

# lion & lamb



Stanton

..If I ruled the world...

IF I RULED the world  
DECCA 45 rpm

Land of Hope and Glory  
45 rpm

My Way  
EMI 45 rpm

This World is not my home

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## **The Church and the Kingdom of God**

The mission of the Church is to point to the Kingdom of God and to live in the present the values of that reality. The Church is the keeper of this vision. It receives it through promise, holds it in faith, and expresses it in hope through the concrete witness of love, forgiveness, peace and justice.

The Kingdom of God cannot be identified with the Church or any social institution. However, the Church uniquely makes way for the Kingdom by keeping history open to the fulfilment of God's promise. The Church keeps history open by resisting the "the institutional stabilising of things, and by 'raising questions of meaning' to make things uncertain and keep them moving and elastic in the process of history" (Jurgen Moltmann). This role of the Church as Prophet is essentially a negative one. The Church is prophetic when it publicly critiques all social structures, political ideologies, and economic powers in the light of the Kingdom of God. "The Church" says Wolfhart Pannenberg, "must always witness to the limitations of any given society. The very existence of the Church depends upon its playing this critical role. When this critical witness is abandoned, the Church becomes superfluous."

In the context of Northern Ireland, this prophetic criticism takes on particular concerns. In our main article **Revisiting the Kingdom of God and the Church** David McMillan explores some of these, inviting us to consider the relationship between the values of the Kingdom of God and the life of our local Churches.

As Christians living in Northern Ireland we are constantly wrestling with complex political, ethical and theological issues that can absorb our energy, leave us confused and overwhelm our faith. At times of despair our divisions and theological squabbling can seem infantile in the light of what we consider to be the pristine life of the Early Church. The reality of course is that first century Churches were not dissimilar to our own. They were full of ordinary people, struggling to make sense of their faith in a community that called them to new ways of living and relating in the world. The pastoral letters of the New Testament unembarrassingly exposes the controversy and discord of these faith families. The mystery is that, rather than this diminishing our confidence in God and his people, the Biblical account reassures us that despite our human frailty God continues to work in his church for the sake of the world. To remind us of this gracious reality we have included three short pieces that highlight aspects of the struggle for faithful witness in the Churches at **Corinth**, **Ephesus** and **Galatia**.

Finally, we have included the first interview in a new series **Faith and Practice**. The format is designed to let a variety of people from different backgrounds share their thoughts on the ways in which their faith has influenced their life and work. In this issue Baroness May Blood speaks of the vision and values that have guided her life, and talks about her work with the Greater Shankill Partnership.

**Derek Poole**

**Editor**

# comment

Peter Wilson

## A question of belonging

Some years ago in a Bray hotel a fellow guest asked me if I belonged. It was not quite as blunt as the question "Are you sure you're one of us?" All of us have experienced this kind of subtle interrogation when meeting a group of strangers for the first time. My inquisitor could not satisfy himself as to my cultural identity (because I would not let him) and in his frustration had gone straight for the jugular. I felt quite at home in the hotel's busy lounge but no, I did not belong and I was glad not to.

Glad, because I do not want the belonging he offered, that which holds a sectarian plumb line up to people and weights it with history, race, religion or culture, all of the things we have no control over and can do little or nothing to change. Why did this man want cultural proofs before he granted me the gift of belonging supposedly within his control?

Both our communities use the most suspect tools to measure a person's merit by judging their right to belong, and tools turn to weapons as we berate each other with points of history, politics or religion. All of this is arrogant and stems from a pride that surely grieves the Spirit of Christ.

The proofs that we deem so important are but works of men to be tested by a divine fire. In the midst of all that would confuse us and lead us astray we must remain true to the principles of Christ. His kingdom is not of this world; neither as Christians is ours. Christians, more than anyone, should neither have nor seek permanent belonging or identity here.

If we would really serve and be light and salt for the world we must not be of the world. It is not only the brighter lights of the world that dazzle, but also the comforting glows of darkened patriotism and unseasoned love of country and community – 'my' people. Think of those this excludes: Asians, the travelling community... what proofs must they show?

The word 'belong' is a verb. It implies action, a sense of the doing of things, a task to be taken on afresh each day. It is not passive, merely a state of being. It means being in the right place, fitting in.

How can Christians 'belong' in the Ulster of 2000, yet still hope in the Kingdom to come? Christ has wrung the last drop out of this word 'belong'. When he met the Samaritan woman, or Nicodemus, or Roman centurions he showed us the way to this most wonderful belonging. He said, "Love thy neighbour as thyself".

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It is a question of our times, a good sound bite. It resonates with enquiry and the search for relevance and credibility in a sceptical community. It betrays a self awareness that is, at one and the same time, self confident and self conscious. And it is on the lips of an increasing number of informed influencers in our churches. How do we do church?

The response ranges from the purpose-driven to the seeker-sensitive, from alpha to community, with a pause for biblical in between. To those out to show a more spiritually and globally sensitive grasp of the real issues behind it, the question is reframed to reflect a less activist and more expressive mindset – how do we **be** church?

