail on two counts. First, individual criminals cannot be isolated. The prosecution of a 'criminal' does not eliminate violence from that quarter but generates a large support group who see the supposed criminal as a heroic soldier and seek revenge on a criminal system while relying on a deeper well of sympathy in the wider community. Secondly, the failure of the court to eliminate the violence of the perpetrator leads to demands for ever tougher laws and/or to

certain groups taking the law into their own hands and launching revenge attacks. These revenge attacks in themselves confirm in the eyes of the 'perpetrator' their analysis that their violence is defensive and never the primary cause. Perpetrators become victims and victims become perpetrators and all differences are eliminated. Judgement of 'guilt' and 'innocence' becomes dependent on the person of the judge and their relationship with the parties in conflict.

Thus the question of 'justice' degenerates into another rhetorical battle in which everybody is fighting for it. No party or group in Northern Ireland believes that their cause is unjust. We have killed and prosecuted our conflict with a clear conscience creating more injustice as we seek to impose our justice. Indeed the danger is that our attempts to create justice by force will degenerate until they are indistinguishable from mass murder. In conditions like ours, where a monopoly of violence can only be achieved by the use of massive force, the rhetoric of 'no peace without justice' is ultimately the same as 'no peace without victory'. Justice becomes 'just us', as the saying goes.

## Perceived Injustice?

The power of the appeal of those who oppose the Good Friday Agreement is deeply tied up with our sense of justice. The injustice of releasing terrorists and letting them into government lies at the core of the argument from No-Unionists that 'it's right to say no'. Among republicans, acquiescence in unjust partition is the central accusation of those who continue to oppose the Agreement. Furthermore, the early-release scheme for paramilitary prisoners is usually justified on the grounds that it prevents the creation of more perpetrators, but it undoubtedly does so by asking victims and those closest to them to forego their due in punishment, a due that would be paid in every other jurisdiction in the western world, so that the rest of us can live.

Once cycles of revenge have started to turn they are enormously difficult to stop until one side prevails, or both sides destroy each other. Stopping at a random point in the cycle leaves many injustices unrectified and many resentments unsatisfied. Stopping is in this sense intrinsically unjust. Tragically and ironically, the last just people are those who would carry on until the last drop of blood is shed. This too is the appeal of the simplicity of pure nationalism in a sea of injustice.

## Biblical Justice

All of this throws light on Paul's apparently paradoxical insight that 'the law is death', even when he saw also that it is often our only possibility of living. To go on fighting until our injustices are finally rectified to our satisfaction is ultimately to destroy everything. Jesus, the ultimate victim of injustice on the cross, does not demand

revenge but sees past the violence of the crucifiers and offers them (us) forgiveness. What the New Testament knows is that justice is only possible when we have a relationship of mutuality or when we have a relationship in which we recognise that we are responsible to and for one another. It is only that relationship which allows us to recognise our actions and those of others as unjust at all, and to feel the 'hot coals' of remorse. It is only when the crucifiers see what they have done, that they lose their feeling of self-satisfaction. That only happens because Jesus breaks the circle of revenge.

The insight that justice only exists in relationship is crucial to any search for justice which departs from the logic of vengeance. A working system of justice in Northern Ireland can only come about when we can distinguish it firmly from acts of revenge. This is an instinct clearly inherent in the Agreement with its emphasis on the building of sustainable political relationships and broadly-based voluntary consent. Our debates about the release of prisoners, about policing and about parades are ultimately about the construction of relationships within which it is possible to develop a 'common sense' about what justice is.

At the same time, the gospel insists that the new relationship beyond vengeance is not one rooted in universal innocence, but rather in an acknowledgement that forgiveness is our duty, because we can only judge as sinners who have received forgiveness as freely given grace ourselves. Hebrew and New Testament justice is always as much about the recognition of our own responsibility for violence as the responsibility of others. Jesus' point is never that we should avoid recognising sinfulness when it happens, but that we must always do so from within a recognition of our own collusion with sin. The Pharisees are guilty not of condemning sin but of hypocrisy about their own standing. In an important sense, the gospel subverts the 'individual guilt' determined about other people, with the narrower path of our own personal responsibility, freely acknowledged.

## The Agreement and Justice

There is a serious danger in Northern Ireland that by dispensing with punishment we have left the impression that nobody is guilty, even that there is nothing to be guilty for. While the early release scheme in the Agreement is a recognition that individual responsibility for violence is an inadequate rendering of the truth about inter-communal and politically-motivated violence in Northern Ireland, the fact that it has taken place without any expression of remorse means that classical individual guilt has been replaced by a great silence, in which the common thread is an assertion of innocence by every political and social actor. The gap has not been filled by any formal or informal acceptance of our joint responsibility in any shape or form. While we proclaim our own innocence, there is considerable evidence that we often still harbour our resentment at the others who we hold guilty. The Agreement is undoubtedly

focussed on removing the motivation of perpetrators and only secondarily concerned with the feelings of past victims. In these circumstances, victims and those alongside them, with their 'irritating' insistence that what was done to them was unjust and unjustifiable, can easily become an uncomfortable reminder of our misdeeds to be denied, avoided, resented and even vilified.

## Future Justice

Justice in Northern Ireland will only be possible in the long run because a cycle of revenge has been replaced by new and stable political relationships. In this, the Agreement represents a bold and brave initiative in Irish history. At the same time, in the space which this creates, we have to edge towards the light of free acceptance of our own and our group's responsibilities. While we continue to defend our own innocence, we are still in some sense or other rivals, deeply suspicious of our opponents and unable to meet or even work with them in freedom. In a deep sense, a stable new police force and justice system in Northern Ireland will remain vulnerable to these unresolved feelings of resentment until we have stopped accusing each other and instead have found the space to meet others with a sense of humility. Only in the slow but real acceptance of responsibility in all of its concrete dimensions can we break the cycle of revenge, acknowledge the real suffering of victims and build the relationships which make justice a possibility.

**Duncan Morrow lectures in the School of History, Philosophy and Politics at the University of Ulster, Jordanstown. He is an elder in Fisherwick Presbyterian Church, Belfast.**

# right relationships

**brian lennon**

The Belfast Agreement was not just, or so some argue. It let prisoners out before they had served their time. Others argue it was just because it may have helped to end the violence that was causing so much injustice. 'Justice' is a Catholic word. At least it seems that way. Often during the Troubles I worked on ecumenical statements with Protestants. We often called for peace. I would also want to call for justice. But some of the Protestants group would object: "That's not a good word, let's look for something else." That something else was generally 'right relationships'.

What was going on in this exchange? It was our different responses to codes. Justice was a code word for Nationalist demands. 'Give us justice' meant 'Stop Diplock courts', or 'Ban plastic bullets' or 'Stop the shoot-to-kill policy', and these were all seen as things that Nationalists would benefit from (although plastic bullets killed Loyalists too). 'Right relationships' was a softer term. It did not have the same connotations. At the same time I always accepted it for ecumenical statements because it is a wider concept than justice.

## Justice and Rights

Let's unpack term 'justice', at least in part. It is a good term, even if not the best, but there are problems with it. One of these is about the notion of rights, because justice includes rights. This century has seen a vast increase in human rights awareness and legislation. It has also seen a huge increase in abuses. The idea behind rights is that there are certain minimum things to which every person is entitled, because they are human beings. Examples are the rights to life, to

bodily integrity, to food, to freedom of speech and movement, to assembly, etc. Take these away from a person and you take away something that is theirs by right. You treat them unjustly.