You would think that after two thousand years we would have cracked this, that by this stage in the long and varied history of the church militant on earth there would be a clearer consensus on the central rationale for our existence and mission. The rise of such questioning of previously understood certainties reflects the deep changes that are taking place in our world. We are at one of those junctures in history that can be described as something of a civilisation shift. The impact is global but also intensely local, and forces us to re-examine the presumed structures and patterns of behaviour that shape the reality we call church.

Now don't get me wrong, I like the question in both its doing and being formats. Indeed by my reckoning it is probably the most pertinent question that followers of Jesus need to address in our times. It goes to the heart of the missiological task of every generation of Christians, which is to make the good news of Jesus real to their world. That job has been given to us as the church and how we structure and live our life as a community of God's people impacts in a big way on how meaningful the good news appears to those around us.

The culture we live in at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century causes great angst in many Christian circles. 'Post-modern' has become a term to strike terror into the hearts of good Christian people. The baby boomers who increasingly provide a generational coherence in the leadership of our denominations (those in their 50's) seem as perturbed by the Generation X'ers of today as the pre-war generation were by them in the swinging sixties.

As someone who is neither a boomer nor a 'Gen Xer', born to live in that in-between half generational wasteland that defies trend setting labels, I find myself in an interesting observation post. Someone has called us the Busters, the rebellious Punk Rockers and monetarist Thatcher's children. As a 'good' Christian I was neither. I prefer the concept of us children of the late fifties and early sixties being the 'Bridgers', building bridges between the world of certainty and the world of change, having an intuitive

sense of belonging to the world as it now is, and yet sensing some of the legitimate concern that our leaders have for the future.

From where I sit it seems to me that this question concerning church is a central key to unlocking today's culture for the kingdom. It is how we 'be' and 'do' our life together that is going to count, that will show we have something to offer that is indeed good news. And getting it right is going to be painful. More so in Northern Ireland, for how to be and do church must directly relate to the fact that we live in a divided society. How we have answered the question in the past has often done much to fuel that divide. We can only hope we are not too late as increasing numbers move beyond the influence of any community of faith who may point to a better way than the growing polarisation that is evident around us.

This question forms one of three strategic questions that will inform ECONI's programme over the next three years, reflected in the magazine and Pathways booklets. It specifically informs the coming conference in September. It is a question that, once asked, leads to the inescapable conclusion that you and I are an integral part of its answer.

**David Porter**

# The Simple Truth...for Colosse

Michael Whitley

Of the three cities in the Lycus valley Colosse was the least important. It wasn't a political centre like Laodicea, or a trade centre like Hierapolis. Colosse was respectable but unremarkable - nothing out of the ordinary ever happened.

The church in Colosse, however, although only a young church, having not long before learned from Epaphras of 'God's grace in all its truth' (1:3-8) had the potential to be radically different. There didn't appear to be any serious challenges from the state or from religious zealots, although there was a large Jewish refugee population. The church was essentially a Gentile church in a comfortable, non-threatening and tolerant city.

The Christians already had a reputation for 'faith and love' and appeared to have a genuine hunger to know more, but it was this very motivation that held the potential for a problem. The dangers that faced this young church came from within their own number.

There were those who, out of sincere religious commitment, had been attracted to the reality of this new and dynamic faith, but in practice found it difficult to leave their baggage behind. There was a security in tradition and a confidence in understanding the 'do's' and 'don'ts' of a holy life, thereby avoiding error (2:16ff / 3:5ff).

The religious fashions of the day, spiritual and intellectual, offered these young Christians special insights that others didn't have and perhaps were not yet ready to appreciate or take hold of (2:8ff). Spiritual snobbery was packaged as maturity.

There were many more subtle dangers for the young church in the spirit of the age, with its religious pluralism. Such accommodation could become much more insidious than blatant opposition. The syncretistic religious environment of the city threatened the purity of their faith with many and tempting parallel experiences (2:9ff). What this new church needed in the face of all these distractions was the 'simple truth'.

The 'truth' had been the beginning of their faith - 'since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth' (1:6). This 'truth' was not obscure, nor was it veiled to the uninitiated. It was readily and freely available to everyone, and understandable by everyone:

*'...the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory' (1:26-27).*

Their future, as individuals and as a church, was not about strategies, patterns or bolt-on spirituality. It was to be founded and built on the 'truth' about God - nothing less.

Such knowledge of God would not come from 'fine sounding arguments' (2:4) but from 'the word of God in its fullness' (1:24) - nothing more. It was simple and uncomplicated, but far from simplistic. Here was knowledge and fullness beyond any sectarian emphasis. This 'truth' was fully articulated in creation, the incarnation, salvation and their future hope - no wonder they should sing out! (3:15ff) This was 'the meaning of life, the universe and everything!' - predating Douglas Adams!

The evidence of this radical refocus in their lives was already there for all to see, but it now needed to grow and permeate everything - 'word and deed' (3:17). This would be the inevitable consequence of a changed perspective (3:2). Understanding would define their relationships with family and colleagues (3:18ff) and make them aware of their part in the bigger picture. Through prayer and action even the young church in Colosse would make a significant contribution to the growth of the kingdom (4:2ff).

The Christians in Colosse were offered 'the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge' (2:2-3). Why be distracted by human wisdom and prejudice?

Jesus had said, 'I am the way, the truth and the life' (John 14:6). Jesus had also said, 'If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free' (John 8:31-32).

**Michael Whitley is a member of the Leadership Team at ChristChurch, Belfast. He is also a member of the ECONI Steering Group.**

# revisiting the Kingdom

David McMillan

Dealing with the concept of the kingdom of God can be a bit like coping with the soap in the bath. It's sometimes hard to get hold of, hard to keep hold of once you've got it, jolly difficult to recover if you let it slip and inevitably - once you've decided to forget about it - it turns up in the most awkward of places.

However, in what follows I will try to:

1. help us get a sense of the concept of the kingdom of God
2. help us think about some ways in which understanding the kingdom of God affects the way the Church thinks of itself in the world.

## The kingdom of God

Some years ago Francis Fukuyama published an article - and later a book - on the theme of 'The End of History'. Fukuyama argued that capitalism and liberal democracy had provided the climax of history. 'Clearly history would go on in that ancient struggles had to be played out - as in the former Yugoslavia - but history, in the sense of a conflict between big ideas, was over.'<sup>1</sup>

Fukuyama was responding to the unique situation of the late eighties when the fall of communism seemed to herald a whole new era. His thinking was bold and provocative and is, I suspect, shared by many in political life in the western world who have reached a similar conclusion by a different route, namely, the thoughtless arrogance of our time and culture. Fukuyama and those who harbour a similar view are wrong. The end of history was proclaimed by a Jew in the region of Galilee some 2,000 years ago when he announced the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy and called on his neighbours to repent, for the kingdom of God is near.<sup>2</sup>

Ancient struggles would continue to be prosecuted and new ones would arise out of our sinful nature but in the coming of Christ the conflict between big ideas was over. Here in His person, in his death, in his resurrection, in his ascension and in his elevation to the Father's right hand is the reign of God

for us to see, know and obey. Here is the rule and reign of God in the king who saves his people and who will judge the world. Here is the one whose kingship demands our allegiance, whose realm knows no boundary, whose territory extends throughout the universe, whose 'kingdom is an everlasting kingdom and whose dominion will endure through all generations.'<sup>3</sup>

How are we to understand the kingdom of God? Look up a concordance and it becomes immediately apparent that the kingdom of God finds its most frequent expression and major focus in the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke (the Synoptic Gospels).<sup>4</sup> Further investigation reveals that the concept of the kingdom of God is used interchangeably with the concept of the kingdom of Heaven (a term much more commonly used in Matthew's Gospel)<sup>5</sup> and that these terms appear exclusively in the context of Jesus' ministry and preaching. Clearly this is the place to start any investigation of the kingdom of God.

At the very outset we need to note that the Greek word translated as 'kingdom' carries a number of different meanings. This word *basileia* (*basileia*) can mean 'rule', 'reign', 'kingship', 'realm', 'territory' or 'kingdom'. Some of these terms convey a sense of power, others a sense of locality. It is clear from the variety of uses of the term in Jesus' ministry that there is a dynamic aspect to the kingdom of which he speaks and we should be careful about interpreting Jesus' use of the term as referring merely to a locality - whether on earth or in heaven.<sup>6</sup>

Mark tells us that Jesus went into Galilee proclaiming the good news of God. 'The time has come', he said. '*The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!*' (1.14-15). Would this have been the first time that the people of Galilee had ever heard of the kingdom of God? No. As Jews they were familiar with the concept of God's sovereignty from the Scriptures. Passages such as Psalm 47.2 '*How awesome is the Lord Most High, the great King over all the earth*', or Psalm 145.1, '*I will exalt you, my God the*

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*King; I will praise your name for ever and ever*, would have been well known. They would have had a consciousness of God's rule over all creation and all the nations of humanity: *'The Lord has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all'* (Psalm 103.19). However, apart from the Scriptures, the concept of God establishing a kingdom was a vital issue in the political and social context of Jesus' ministry in Galilee.

There was at the time a mixture of religious and nationalistic expectations. These ranged from the apocalyptic vision that God would act to draw history to a close and usher in a new era of his rule, to more nationalistic hopes that God would act on Israel's behalf and raise up a Messiah who would shake off the Romans and re-establish Israel as a sovereign nation. Jesus' preaching of the kingdom of God was not uttered in a vacuum but rather in the context of mixed and confused expectations that 'God would do something'.

Matthew and Mark (Mt.4: 17; Mk.1: 15) present a sharp summary of Jesus' message as they record him proclaiming 'good news' that *'the kingdom of God is near'*. Luke sets the scene for the preaching recorded in Matthew and Mark by telling the story of Jesus' preaching in the synagogue in Nazareth. Having read from Isaiah 61: 1-2 Jesus declared, *'Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing'*. It is clear that Jesus understood his ministry as ushering in the kingdom of God. In the person of Jesus the kingdom of God had arrived in all the power prophesied by the prophets and with all the attendant glory witnessed to by the Scriptures.