Or do you? Take the right to life. If you are a pacifist then it is always wrong to kill someone. But if you believe that there may be circumstances in which it may be right to kill, for example, in self-defence, then you believe it can be right to take away something - one of their fundamental rights. And you believe you can do so justly. Another example is prison. Is it good to lock up persistent offenders in order to protect society? If you think it may be, then you believe it is good to interfere with one of their fundamental rights. So the cry: "Give us justice" runs into problems if by it you mean: "Give us our rights", because in many circumstances some people's rights conflict with others.

A further problem with rights is that when people first thought of them they thought of the rights of individuals. But the rights of groups are at least as important. The most glaring example in our present century is the Jews. It was as a people that they were subjected to the Holocaust. It did not matter what they were like as individuals, it was because they were Jews that they were murdered. One of the arguments for the existence of the state of Israel is that it is only by having their own State that the Jewish people can hope to protect the right to their life.

Again the theory runs into problems when the rights of different groups come into conflict. Kurds are a people, but they live in several different states including Turkey and Iraq. Are they entitled to their

# or justice

own state? If not, why not? They too have been massacred. Have they not the same entitlements as Jews?

The answers to such questions are heavily influenced by power politics. Jews have been much more successful than Kurds in gaining power in business and finance especially in the US. So, whatever the merits of the Jewish case they are more likely to be successful than the Kurds. That shows another aspect that we assume in justice. It implies treating people with equality.

## Justice and Equality

This has been the basis of major complaints by Nationalists in Northern Ireland over the years:

- ...that Nationalist identity has not been recognised to the same extent as Unionists;
- ...that the Irish language has not been respected;
- ...that Unionists were more likely to get jobs and promotion;
- ...that the courts and security forces treated Nationalists differently.

Whatever you think about the merits of these charges, they are all based on the idea that each citizen is entitled to equal treatment. However, that is not the way it works in any society. Rich people get better lawyers. That means they get a better defence in the courts. This is one reason why death rows in the US are full of poor people. Rich people have better access to politicians. (It is no accident that Philip Sheedy, whose sentence in the South for killing a man while drunk driving was reduced, is an architect. Had he been from a more deprived background it is unlikely his relatives would have

been able to chat to a Supreme Court judge while walking in a local park.) Rich people also get better education which in turn gives them access to better jobs. To defend the idea that there should be absolute equality in society you would have to find a means to eliminated differences in wealth and education.

Some argue that what matters is not equality but rather the opportunity for equality. So some people might get rich, and that is OK as long as everyone starts from a level playing field. But of course they don't. Children whose parents have a university qualification are much more likely to get a university qualification themselves.

## Justice and Punishment

Punishment is another aspect of justice. It's what we started with in this article and it caused the greatest problems for the pro-Agreement camp during the Referendum. It was really difficult for the families of many victims to see those convicted of the murders of their loved ones being released early. They wanted to see them punished. Prison, as many saw it, was too light a punishment. It was nothing like the pain the victims were enduring because their loved ones were never going to return.

The prisoners were not let out for the sake of justice. They were let out as part of a deal. That deal was arrived at by a calculation by the different parties about how much or how little they could live with, and how much or how little their opponents could live with. As part of that calculation the prisoners were always going to get early release. It was one of the easier decisions from a political point of

# right relationships

view the main objectors were victims and victims are not among the most powerful in society.

However, it is not enough simply to say that letting the prisoners out did not meet the demands of justice, and leave it at that. Prisoners and their representatives had some points on their side. Others were guilty besides them and were never caught. Republicans in particular referred to individual cases involving members of the security forces where no great effort was made to bring perpetrators to justice. So, if letting prisoners out early was unjust, so was the failure of the State to convict other offenders.

## Restorative Justice

Since the Agreement there has been much talk of 'restorative justice'. This puts much more emphasis on trying to set up a new and positive relationship between victim, perpetrator and society, rather than focusing only on punishing the perpetrator. Indeed one of the criticisms supporters of restorative make of conventional justice (which they often term 'retributive justice') is that it tends to ignore the victim. For example, suppose your house is robbed. If you tell the police, they may arrest and charge the perpetrator. They may or may not tell you they have done so. They then bring him before a court. A state solicitor or barrister will prosecute the case. You may not be called to give evidence. A jury (or in Northern Ireland a judge) may decide the verdict and then the judge decides the punishment. Again you may not be consulted. You don't get your property back. In other words, in this process, the victim almost disappears.

In a restorative justice approach more effort is put into convincing the perpetrator that what he has done is wrong. Part of this means exposing him to the suffering he has caused. One way of doing this is by getting him to meet the victim (if you are willing to meet him). Punishment very often will be community service rather than prison. How do you feel about this approach? It's easier to answer this question if you are not a victim. But suppose you are? How do you feel about the perpetrator not going to prison? About possibly meeting him and listening to his explanation, if any, for doing what he did? About explaining to him what his crime has meant to you, the loss of a loved one, the utter fury that can follow, the despair, the loneliness?

Most people I know would not feel happy about this. They would find it very difficult to meet a perpetrator. Nonetheless, those who support restorative justice tell story after story of how both victim and perpetrators have been helped by such meetings.

## Limits of Justice

Behind all I have said is the sense that justice cannot solve all our problems. In the area of rights, of equality, of punishment we run into trouble if we rely too heavily or too exclusively on justice. That is why 'right relationships' is a fuller term. It is also a more biblical expression. The way the term justice is often used shows no awareness of a relationship and the responsibilities that come with relationships. One of these is duties. If we have rights which others owe to us, then we also have duties to respect the rights of others. The notion of right relationships emphasises this. It fits more easily with the Biblical themes of 'Covenant' and 'Shalom'. This places the

# or justice

stress on the community. We cannot be part of the community unless we are in respectful relationship with other members, especially those who are marginalised. We cannot be in touch with God while we ignore Lazarus sitting at our gate, even if there is no evidence that we are directly responsible for the poverty of Lazarus. (All the gospel story tells us is that Lazarus was poor, not how he became poor. He could have been an alcoholic.)

Nonetheless, I do not want to let go of the term justice. It was a supreme irony that Christians allowed Republicans to take over this term during the Troubles, given what Republicans were doing. There may be problems with aspects of justice, such as rights, equality, and punishment. But that does not mean these have no value. The danger of a term like 'right relationships' is that we may overlook the specific duties that are owed to individuals and to groups. People still have rights, even if it is sometimes difficult to settle disputes over conflicts of rights. Equality is still a value, otherwise the rich will think they can worship God and ignore the marginalised. Punishment remains a value in its own right, even if prison is often inappropriate.

Finally, justice has another value. One of the recurring dilemmas for Christians is how to relate to secular society, with its mixture of wheat and tares. Right relationships are a Christian ideal which will often be unattainable in ordinary life. Justice can often be a better measure of what is possible. It is important that people get their rights, even if they are not open to a relationship. That is an important principle in the parades controversy. Groups should be accorded their rights even if they are not open to relationships. (Just in case either side thinks that comment benefits them, it doesn't, because we still need to work out what rights are due to different groups!)