Given that the kingdom is about the rule of God in and through Jesus, what is happening in 'kingdom' terms throughout the New Testament can be thought about in the following way:

**The Synoptic Gospels** portray Jesus announcing and ushering in God's kingdom in his life, death and resurrection.

**John, Paul**<sup>7</sup> and some of the other New Testament authors teach the Church the significance, values and terms of entry to the kingdom.

**Peter** concentrates on teaching the Church what it means to live as 'kingdom' people scattered among the kingdoms of this world - hence his emphasis on the Christian calling to be aliens and strangers.

**John** in Revelation gives us the overview of the historic struggle of the kingdom of darkness against the kingdom of God in Christ and paints for us an amazing picture of the climax of history in the fulfilment of the kingdom in Revelation 20.

It is quite wrong to think of the kingdom of God as 'absent' from the rest of the New Testament. To think of the kingdom of God as assumed, underpinning, explained, worked out, applied, and portrayed is much more appropriate.

The view I am proposing could be characterised as understanding the kingdom of God as the sovereign rule of God declared in Christ, witnessed to by the Church and coming in all consuming power and splendour. Theologically this is known as 'inaugurated eschatology'.

Those who see the kingdom as something yet to happen hold to a 'futurist eschatology' and those who see it as an expression for change and development of whatever kind (social or spiritual) in the here and now hold a 'realised eschatology'. Neither of these extremes is satisfactory. The end has begun - inaugurated in Jesus' incarnation, death and resurrection. The end is being played out and it is decision time for the peoples of the world - to whose kingdom do we belong: Christ's or his enemy's? It is the Church's task to present the challenge, model the values and standards of the kingdom and remain loyal to Christ. The kingdom will come with power and fullness when Christ comes again.

# revisiting the Kingdom

The kingdom of God (the rule of God) is the big project of scripture and encompasses the renewal of creation, the salvation of God's people, the judgement of all things. It is to this kingdom, through faith in Christ, in the fellowship of the Church, for the glory of God, that the Christian belongs. Membership of the kingdom of God identifies us in the world, defines our values and allegiance, determines our destiny.

Now that we have grabbed the soap firmly, we must apply it with effect and not let it slip through our fingers. This is easier said than done, I know, but let's take a look at two areas where wrestling with the issues of kingdom loyalty affect the way the individual Christian and the fellowship of Christians relate to our society.

## Politics

One of the most obvious issues we have to deal with in Northern Ireland is the matter of political allegiance. While this is a blindingly obvious area of concern to us in Northern Ireland it is a matter of relevance to Christians of all times and cultures.

Over the years the message that ECONI has sought to communicate is that the values of the kingdom are, for members of the kingdom, the non-negotiable terms of engagement in the politics of this country. If winning a political argument or maintaining political power necessitates ditching, or ever so slightly abrogating, our responsibility to love our neighbour as ourselves or our responsibility to model holiness and Christlikeness in our encounter with our fellow citizens then we would rather lose the argument and concede the power than break allegiance to the kingdom of God.

One critic of ECONI, Patrick Roche, in his book **The Appeasement of Terrorism & The Belfast Agreement**<sup>8</sup> attacks ECONI for issuing statements which, in his opinion, appeal to the 'values of the kingdom' as a 'trick' to:

*implicitly ... align a commitment to unionism with a subordination of the 'values of the kingdom' to the values of 'politics', 'culture', or 'nation'.*

He continues

*The fact of the matter is that no such subordination is required by a commitment to unionism. Unionism involves nothing more than a commitment to the 'cherished position of equal citizenship within the United Kingdom'. Unionism is therefore entirely compatible with authentic Christian allegiance to God. The ECONI statements on issues central to unionism ... amount to a subtle use of theological rhetoric to attempt to immobilise unionist opposition to the accommodation of the political demands of Irish nationalism.<sup>9</sup>*

When one gets to the heart of his criticism it is evident that Roche perceives no greater threat to the pursuit of selfish, unaccommodating political goals than discussion or exposition of the 'values of the kingdom'. To name the values of the kingdom, to use them as the touchstone for political engagement, threatens to undermine the vision of democracy he so cherishes. The attempt to caricature ECONI's position as being anti unionist and pro nationalist is an essential characteristic of those who need to neutralise, for the sake of their own conscience, the rigorous demands of the kingdom of God as the defining terms on which they must deal with their nationalist neighbours.

There is nothing incompatible between a Christian commitment and a unionist conviction. No one ever said or implied there was. What is unsustainable is a political commitment (unionist or nationalist) that is pursued outside of the terms of the Sermon on the Mount. Furthermore, just as the good news of the kingdom carries with it an implicit warning of judgement for the individual (the call to repentance being matched by a warning of judgement) so political systems

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or philosophies which fail to deal fairly with the alien or the stranger among them will, of necessity, find themselves under the judgement of the rule of God.

In simple terms, those who present themselves as anxious about the health of democracy but who failed to promote the democratic rights of their nationalist neighbours four decades ago should not be surprised at the diminishing nature of their political power. We (unionist or nationalist) ignore kingdom values at our peril.