Nonetheless, right relationships is the wider, the deeper and the more biblical concept. Christians need to work for justice, but with their eyes on the broader concept. Further, justice itself will often not be possible outside the context of new relationships. If in the past Protestants tended to emphasise right relationships (sometimes as a way of avoiding tough justice demands), and if many Catholics emphasised justice without focussing on the need to relate to Unionists, both should now concentrate on the need to build a new relationship. It is only within the context of such a relationship, in which both Catholic and Protestant, Nationalist and Unionist, take responsibility for the future of this place, that we will be able to get any proper justice in the real world. It is only in the context of such a relationship that both Catholics and Protestants will find a proper basis for their own safety. It is the lack of such a relationship which creates the fear that makes people on both sides use violence. Put a relationship in place, take away the fear, and then justice will fall from the skies to embrace us all in the life of God.

**Brian Lennon works as a co-ordinator with Community Dialogue and is a Jesuit priest.**

the truth,  
the whole  
truth and  
nothing  
but the  
truth.

## alwyn thomson

For most of us there is an intimate connection between truth and justice, particularly justice as it is dispensed by the legal system. We assume that the task of judges and juries is to ascertain the truth of the matter in relation to the defendant and to determine whether the decision should be a declaration of guilt, followed by punishment, or a declaration of innocence, followed by release. Along the way, both are assisted in their task by witnesses - for and against - who are sworn to tell the truth. Sworn, moreover, to tell the truth without leaving bits out and without adding bits in. We treat this truth-telling with such seriousness that to fail to tell the truth as required can itself result in a witness becoming a defendant.

But already, as we think of witnesses, we begin to see that this business of truth-telling is not as simple as at first it seems. After all, in those instances where the accusations are being contested there will be two sets of witnesses. There will be witnesses for the prosecution, whose truth might well lead to a verdict of guilty, and there will be witnesses for the defence, whose truth should lead to acquittal. Whatever the verdict, it is unlikely that one set of witnesses will then be charged with perjury. And, of course, there will also be the legal professionals arguing on the one hand the defendant's guilt and on the other, the defendant's innocence.

Truth, it seems, even in the apparently unclouded waters of a court, is rarely simple. How, then, in pursuit of not only legal justice but that wider justice that God calls us to, should we think about truth and truth-telling?

### Whose Truth is it Anyway?

It is no desire of mine to suggest that there is no such thing as 'truth', and that one person's view is as valid as the next. However, even if we agree that there is some account of truth that frees it from being merely the expression of our prejudice, discovering or agreeing on that truth is far from straightforward. In order to explore this further I want to describe three kinds of 'truth'.

The first kind is perhaps the most obvious, factual truth - that is, what actually happened. It is with this kind of truth that the legal system is largely concerned. The gathering of evidence, the calling of witnesses, the arguments of solicitors, all are geared towards demonstrating to the jury that the defendant was in this place at this time doing this thing - or not, as the case may be.

However, even here, where it appears that we can have some confidence that the truth is available to us, it is not always easy to find. Communities in conflict may well agree that shots were fired on a specific date on a specific occasion. However, it may be a great deal more difficult to establish who fired the first shot. Witnesses of equal sincerity will swear with equal certainty to two different accounts of that first shot.

Beyond this factual truth, difficult as it is in itself, there is another kind of truth, more difficult yet - this is interpretive truth. Here the range of questions is beyond the ability of courts to address effectively. These are the questions that ask, "Why were shots fired? Why did they attack us? What did this incident mean? More than this, what did it mean for us, for our community? What does it tell us about them, the other community?"

Clearly, the possibility of establishing a shared interpretive truth between communities in conflict does not exist. For the very questions we ask and the interpretations we come up with rest on a series of assumptions about ourselves, and about those others with whom we are in conflict. More than this, they reinforce these assumptions and therefore reinforce the sense of who we are, who they are and the difference between us.

Moving further, we can identify a third kind of truth - this is functional truth. These are the communal or personal truths we inherit, hear told, tell ourselves, and pass on to others. These are the truths that vindicate us, condemn the other and subvert any attempt to challenge the status quo. This is a more conscious way of making use of truth - factual and interpretive - for our own ends. The use of events in the past to justify actions and practices in the present is an example of functional truth. Here, truth is used consciously and deliberately to maintain identity - both ours and theirs.

I want to illustrate these three kinds of truth through reference to the events of Bloody Sunday. I imagine most of us are aware of the questions that are still being asked as to what actually happened that day - the factual truth. Were there IRA snipers operating? Did they fire the first shots? Did the British Army believe itself to be under attack from the IRA? Were there British soldiers stationed on the walls of Derry? Did they open fire first? Was there an order from the military or political authorities to get tough? After twenty seven years, these questions and many others - questions that are primarily about factual truth, about what happened on that day - remain disputed and show every sign of continuing to be disputed despite the new inquiry announced by the British Government in 1998.

The interpretive truth of Bloody Sunday is probably familiar to us all. On the one hand the British regime confronted the demands of Irish people the same way it has always done - with force - and did so egged on by a sectarian Unionist establishment. On the other hand nationalism demonstrated its disloyalty and untrustworthiness and allowed itself to be used as a cover for terrorist attacks on 'our' Army. For both communities Bloody Sunday simply reinforces negative and hostile interpretations of the other. These interpretations existed long before the events of

that day, and continue to exist among many in both communities who were not caught up in Bloody Sunday or, increasingly, were not even born in 1972.

The functional truth of Bloody Sunday is simply the interpretive truth put to use for our own ends. On the one hand it can be used to justify the tactics of armed republicanism. For them, Bloody Sunday demonstrates that the British State is not amenable to peaceful protest and that the unionist state can never accept nationalists as citizens with equal rights. Thus, the only option is violence.

For many unionists on the other hand, the events of Bloody Sunday are used to justify a deep-seated suspicion of and hostility towards nationalism. Bloody Sunday demonstrates to them that nationalist demands can never be satisfied, for nationalists will settle for nothing short of a united Ireland. More than this, it demonstrates the extent to which nationalists are prepared to resort to violence to achieve their ends. Thus the events of Bloody Sunday function as a means of calling unionism to watchfulness and resistance.

## Discerning the Truth

How does a society deal with these different kinds of truth? Should we simply give up in despair, allow the courts to settle routine legal matters and build walls out of our functional truth on the foundation of our interpretive truth? This at least would guarantee our survival as a community and keep us continually aware of the 'enemy'. Yet, as we know to our cost, this is a recipe for despair.

What then should we do? First, we should not undervalue the significance of the pursuit of the factual truth. While factual truth is never complete in itself, that is no reason to simply give up. Factual truth, once established, can have one particular benefit. For factual truth functions 'to narrow the range of permissible lies'. (Michael Ignatieff) Where few facts are available, all of us have space for endless creativity in self-justification. However, the more that is known of what we knew, the less scope we have for the creation of self-deceiving narratives. To go back to our earlier example, if we can determine the factual truth of who fired the first shot, from where and when, it might become more difficult to sustain interpretive truth based on other claims about factual truth. I emphasize 'might' because we also have to acknowledge that interpretive truth is not dependent on the details of factual truth. Clarify one detail and another will take its place. The primary purpose of the details - for example, who fired first - is usually to illustrate, reinforce and exemplify an existing, more broadly grounded interpretive truth. So an incident like Bloody Sunday does not create interpretive truth - it demonstrates it.

We must also recognise that the pursuit of factual truth, and even the reaching of agreement on factual truth, will not inevitably result in a shared interpretive truth. For, if my interpretive truth is crucial to my self-understanding and my understanding of you, then I cannot abandon it without at the same time radically redefining my own identity. To abandon the interpretive truth that sustains key aspects of my identity is to abandon that identity to a degree that few of us are able or willing to do.

We might be tempted to think that between abandoning and holding onto our interpretive truth there is some third way. However, this itself creates difficulties. For unless the whole of a community is prepared to redefine its identity on the basis of some shared interpretive truth - perhaps lying somewhere between existing ones - then the end result is not a community at peace with itself but a community where there is now a third interpretive truth being told.

## Reconstructing the Truth

This raises a new question. Might it in fact be possible to establish a shared interpretive truth which can claim the allegiance of different communities, and allow for the creation of a new community with a new self-understanding whose identity is able to encompass those who were once the other, the enemy?

In one sense the Belfast Agreement is an attempt to do precisely that. While recognising the legitimacy of both nationalist and unionist identities in Northern Ireland, it attempts to construct a shared story of the future, even if it fails to deal with much of the past by handing the questions back to a series of commissions. Thus far, this new interpretive truth has managed to gain the assent - if not necessarily the wholehearted allegiance - of many from both communities. However, within both communities there are those who continue to maintain an allegiance to their alternative interpretive truths. There are, too, many more whose heads assents to the new interpretive truth but whose hearts still tell them a different set of truths.

The extent to which the Agreement does or does not deal with crucial concerns from the past raises another key question. How much truth can any society bear? We assume that exposure to the truth can only be a good thing with positive results. But why should we? We also assume that other societies that appear to be more at peace with themselves are so because they hold to a shared truth. But is this really so? Isn't it the case that in such societies it is the 'shared' that is more important than the 'truth'? A lie will do, so long as the lie is widely accepted. In reality, for all societies it is neither lie nor truth that determines their self-understanding and forms the basis of social stability. It is some combination of lie and truth - something we might charitably call myth. We might wish to extend our charity further, and define the Belfast Agreement too as myth.

## Truth-Telling and Reconciliation

That truth and justice belong together is probably widely recognised. I suspect that before the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa the pairing of these two ideas might have been less common. The TRC seems to suggest by its very name that truth-telling and reconciliation are intimately connected. Certainly, Archbishop Desmond Tutu is strongly committed to the belief that the two are inseparable. However, it is worth asking if knowing the truth can or will result in reconciliation.

Truth, after all - factual truth - can divide. It can create anger. It can discover new facts to legitimise interpretive truths based on difference and conflict. Truth can wound. Truth can be bitter. It is fair to ask just how much truth any of us - individuals, communities, nations - can handle. "All nations," writes Ignatieff, "depend on forgetting: on forging myths of unity and identity that allow a society to forget its founding crimes, its hidden injuries and divisions, its unhealed wounds."

Could a TRC work in Northern Ireland? We need to be aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the South African TRC before addressing that question. First, at the level of truth the TRC has been relatively effective in exposing the factual truth of what happened - who was killed, who was tortured, who was responsible. However at the level of reconciliation the TRC's achievements have been more ambiguous. Significant groups within South African society remain unreconciled - many within the military establishment, within the Afrikaner community, even within the ANC itself.

Yet if a TRC was going to work anywhere it should have worked in South Africa. For it was clear that the political and religious leadership of white South Africa, as well as many others within that wider community, recognised the unsustainability of their interpretive truth long before the TRC began its proceedings. It was that recognition of illegitimacy, and of the need to create a new interpretive truth that would encompass both black and white South Africans that made the TRC possible in the first place.

However, no such situation exists in Northern Ireland. Neither community here accepts that its interpretive truth is illegitimate or unsustainable. Where both parties still believe in their interpretive truth, truth is powerless to bring reconciliation. It will remain a basis of disagreement, and the pursuit of one truth at the expense of the other may well generate renewed conflict. It is also critical to note that the Belfast Agreement, indeed the whole process that has taken place over the past years, is premised precisely on asserting the legitimacy of the interpretive truths of both communities.

## Forgetting the Truth?

If, in a sense, the Agreement represents a setting aside of the issue of competing claims to interpretive truth in the interests of reconciliation, it is by no means unique. In the immediate aftermath of independence, the Irish State fought a bitter and bloody civil war. However in the interests of the survival of the state there was little attempt, either then or since, to address this conflict. This may have been less a matter of choice and more a response to the geographical presence of another interpretive truth - that of Irish Unionism - and the availability of a shared interpretive truth around the War of Independence against Britain.

Looking further into the past, in the aftermath of the American Civil War Abraham Lincoln resisted calls for retribution against the defeated Confederate states. Instead, he followed a policy driven by the principles of his 1863 address at Gettysburg. Yet the pursuit of unity and reconstruction meant that many of the events leading up to the war, and many of the actions carried out during the war were left unexplored and unaddressed. More recently, post-Franco Spain chose the way of political amnesia in its attempts to deal with the years between the Spanish Civil War and the end of the dictatorship. So it is clear that despite the current emphasis on Truth Commission, these are not the only ways in which states and peoples deal with conflicting interpretive truths after the end of a period of conflict or political trauma.

## Gospel Truth?

Churches, too, have an interpretive truth. It's a big truth. It takes in the whole of creation and the whole of time. But it does so without ignoring the particular, the here and now of the lives of those of us in this community at this time. Part of the church's difficulty, though, is that relating its interpretive truth to those of the communities, to which church people belong, is far from easy. Often, we get things wrong. Often we prefer not even to think about it. Often it is the interpretive truth of our community that determines our reading of the interpretive truth of the church.

Given this, perhaps the best place for the church to start is from a position of humility. We have often got it wrong. We have often taken the easy option. We have often marginalised our role as members of the church in order to more fully assert our place as members of our community. We have often sewn a seamless garment from the interpretive truths of our community and our church.

A voice spoken with humility must then give way to a voice of warning - a warning to ourselves and to others. A voice that warns and reminds that we dare not assume that our truth is 'The Truth', while your truth is a lie. While such an attitude may be the norm, not just in our community but in the life of any community that does not put God at its centre, this is not a reason for us to concede the legitimacy of such of view, either by assenting to it or by ceasing to challenge it wherever it is found.

The voice of warning must then give way to the voice of proclamation. There is truth - interpretive truth - to be found. It is the truth we find in Jesus Christ. This is not just a truth of facts, or of doctrine, but a truth of life, a truth to be lived. It is the truth that speaks neither in triumph nor in bitterness, but in love. It is the truth that challenges and subverts the interpretive truths that are dearest to us in our community life. It is the truth that shapes lives and communities so that they embody and manifest the virtues of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

## Further Reading

I would like to acknowledge my debt to the work of Michael Ignatieff and Timothy Garton Ash on these and related matters. I would strongly recommend anyone wishing to follow through on these concerns to begin with their works.

**Alwyn Thomson is Research Officer with ECONI.**

# walking for

It's good to walk. It's also biblical. When Paul wanted to go from Troas to Assos, he sent the rest of the missionary team around the peninsula by boat and walked across without them, 20 miles. Jesus sent his disciples across the Sea of Galilee by boat. They thought he'd walk round the lake, in fact he walked across it, but the intention was the same. What is it about walking which makes it so important for ministers?