### **Inclusiveness**

It's very much a PC term, a buzz word of the late nineties, a catch-all contemporary value echoing the spirit of relativism and tolerance which tyrannises the terms and nature of contemporary relationships. The one thing we must not do, it appears, is contemplate excluding anyone from anything – whether it be students from Oxbridge or Sinn Fein from the Executive. Inclusiveness at any price, inclusiveness for its own sake, seems to be the order of the day. Whatever the confused reasoning behind contemporary inclusive agendas may be, Jesus' parable of the mustard seed presents both a model and a necessary challenge to the Church on this matter of 'inclusiveness' (Matt.13: 31-32). It is a model that applies the values of the kingdom of God to the life of the Church. This parable of the kingdom indicates that the apparently insignificant seed of Jesus' death will be sown - at the cross<sup>10</sup> - out of which will come a tree capable of providing a home for all who perch there. The 'birds of the air' who will find a home there is an inclusive idea – those that were previously considered 'unclean' will find space on the branches of this tree.

In Acts 10:12-14 we meet exactly the same concept when Peter is confronted with the vision of 'all kinds of four footed animals, as well as reptiles of the earth and birds of the air', and invited to 'kill and eat'. Peter is appalled, declaring, *'Surely not Lord! ...I have never eaten anything impure or*

*unclean'*. As Peter then finds himself called to the home of Cornelius, understanding comes. *'God has shown me,'* he declares, *'that I should not call any man impure or unclean ...so I came without raising any objection'* (28).

This major cultural shift in Peter's thinking had to be defended before the other Apostles. The association with the contaminated and unclean Roman centurion was compromising the Church. The fascinating aspect of Peter's report to the Apostles (Acts 11:1-18) is that he discovered that God had already spoken to Cornelius before he had even heard the message of the gospel or repented and put his faith in Christ (Acts 10.11-14). It was at this stage in his life that Peter came to understand the parable of the mustard seed.

Peter would have been wrong to refuse to associate with Cornelius. He could have chosen to live by the standards of the kingdom of Jewish culture and identity. He would not have been criticised for refusing to go. Indeed he would have been applauded for refusing to associate with, and give legitimacy to, those whose hands were stained with the blood of innocent Jews - not least that of Jesus. But Peter would have violated the standards of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is not concerned for the niceties or self-righteousness of the kingdoms of this world. The kingdom of God will be for the 'birds of the air' whether we like it or not!

The challenge is clear - to what degree have we come to terms with this in our churches? Do our churches mirror the kingdom of God? Or have they become the servants of the kingdoms of this age, baptising and sanctifying the kingdoms of Protestant or Irish culture, middle class homogeneity or male supremacy?

### **Conclusion**

It is a great shame that the concept of the kingdom of God is so frequently absent from our thinking and vocabulary. It is an even greater tragedy that this radical concept has been tamed

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and neutered by evangelicalism. Membership of the kingdom of God identifies us in the world, defines our values and allegiance, determines our destiny.

Many years ago I was present at a commemoration for the victims of one of the violent atrocities that are now part of our history and our shame in Northern Ireland. The congregation stood to sing and, as I opened my order of service, I encountered for the first time Cecil Spring-Rice's hymn.

I vow to thee my country - all earthly things above -  
Entire and whole and perfect, the service of my love,  
The love that asks no questions: the love that stands  
the test,  
That lays upon the altar the dearest and the best:  
The love that never falters, the love that pays the  
price,  
The love that makes undaunted the final sacrifice.

And there's another country, I've heard of long ago -  
Most dear to them that love her, most great to them  
that know -  
We may not count her armies: we may not see her  
King -  
Her fortress is a faithful heart, her pride is suffering -  
And soul by soul and silently her shining bounds  
increase,  
And her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her  
paths are peace.

I listened as the congregation sang - staggered that the clergy who led the service could channel the pain and anguish of grieving relatives into blind patriotic allegiance; angry that what had been pure bloody murder stemming from the same kind of blind patriotic allegiance to a different flag was being rationalised using the same frame of reference as the killers; distraught that for this congregation the kingdom of God seemed no more than 'another country' of which they had heard instead of being the source of power and comfort which these good people needed in their sorrow.

Never had the kingdom of God been more real to me than during those moments standing there. Never before had I perceived how spiritually dangerous is the elevation of loyalty to a flag or cause, nor how bankrupt its comfort, nor how vacuous its hope. The 'other country' and its King is more real than any state, more glorious than any earthly monarchy and no flag or country shall ever have my heart or share its praise.

*Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.*  
(1Tim.1:17)

<sup>1</sup> Bryan Appleyard, 'Thinkers of the Nineties', *Independent* 20/11/95

<sup>2</sup> Mark 1:15

<sup>3</sup> Psalm 145.13

<sup>4</sup> The phrases Kingdom of God and Kingdom of Heaven occur over 100 times in the Synoptic Gospels, only twice in John's Gospel and rarely elsewhere in the New Testament.

<sup>5</sup> See Matthew 13.11 // Mark 4.11 // Luke 8.10 and Matthew 4.17 // Mark 1.15. See also Matthew 19.23-24 where both terms are used in the same context.

<sup>6</sup> For example Matthew 4.17; 12.28; Luke 17.21.

<sup>7</sup> It is not insignificant that Paul's ministry is summarised as preaching the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ. Acts 28:23 & 31

<sup>8</sup> Patrick J. Roche, *The Appeasement of Terrorism and the Belfast Agreement* (Belfast: NIUP, 2000)

<sup>9</sup> Roche, *Appeasement* 66

<sup>10</sup> cf. John 12:24

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faith and practice



interview with baroness

# mayblood

# interview with baroness may blood

*The purpose of this and succeeding interviews is to explore the connections between faith and practice. We hope to talk with folk whose work within the community is well known, who also hold their Christian faith dear. Each will be asked a number of core questions, about the work they do, the vision that has fired them, the values that undergird the work and the part their faith plays both inside and outside the work place. We begin with Baroness May Blood.*

On a bright, sunny, spring afternoon the editorial team went up the Shankill Road to the Early Learning Centre to talk with Baroness May Blood. We were greeted by a friendly, cheerful lady who spoke with clarity and conviction. She described herself as *'just an ordinary woman who has had extraordinary opportunities'*, opportunities given her by God. She was grateful that her life experiences have married so well with the various positions she has held.

## The Mill Years

*I first started working life in a mill, a huge mill on what's now known as the 'peace-line' in West Belfast. There were 450 people working in the mill and over the years I became first the shop steward and then a senior steward. In a sense I was responsible for everyone in the mill. So in that way I've always been involved with people. I'm nosy and I think that's always a good thing. It helps you to go beyond what you're being asked to do. And certainly the years of the troubles in the mill weren't easy years because you were working not only in a dangerous situation, physical danger, but you were working in a very hard situation mentally. You were working with men and women whose outside lives were all over the place. Some of them were young women, whose men had been lifted, interned. You had people coming in who had relatives killed. You had people in the factory who absolutely hated the RUC. You had people in the factory who absolutely loved the RUC. When the soldiers first came on the streets, we had young women in the mill who married into the army but two years later were told they couldn't marry them. So you'd all those kind of complex problems. But also within the mill setting you had domestic violence, you had poverty, you had children's health. You heard all this as the day went on and in that way I suppose that's where my love came for community.*

*While I had a full-time job, I would still have done voluntary work at night. That's how I came to be known as the 'Vicar of Blackstaff'. Everybody brought their problems to me. People would say, "Away up and see May Blood and if she can't solve it, it can't be solved." I suppose in that sense you need a real feel for people, where they are coming from. I've always tried to do what I could that way.*

## Capacity to Lead

May did not always see herself as a leader. She believes she gained all her education through the Trade Union Movement.

*I left school with absolutely no education. My parents had higher aspirations for me but I went into the mill. When I arrived I was a very shy person. I wouldn't really have spoken in public. Through the Trade Union movement I got my education. I learned the art of public speaking and gradually gained leadership qualities. But that never encouraged me to take the skills outside. In a sense the mill was my comfort zone. In the mill everybody looked to me, so it was easy. Once I came outside the gate it was totally different.*

*Then, when the mill closed and I became unemployed, a friend who was in community development offered me a job managing a project for long-term unemployed. I can remember saying to her, "Don't be stupid, I can't even manage myself, never mind a project." But she encouraged me to do it and I never looked behind. Obviously I had some kind of leadership qualities that I didn't recognise at the time. It's just been my privilege to be involved in it that way. But in the early days no. If anybody had told me when I was young that I was going to get up and speak, I'd have said, "Forget about it."*

## Greater Shankill Partnership

When the mill closed May became involved with the Greater Shankill Partnership. She worked as Information Officer with them for several years before being elevated to the House of Lords in Westminster, where she concentrates on her new role as a Crossbench Peer. She describes this as taking community development to another level. She seeks to challenge the statement once made by Margaret Thatcher that there is no such thing as society.

## Vision and Values

May was clear that people have been her priority. Her aim in the mill was to improve the conditions of the men and women working there. This brought her into conflict with employers who did not see how better conditions would improve profit margins.

*One value that I was reared with has been with me all my life - to value people for what they are. I have tried never to judge anyone for their religion or their colour or anything like that. To me people are people. You know everybody has the same problems and so in that sense I started from a base that the only way is up. I think you*

take people with you. But the one value I carry in my life is that I like to treat people as people. That's very central to everything I do.

### Faith and Defining Moments

We asked May to talk about her faith and the place it has played in her life so far. She told us how she had once planned to be a missionary with the Salvation Army, but came to realise it was not what she should be doing. She is now a member of her local Presbyterian Church.

*My faith is something that is very personal to me. I wasn't reared in a Christian home but I went to Sunday school like most young Protestants do. Sunday morning you were up, you were away to the Bible class and then you went to church, came home, got your dinner, you were back to Sunday school, you were back to the church that night. And that was just your way of life. But I think you're taking in things at the time you probably don't realise. And my faith is very, very important to me. I make no secret of the fact that I would go to church. For me it's very vital to go to church and have my faith. Not that going to church gives you your faith, but to me it's very vital - that inward faith. I lost my mother and father in the one year, so again my faith was a great source of comfort to me, and I've had a number of problems in recent years. I have a very clear vision of what a good Christian faith is, and it's not grounded in the fact that you have to sit in church every Sunday. In fact I'd be very critical of the churches throughout the troubles.*