## Walking is for those who are not busy

Ministers are busy people. We have diaries full of appointments, heads full of plans, people to see, messages to prepare. We seem to be on a treadmill of things we have to do. Maybe we even get the same rewards from this as busy people in the world - sense of identity, self-worth, significance. But listen to Eugene Peterson on busyness:

"The word busy is the symptom not of commitment, but of betrayal. It is not devotion, but defection. The adjective 'busy' seen as a modifier to pastor should sound to our ears like adulterer is to characterize a wife or embezzling to describe a banker."

Why the strong language? Because busyness is not about the most important things. Cars are very useful for constantly busy people. Constantly busy people are not very useful for God. Jesus did not have the benefit of the internal combustion engine but made a bigger impact on the world than you or I.

## Walking is a place without words

When the saints of old talked about silence, they did not mean the absence of the wind in the trees, but the absence of words. Our society has a love affair with words. They talk to you out of advertising hoardings, TV, papers, books, radios in cars - and the Reader's Digest kept in your smallest room so you will not be without words even for that short time. Our faith is a very wordy faith. The Reformation mostly began in universities and it shows. The minister's job seems to revolve around words.

In fact, words gain power in proportion to their absence. Henri Nouwen uses the illustration of Anthony in Egypt in the third century (not the one who fell in love with Cleopatra!). Anthony moved out of society and Christian work for some years. When he came back into Christian ministry, his words counted. Nouwen's conclusion is that words spoken out of silence are more powerful than words spoken out of busyness.

# ministers

the cheesman file

## Walking is for healing

As Dr. Johnson said, the two best doctors are often the left foot and the right foot. Ajith Fernando from Sri Lanka talks about how he copes with stress and the way it deadens his spiritual life:

“During this time I developed the discipline of walking, sometimes two or three miles until I felt the joy of the Lord return.”

One of the great diseases of the heart is the preference of doing over being. Doing what we ought to do may be difficult but it is always easier than being what we ought to be. And walking is the absence of doing which gives us space to think about being.

## Walking is so as not to be alone

Walking on your own is saying that people are a joy and blessing but we need time without them. The three things modern man seems unable to be without - busyness, words and people are all put on one side when you walk. But it is not to be alone, it is to be with God.

God is always with us because he is everywhere. He is with us in all our busyness. But there is a difference between presence and attention. Think of two people in the same room. One is doing the ironing and the other reading the paper. Then the iron is switched off and the paper folded and they sit together. They were always present to each other but now they have put the busyness aside are enjoying the presence. Perhaps we ought to take that description of Enoch more literally. Enoch walked with God.

Now, why don't you put this magazine down and go for a walk?

**Graham Cheesman, Principal of the Belfast Bible College, is a regular contributor to Lion & Lamb.**

dealing with  
the pain of our  
shared tragedy

## david bolton

In two earlier contributions for the Lion & Lamb (Jan/Feb 1997 pp 4-5; and Mar/Apr 1997 pp 3-5) I reflected upon the needs of those who have been afflicted by violence, and put forward some ideas as to how, as part of the means of addressing the consequences of our conflict, we could collectively acknowledge the losses and sufferings of the past years. In this article I would like to tease out in some more detail some of the issues which now face us concerning those affected by violence. I am not speaking on behalf of these people, but speak from a position where I have been exposed over a number of years, at times in very intense ways, to the consequences of our conflict. I firmly believe that, if we are really to address our conflicts, and experience a wider and deeper healing, then the needs of individuals, neighbourhoods and communities affected by violence, must be addressed as part of a wholesome response to our predicament. It will not be enough to brush things under the carpet, or to put our seeds of hate on the shelf for another generation to sow.

### The Impact of the Troubles

Those of us who have been affected by violence through bereavement, injury, trauma, intimidation and harassment, will respond to our experiences differently. This is true when one individual is compared with another, but it is also true to say that most of us will respond differently over time. How often have those who have been bereaved reported the waves of grief that overwhelm them, in between periods when they seem to be stronger and coping better?

The experience of tragic loss, injury and trauma in the context of violence adds different dimensions to suffering. That is not to say that others who have suffered through experiences not associated with our Troubles, do not also have particular dimensions to their experiences and needs. Take for example those bereaved or injured through road traffic accidents, children who experience child abuse, or personal violence such as rape or domestic violence? These experiences give rise to profound experiences of loss and trauma, and are equally worthy of our concern as a community. I feel it is important to stress this, so that we do not forget others who suffer, and that we allow the lessons we learn from dealing with the consequences of the Troubles to bring benefit to others, now and in the future. Also, by specifically addressing the consequences of the Troubles, we will create a healthier and more wholesome community for all.

There are perhaps two dimensions of the experience of those who have suffered through our civil conflict which are relevant to this article. The first is the fact that the circumstances of a person's death, injury or trauma are inextricably linked to how they feel about that experience and its consequences. In an earlier contribution to the Lion & Lamb it was noted:

*"It is not alone the fact that someone has been killed, but also the manner of their death, that is significant. The fact of someone's death in these awful circumstances cannot be separated from the means of their death. Death and injury, caused by human intention and action, brings with it complications and adds to the experience of victimisation of the one who suffers. For many, they have known multiple deaths and injuries, where the sorrows of one experience are overtaken by the next. So people who mourn or who nurse within them the disability and pain of injury, experience their loss within the context of the violence. The violence, its causes and its history, are to some extent the framework within which they understand their loss." (Jan/Feb 1997 pp 4-5)*

So the basis on which we adjust to experiences of violence will depend in good measure on what happens in response to the act of violence. By that I mean things like accountability, acknowledgment and experiences of what I call personal justice, that inner need for explanation, understanding, acknowledgment and perhaps even for someone to say they are sorry for what they did. The goals of this personal justice need to be seen separate from civic, judicial or political justice, which also have their part to play.

The second dimension relates to what happens as part of the political process in response to needs of those who have suffered through violence. To explain this further, it seems to me that the response we make, and the political process makes, in response to the consequences of the Troubles, is of utmost importance to the well being of those who have survived them. It is vital therefore that as part of our political settlement a response is made to acknowledge, address and where possible redress the impact and consequences of the civil violence. That, at least to some, may sound like an obvious statement to make. However, I have heard it said in respectable company that we need to forget or bury the past, including the impact of the violence, so that we can move forward. Now I understand the reasons for such views. They reflect a fear that dwelling on the past, including the suffering will prohibit us from making peace with each other. I do not agree with such views, believing that ways can be found to enable the needs of victims to be understood, acknowledged and addressed in ways which will be immediately helpful for them and wholesome for the wider community. Take as an example the BBC Radio Ulster series Legacy.

Some parts of our community have responded to the needs of victims by focusing on the political or judicial dimensions of their experiences. That is not to say that these elements aren't important. On the contrary those issues, too, need to be addressed. The problem is, in my view, that as the victims of our conflict have not been served well by our community and its institutions and interests. Their common human needs have not been at all adequately addressed. By that I mean, chiefly, the need for care and services in relation to injury, pain, disability, mental distress, trauma and bereavement. This neglect has no doubt for some fuelled experiences of injustice. As a result the

attention to political and judicial issues for many represents the first kindly response to the experience of victims. Others, who have not had any support worth talking about, may see the avenue of political and judicial campaigning as the only means of addressing their needs, (which must include a significant experience of injustice).