*I've always been religious in the sense that I went to church as a child and really can't remember a time when I didn't. I really can't remember a time when I wouldn't have been interested. I think they do put into you a basic respect that is perhaps missing today. Certainly for me anyway I always have my faith to fall back on. One of the verses in the Bible that always comes into my mind, especially when I'm out public speaking is, 'For what is your life, it's but a vapour.' I like to think that perhaps that has been a guiding principle, that I've always tried to work to make my life meaningful and make it responsive to people's needs. And always, and I don't mean this in a big-headed way, I'm willing to go the extra mile. And I think your faith has to come in on that because certainly in community work there are a lot of knocks and I think if you don't have that basic fall-back you could be in serious trouble.*

### Churches and Northern Ireland

We invited May to say what she thought about the way churches have engaged with the real issues of community development. She was very clear about that.

*I would be very critical of the churches. In the years of the troubles, certainly in this area, the church didn't really respond to the community and I think in many ways the church missed out. You basically only saw the church in those days if somebody well known was killed. They were at the funeral. But by and large they didn't want to know and I think the Protestant churches missed out. I can remember when we were doing research around the work of the Greater Shankill Partnership. There's some forty-seven churches and mission halls in this area. I can remember writing out to them because we wanted them to know about what we were doing and I think only about four responded. They're not seen as part of the community. I'll give you an example of this. I'm very often approached by people who say Protestants aren't getting their fair share of the peace and reconciliation money. You go up and down this country any day of the week and you will see Protestant churches sitting closed. You'll see their church halls sitting closed. You go past any Catholic Church, there's something going on in the church hall, mother/toddler group, women's group, you name it, it's there and they're in for all the funds. Now that's not grabbing the money, that's supporting their community. I don't believe we as Protestants in the church have learned it. I think we've had a very negative attitude towards community development. In a sense they've almost missed the boat. I think there could have been a lot more done.*

She spoke of the vision she had of the future and how she would like to see churches becoming involved with their communities.

*I think the church has enormous talent, the potential to do a lot of things within their community, for instance just simple things like mother and toddlers groups or a youth club or something like that. But many churches don't want to be bothered, it's too much trouble. Look at the enormous talent that's within a church. One of the things that fascinated us from our research was the number of organised, uniformed groups in the Shankill. Young people, who belong to a church for the BB or the Scouts or whatever, have no connection to the church other than that. They're just in the uniform. There are exceptions to that rule but by and large I would say that the talent and*

*the scope that the church possesses has never really been utilised in Protestant areas, certainly not in community development.*

### **The future for the Shankill**

May was optimistic about the future of both the Shankill Community and the Partnership.

*Well, the Partnership set itself the task away back in '92/'93 to look ahead for the next fifteen years and it had a very concentrated programme. It was looking at health, employment, housing, young people. Education was the biggie, anything we did came back to education. The Partnership has been working through those programmes in the last five or six years and they've had really good success. The Greater Shankill Partnership was ahead of its time. Partnerships are now flavour of the month but this one was ahead of its time. It took on an area that had a great deal of deprivation and tried to raise the whole standard. It has worked very well.*

*What they're looking at now is where the next five years go. The Early Years Centre is up and running. They're now building a new youth, arts and culture centre here on the road. It will be ready late this year and will put a wonderful facility in the hands of young people. They're also looking at partnerships as part of private development. Today on the Shankill every available space has been bought up for private development. Five years ago if somebody said they were buying a house on the Shankill, they'd have been told, "Don't be stupid, who'd buy a house on the Shankill?" Today the property is going for anything from £50,000 to £80,000. And as fast as the houses are being built, they're being bought. So there's a whole upsurge in the community here and the Partnership has to take that on board now.*

*They're looking at a further three to five year plan. They set themselves the task of working with children from the day they were born, or preferably before they were born, because they knew they had the highest proportion of young teenage pregnancies in Western Europe in this area. They've worked through that now but obviously you're not going to solve that problem in five years, so we'll have to wait until those children are grown up to see the advantages.*



ECONI want to thank Baroness Blood for her willing participation in the interview. We wish her success as she continues to make a difference in people's lives.

**Ruth Hutchinson**  
Assistant Editor

# Ephesus

Heather Morris

Opposite characteristics co-exist. Then, as now, there were significant gaps between theological assertion and reality.

Ephesus was a major port in the Roman Province of Asia. In its past it had been a Greek city and was the centre of worship of the god Artemis (Diana). Paul's initial visit to the city was very brief (Acts 18: 19-21) but on his return he stayed for about two years (Acts 19). In Ephesus '*...the word of God spread widely and grew in power*' (Acts 19:20). It appears that a Christian community had developed whose members were committed to the Lord and to one another. Its nature may be echoed in the message recorded in its name in Revelation 2. Here the church is rebuked for having lost its initial fervour: '*You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first*' (Rev. 2:4-5).

This was a church which was active, alive and empowered by the Spirit. The opposition of Demetrius exemplifies the effect that it was having on the community (Acts 19:23-40). We can understand the enthusiasm with which the Christians in Ephesus are greeted. '*For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, I have not stopped giving thanks for you*' (Eph. 1:15-16).