In reflecting on this I am reminded of William Booth's statement that went something like this, "You cannot fill a man's soul until you first fill his stomach." It seems to me that we have not adequately addressed the common human needs of the victims of violence and have focused in certain situations more on the less tangible dimensions of the victims' experiences. Sometimes I think I hear victims saying, "Yes, I am grateful for your interest and your desire to represent the injustice that has been done to me and my family. But you have missed the point. I'm not ready for that yet. I have other more immediate needs."

The politicisation of victims has been amplified by the disagreement between those supporting the Good Friday Agreement and those opposing it. It is significant that since the Agreement was struck, a number of groups have emerged to articulate the interests of victims, from whom little has been heard up until recently. The fact that previously silent voices are being heard is to be welcomed, but the timing and circumstances raise concerns. The development has arisen partly in response to the early release of prisoners, one of the more evident and controversial manifestations of the Agreement. The intensified focus on compensation for victims arises in good measure from the apparent tangible benefits experienced by prisoners who qualify for early release. Whilst the Agreement makes significant reference to the needs of the victims of violence, expressed in Sir Kenneth Bloomfield's report, *We Will Remember Them* (May 1998), there is a feeling that, at least for the moment, the issue of victims is on a back burner as far as the main stream political process is concerned.

## Why have we left it till now?

We have not been good at recognising and addressing the consequences of the violence. We have buried our heads in the sand to a very great extent. That is, I believe, true of our whole community and our various statutory, religious and other institutions and organisations. The reasons, I believe, include the following.

1. Partly it has been due to the business-as-usual mentality which in many ways has sustained us. If we had let our guard down or 'given up' it would have been more difficult to survive. In acknowledging our distress we would have allowed those who attacked us to have won. We would have been finally vanquished if we had asked for help, and the assailants and their organisations would have triumphed.
2. Second, no sooner had we experienced one incident we were on to the next. It would have been intolerable to allow ourselves to be consumed by each loss or tragedy.
3. Then there was the difficulty in asking for help. Many did not know where to turn and, in a world full of uncertainty and mistrust, it was hard to trust even those to whom we might look

for help. In a divided community, seeking help that might come from someone from the other community, was not an option for many.

4. There has also been the personally or externally imposed silence. This has at times been the silence within a community, mistrust and fear being the main driver. Additionally, parents have imposed silence on their children (whatever you say, say nothing) and at times a similar pressure has been exerted by key groups and individuals in communities.
5. Related to this is the politeness, which is such a feature of our community. This politeness masks and hides the conflict and its consequences. It was easier to get along with your work mates if the terrible atrocity of the night before remains unmentioned.
6. The uncomfortableness of each incident, at times created a great dilemma. This exemplified itself in the decision about whether or not to go to a funeral. Going to a funeral sent a signal to others that we took a position; staying away from a funeral did likewise. So we chose to respond in ways other than those we would have preferred.
7. As part of the normalisation of the conflict, we tried to deal with it and its consequences by normal means. We dealt with the abnormal, in normal ways. This response pervaded our whole community.
8. Related to that is the consideration, that in so far as emotional and psychological needs are concerned, we did not know much about them, thirty, twenty or even ten years ago. However, our understanding of such issues and our access to information has come a long way. I still feel however, that we need a stronger commitment to using it. Northern Ireland could have been at the forefront of researching and developing ways to help people affected by traumatic events, much like we have been in response to the surgical needs of people affected by the troubles. We have not done this. It has been too hot to handle and we have left it undone.

The situation is now changing. The issue of victimhood is out in the open. This has primarily been due to the efforts of those who have articulated the experience of those afflicted by violence, including the various voluntary and political initiatives, and various reports and studies such as the Bloomfield Report, the 'Cost of the Troubles' studies and the Social Services Inspectorate Report *Living with the Trauma of the Troubles* (April 1998). Political developments have also brought the issue of victims centre stage, although some would say more as an after-thought than as a primary plank in the process.

## Addressing the impact of the conflict

As a result of the changing climate in relation to the impact of the violence the opportunity now exists to properly address the human needs of those who have been afflicted. By that I mean issues of physical injury, disability, chronic pain, trauma and bereavement. I believe there is an important opportunity for our community to recognise collectively that these needs should be addressed,

focusing especially on the needs of children and those who have been traumatised by their experiences. The agenda has been largely set for us through the Victims' Commission Report We Will Remember Them (The Bloomfield Report op.cit) which is required reading for any one with an interest in or responsibility for addressing the impacts of the Troubles.

The politicisation of victims, without a complimentary effort to address their common human needs, could significantly distort the response to victims in the long term. The unresolved justice needs of various individuals and groups will have to be addressed, but some initiatives in this regard, I fear, have been embarked upon for primarily political, as opposed to humanitarian, purposes. It is about balance and sequencing, and about what is achievable. With a commitment to addressing issues of justice in the fullness of time, possibly through some type of forum or restorative justice mechanism, could we not now agree that the common human needs of all who suffer pain, loss, disability, trauma and bereavement should be addressed?

Also, there is a proper place for victims in the political process. To have it otherwise would be unthinkable. There is now a degree of urgency in the rudimentary Assembly bringing forward political arrangements based on humanitarian considerations which will address the needs of victims and the wider human consequences of our conflict. This should be in the form of a cross party agreement, underpinned by the aspiration that, in addressing the consequences of the violence, a significant contribution will be made to resolving our quarrel and to addressing the human and social consequences for this and future generations. We also need, amongst other things,

- a commitment across our community to address the consequences of the violence;
- an integrated interdepartmental response at governmental level right down to local operational level;
- community education and healthy lifestyle initiatives to raise awareness and develop personal and local responses to the consequences of violence;
- arrangements to support the work of voluntary and community groups tackling the consequences of violence including longer term core funding;
- arrangements to establish standards in pastoral work and counseling and other therapies.

There are vital humanitarian and social reasons for addressing the consequences of the violence, because if we do not, many will continue to suffer unnecessarily or with greater intensity, and this in turn will contribute to greater levels of ill health and social problems. Unresolved, the human and social consequences of the last 30 years will act as a source of poison, damaging the common good, leading to a lack of social responsibility, and amongst other things, a rise in corruption and organised crime. Preparing for, and living at peace will be as hard a day's work as coping with the Troubles.

David Bolton is a Director

of Social Work with the

Sperrin Lakeland Trust,

which has been

addressing, with other

organisations and

individuals, the

consequences of the

Omagh bombing of

August 1998. David has

been working on the

human and social

consequences of the civil

violence ever since his

involvement in the

aftermath of the

Remembrance Day

bombing in Enniskillen,

in November 1987. He is

a former Chairperson of

the Fermanagh District

Partnership for Peace &

Reconciliation.

# the case for human rights

martin o'brien

“Human rights didn’t just happen” is the title of one of the units in a teaching programme developed by the Churches’ Peace Education Programme - an initiative of the Irish Commission for Justice and Peace and Irish Council of Churches. A poster accompanying this particular teaching module traces the debate around human rights back into the pre-Christian era with frequent references in the Judaeo Christian tradition to the dignity of every human being deriving from the fact of their creation in the image and likeness of God. Similar spiritual and religious roots have been traced within the eastern faiths (Hinduism, Buddhism) as well as in the third major mono-theistic faith - Islam. The roots for the modern debate around rights lies deep in these spiritual roots and cannot - and indeed, in my opinion, should not be divorced from those spiritual roots.

It is nevertheless true to say that the term “human rights” in its modern conception is often associated more naturally with its political rather than its religious roots. Magna Carta, the American Declaration of Independence, the French Declaration of the Rights of Man, and in this century the movements to extend the suffrage to women, the civil rights movement in the US, and the struggle against apartheid in South Africa, have all developed as natural successor movements within the continuing struggle for rights. At each of these momentous points in history (and many many more), ordinary people (initially major landowners and minor royalty, then ordinary white males, and then gradually women, and black males and females) started to assert their basic humanity. The assertion of that humanity often required either that clear limits be placed on the power of the state, and/or that the state be obliged to extend to them the rights which others within society had long enjoyed.

In my own reading of “human rights”, I must say that I see no great discordance between its spiritual and its political roots. It is true, however, that some modern proponents of human rights argue that it is “the new morality”. In a highly secularised world, and in the absence of the widely accepted and the almost universally relevant moral codes previously provided by the world religions, some human rights activists argue that “human rights” provides the moral code we can all subscribe to in the 21<sup>st</sup>

century. They argue that human rights can replace traditional religions. Indeed, they see in the centrality that the struggle for human rights gives to the human being, both as individual and as social being, a building block upon which right relationships can be built. While attractive for those who foreswear all religious beliefs, the ethic provided by human rights does not however have to be an all-encompassing moral code. Indeed, for many, human rights activism is only fully understood if placed within the context of our spirituality and our personal relationship with God.

So, let me talk positively about what the term “human rights” means for me. Firstly, it is about my basic humanity. I am a human being - as such, I need food, clothing, warmth, rest, work, liberty and so many other things. Without these, I will be unable to survive, still less thrive, as a human being. Most of these cannot be secured by me in isolation. Indeed, many of my basic wants - for conversation, for love, for the free exchange of ideas - would not even have any meaning unless others shared the same needs. If I am to flourish as a human being and - given my religious beliefs - to flourish as God intends me to flourish, I have certain human needs that must be met. Until I started to come of age, these rights were secured on my behalf by my parents and guardians, but gradually - as part of my maturing process - I was obliged to take on a personal responsibility to secure and maintain these rights.

Secondly, “human rights” can never mean solely my rights as a human being. As noted, my rights can anyhow not be exercised in isolation - most of the most important rights require to be exercised in association with others. But more importantly still, I have rights by virtue of my very humanity. There is only one logical reason in which I could ground a decision not to extend exactly the same rights to every other human being, and that would be that the person concerned was somehow less human than me. Yet, what in my religious or ethical tradition would allow me to come to that conclusion? In previous eras, of course that was quite possible. In early Greece, citizenship, and the rights that flowed from it, was certainly not extended to slaves or women. Women had to wait more than two millennia for their

basic rights as human beings to begin to be recognised. Many other groups still await even this basic recognition: the right to be homosexual or to be physically disabled without suffering social exclusion and discrimination as a result, or the right to be a child and to have your opinion taken into account. But these 'system failures' have all come to be seen as such in retrospect. Is there anyone in our society who would argue the principle that people who are of a different gender, or have a different colour skin, or have different colour eyes, are less than human? My assertion of rights requires - as a matter of simple logic - that I extend the same rights to all other members of the human family.

Thirdly, and lastly for the purposes of this article, I want to address and categorically refute the charge that is occasionally made (at least here in Northern Ireland), that somehow "human rights" are divisive. While I recognise that people can sometimes play political games with the language, this mis-use for short-term gain should never oblige us to discard concepts that have been hard won and which transcend both this particular time in history, and this particular small place on the globe. On the contrary, I believe that a society that truly respects human rights is the only hope we have of creating right and harmonious relationships within and between people.

The language of human rights gives human beings - who may share nothing by way of culture, or political beliefs, or skin colour, or religious beliefs - a language by which we can respect but also transcend our differences. In the absence of the flight or fight option denied us in the modern era, humanity requires a language and concepts that remove the deeply ingrained fear of difference and allow us not only to accept difference, but even to enjoy it. Human rights - whether rooted in religious beliefs or not - provide just such tools. The language of rights requires that we accept an individual's right to be different, we accept the need for difference, and yet also emphasises the fundamental way in which we are all the same and share a common humanity. Those who argue that human rights can be a divisive concept are obliged either to minimise our differences, or to suggest that they can be submerged for the greater good of the family or society. But what family or society will thrive by allowing its weaker members

(since it is never the powerful who are challenged in this scenario) to be marginalised? Individuals, groups, families and societies built on inequalities cannot thrive; those built on a firm foundation of mutual respect and equality will. Human rights is the only foundation on which individuals and groups will mutually thrive. It is in a fundamental sense the glue which will bind people together and create the social cohesion that we all need.

Let me finish with the words of Mary Robinson, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, on a recent visit to Belfast:

*"Equality and rights are something for us all, and something which enrich us all. It is not simply the people with disabilities who benefit when public policy has to consider issues of access; it is not simply Travellers or other ethnic minorities who benefit from strong anti-racist protections and measures. A society which seeks to recognise the richness of difference, and to respect its many manifestations in the people that constitute that society, is a truly healthy one."*

**Martin O'Brien is Director of the Committee on the Administration of Justice (CAJ), a cross community human rights group working to create a just and peaceful society in Northern Ireland where the human rights of all are fully protected.**

# what's wrong with rights?

alwyn thomson

Human Rights is the new religion of Western liberalism. Its scripture is the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Its denominations are Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. Its priests are the Human Rights advocates and activists. To challenge this ideology is to blaspheme. Nonetheless, there is much that needs to be challenged.

## Liberal Fundamentalism

The ideology of Human Rights is one key expression of the ideology of liberalism. Its advocates portray liberalism as standing above the world's ideological conflicts. In the playground squabbles of nationalism, socialism, Christianity, Islam and the like, liberalism is presented as the patient teacher refusing to take sides, seeking to educate the unruly children, armed only with the virtues of tolerance and respect.

In truth, liberalism is down in the playground with the rest fighting its corner. Liberalism is, after all, just another worldview doing what all worldviews do - attempting to interpret the totality of human life and experience within its own frame of reference.

However, this liberal worldview is at odds with the Church's worldview. Consider the following from the UDHR.

"Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance."

*(Article 18)*

This Article makes two assumptions central to the liberal understanding of religion. First, it assumes that liberalism has the 'right' to define the limits of acceptable religious behaviour. Second, it assumes that religion is primarily a matter of private belief. Both assumptions are at odds with Christian faith. For Christianity is not a set of private beliefs to be graciously tolerated by the liberal state. Christianity, embodied in the Church is an alternative way of talking about and relating to our world. And part of that alternative way of talking about the world

involves denying to liberalism the pretence of neutrality and civility with which it cloaks itself. Until we understand the assumptions that lie at the heart of liberal ideology we cannot clearly address the implications of Human Rights ideology for society or for the Church.

## The Fallacy of Universality

All major declarations of human rights assert that Human Rights are 'universal'. That is, they are held to be in some sense inherent in all human beings simply by virtue of their being human. They are, moreover, held to be more fundamental than the specific laws and traditions of particular societies. So, in a clash between Human Rights and the laws and traditions of a particular community, it is the latter that have to give way.

However, this assertion is unsustainable. The definition of Human Rights is shaped by the particular social and historical location of those drawing up particular declarations. Human Rights are neither inalienable nor universal. They are built on the shifting sand of power politics and popular opinion (or prejudice). The UDHR, for example, clearly assumes and reflects a Western liberal political system (*Article 21*), economic system (*Articles 23, 24*) and judicial system (*Articles 8,10,11*). It also clearly reflects its historical context - the aftermath of World War 2.

To take a more specific example, consider the death penalty. The UDHR makes no mention of this issue. It does, however, state in Article 5, "No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment." This language reflects the language of the US Bill of Rights: "Excessive bail shall not be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishments inflicted." (*Eighth Amendment*). In 1972 the US Supreme Court, for a variety of muddled reasons, declared that the death penalty constituted 'cruel and unusual punishment'. However, in 1976, for equally muddled reasons, the same court decided that it did not and executions recommenced. What had changed? The Bill of Rights had not changed. But American public opinion and the political complexion of the court had.

Confusion also reigns in the European Convention on Human Rights. Having asserted the right to life, it promptly concedes to signatories the authority to execute criminals (*Article 2.1*). In 1983 a Protocol was drawn up on the abolition of the death

penalty (Protocol 6). However, it allowed for the retention of the death penalty in time of war. Moreover, states that had ratified the Convention were under no obligation to ratify the Protocol.

If the UDHR is silent and the US Supreme Court muddled, at least Amnesty International is clear: "The death penalty is the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment and violates the right to life." If on an issue as fundamental as life and death, non-governmental organisations, governments and international bodies cannot decide what is a human right and what is not, how can the claim to universality and inalienability be sustained?

## Give Me My Rights

The ideology of Human Rights tends to reinforce the ideology of self. Individuals or groups rename their desires as needs to be satisfied, asserting that it is their right to have them satisfied. A consequence of this is that we then absolve ourselves of responsibility. Asserting our own needs, we dismiss or ignore our responsibility for others. When our needs are not satisfied there is always someone to blame. We are not at fault, we are victims, we have been denied our rights. The consequences of the Human Rights ideology are all around us in a culture of self, of victimhood, of blame and resentment.

## I'll See You In Court

Finally, the ideology of rights tends to create societies marked by confrontation and accusation. This is not surprising given that the ideology is so strongly legal in nature. Human Rights advocates are also advocates of international law, international courts, incorporation of Human Rights declarations into national law and the like. With this legal emphasis within the ideology it should come as no surprise that the result is conflict, for Western legal processes are confrontational by their very nature. The result once more is a culture of blame and victimhood.

These practical difficulties are clearly illustrated in the conflict over abortion in the United States. Both sides present their arguments with an appeal to rights, both sides attempt to use the law and the courts to impose their views on society as a whole, both sides demonise and abuse the other. Worse still, this conflict

has often been violent and is, at times, murderous. And all of us should be able to see the central role appeals to rights play in the conflict over disputed parades in Northern Ireland.

## An Alternative

To point out the flaws and failings of Human Rights ideology is not to disparage the many sincere activists and advocates, who believe wholeheartedly that the pursuit of Human Rights is fundamental. Yet the aspirations to the creation of a different kind of society are not matched by the reality. Human Rights simply become another weapon in the armoury of weapons we humans use against one another.

This disjunction between the aspiration and the reality simply reflects the disjunction between our createdness in the image of God and our fallenness. As bearers of the divine image we turn upwards to God and outwards to the creation - not least our fellow human beings. As a fallen people we turn against God, turn away from our neighbours and turn in on ourselves.

So, on the one hand we turn to the world with a desire for justice and human well-being; on the other, we turn to the pursuit of justice for ourselves (often merely to sanction our own desires) and our own well-being. Worse still, we pursue our well-being through hostility to God and indifference towards our fellow human beings. Against the power of this sinful turn, that lies at the root of our human being, liberal ideology has no answer.

That liberalism does not have the answer to the challenges facing us as people is recognised by some within that tradition. So Michael Ignatieff acknowledges that "a decent and humane society requires a shared language of the good. The one our society lives by - a language of rights - has no terms for those dimensions of the human good which require acts of virtue unspecified as a legal or civil obligation."

But it is not the business of the church to simply fill the gaps in the discourse of liberalism. For liberalism and its Human Rights offspring is incompatible with Christianity since Christianity, too, claims to be a way of interpreting the whole of life. Liberalism gets around this difficulty, this challenge, by policing the social

space in a way that allows churches a role only on terms determined by liberalism itself. Thus the churches are subservient to the pursuit of liberalism's goals and values.

It would be a tragedy, if the church in Northern Ireland, having finally broken free of its subservience to the discourse of nationalisms, were to voluntarily make itself subservient to the discourse of liberalism.

What then should the church's role be? Two things spring to mind. First, the church's key role is to be the church - that place that knows and understands the all encompassing discourse of biblical and Christian tradition. Moreover, it is to be the place where that discourse is proclaimed and effected in the internal relationships of the body. The church is not to be one strand of civic society but an alternative community, an alternative 'civis'. In this community human dignity is not intrinsic but God given - without God we are as the dust of the earth. In this community we do not demand that our God given dignity be recognised, but we recognise that dignity in others and serve the, having the same mind as Christ.

Second, from this position the church has an obligation to engage with society. It may be that there are indeed common grounds for working with and speaking to the wider society. This can be understood in various ways - through the commonality of human creation in the divine image, through the operations of divine grace, through the historical fact of the presence of Christian tradition in the life of Western societies generally, or through some sense of natural law. However, this should not blind us to the fact that ultimately Christian discourse is given and shaped by the God we know in Jesus, while the discourse of liberalism and Human Rights ideology is not. A truly Trinitarian church in practice as well as in belief cannot be comfortable in liberal society or in any society that counterposes an alternative discourse - even one so apparently noble as Human Rights.

**Alwyn Thomson is Research Officer with ECONI.**

# and finally

## November Conference 1999

Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> November 1999 in Stranmillis College, Belfast  
Theme: Firm in the Faith – Christian Citizenship in Times of Change

Keynote speaker: Donald Macleod, Professor of Systematic Theology at Free Church of Scotland College, Edinburgh.

Brochure available in the next issue of Lion & Lamb.



## ECONI Sunday 1999

7<sup>th</sup> November

Theme: Eager to do Good – Christian Citizenship in Times of Change  
Offering churches, fellowships and study groups an opportunity to

- Pray for the community and the current situation
- Reflect biblically on the theme of 'citizenship'
- Identify with others who are engaged in this event throughout Northern Ireland.

The resource pack, which includes sermon notes and bible study material, will be based on the First Epistle of Peter and prayer cards will also be available for congregational use.

Full details available on the brochure – or contact Gladys Swanton at ECONI

## TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES



### Back to the Future

9-13 July at Belfast Bible College

Some places still available. Contact the office for details.

### Training Officer

We welcome Lynda Gould to the post of Training Officer.

### Autumn Courses (details later)

Clergy Forums

Journey in Understanding

Bridge Builders

Transforming Bible Study

Howard House, 1 Brunswick Street, Belfast, BT2 7GE  
Tel: (01232) 325258 Fax: (01232) 434156  
e-mail: [admin@econ.org](mailto:admin@econ.org) [www.econ.org](http://www.econ.org)

Thinking Biblically **Building Peace**