## Internal bickering

But there were also challenges to be faced. The big fault line was between Jew and Gentile. In his farewell to the elders in Ephesus Paul addresses this directly, '*I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus Christ*' (Acts 20:21). Yet there were significant divisions between Jewish and Gentile Christians in the church and Paul had to address them again in his letter. '*He (Jesus) came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to you who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by the one Spirit*' (Eph. 2:17-18).

A call to recognise and exhibit the reality of their theological unity resounds throughout this epistle, '*...be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace*' (Eph. 4:2-3).

The divisions that gave rise to that heartfelt plea may have been largely doctrinal but there are also indications that they were due to bickering and squabbles. '*Do not let any troublesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up*' (Ephesians 4:29). In his letter to Timothy, whom Paul had left in charge of the church in Ephesus, he wrote, '*I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer without anger or disputing*' (1 Tim.2:8).

The Christians in Ephesus knew all about what it is to differ from one another within their fellowship. It is to a bickering, often-divided community that the author holds out a vision of what John Stott calls 'God's new society'.

## Heresy

The nature of the heresy which influenced the Christians in Ephesus (Eph. 5:6 for example) is disputed. Whatever its precise nature it is abundantly clear that within the church there were those who were teaching a different gospel. This was alluded to by Paul in his speech to the elders (Acts 20:29-30) when he warns them: '*I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will come and distort the truth in order to draw every disciple after them*'. The need to confront those who distort the truth of the gospel is made clear in 1 Timothy 1: 3-4 where Timothy is directed, '*Stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer, nor to devote themselves to endless genealogies. These promote controversies rather than God's work*'.

So we are given insight into a community whose work and witness was blighted by controversy and heresy – enough to make any pastor's blood run cold!

**Dr Heather Morris is minister of Dundonald Methodist Church. She is also a member of the ECONI Steering Group.**

# LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION...

Alan Wilson

When I read these words, I scratch my head and wonder. They seem so out of context, almost against the grain and sentiment of the rest of the prayer. We have been praising God as our Father, putting our confidence in him to meet our daily needs, and trusting in his grace and mercy to deal with our sin. Suddenly, out of the blue we find '*... and by the way, don't lead us into temptation*'. These words seem to suggest that we doubt or question God's character. Would God lead us into temptation? (See James 1:13.) Yet these are words that Jesus encourages us to use. Are the words '*lead us not into temptation*' a subtle expression of doubt or an honest expression of faith?

I think Mathew 6:13 is one of those verses people love to take out of context; it has suffered from hermeneutic ineptness. When some people read the Lord's prayer they take each phrase in isolation and apply it. So they apply verse 13 to spiritual warfare, and use it as a prayer for protection from the evil one. This may be a legitimate application, but I believe it to be secondary. I don't believe Jesus was thinking in terms of spiritual warfare when he spoke these words.

If we read this verse in its context we notice that the verse before says, '*Forgive us our debts as we forgive others*'. The verse after it says, '*For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.*' So when Jesus teaches us to pray '*lead us not into temptation*' he is still thinking about the process that is involved in genuine forgiveness.

How are we to understand it? There is a Christian myth that says, "Once I have forgiven someone, the pain they have caused me will go away." This is not true. Often a lot of time elapses between the act of forgiving and complete healing, and sometimes the healing will not be complete until we see Jesus. I think this is the issue Jesus is addressing when he says '*Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one*'.

It may be interesting to point out that this is the only specific request for leading recorded in the New Testament. It is a request made by people who are in the process of forgiving others. It is a request made by hurting people, people who are in pain, people who are trying to deal genuinely and spiritually with an injustice they have suffered. Those who are going through the demanding requirements of expressing authentic forgiveness are of all people the most in need of God's 'leading' in their lives.

When we pray, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one," we are expressing the same heart attitude that we expressed in the previous verse. It is a cry of dependence, a deep recognition of our need of God. We are saying, "God, unless you lead me and carry me I will fall into the temptations that come with a hurting heart." In effect we are saying, "Father I have been hurt. I feel wounded. I need you to carry me through this pain, not to shield me from my responsibility to forgive the person who hurt me. But I need you to help me so I can do it." This leading can only be accomplished through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. His gentle leading helps us to manage the pain of injustice, not medicate it (Rom.8: 14).

Only God's protection and leading can keep us from the dangers of an unforgiving heart. When we refuse to forgive others, then we are opening our lives to other sins and to the evil one. An unforgiving heart will lead us astray.

The prayer '*Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one*' asks God to lead us through a healing process. To hold on to our pain, to nurse a grudge, or to elude the exacting necessities and raw vulnerability that healing and reconciliation require, is committing ourselves to evil.

**Alan Wilson is a member of Hamilton Road Baptist Church, Bangor.**

# Galatia

I will never forget those first heady days when many of us responded to the message of this enigmatic, fearless man. He spoke with conviction, and there were times when his fierceness was intimidating. Yet behind all he said was an overpowering sense of genuine concern for us. Even when he was ill he continued to teach us about the God who loved us so much that He sent his Son, Jesus Christ to rescue us by dying for us on a cross, so that we too could become children of God.

The incredible truth that there was a God who wanted to be our father and make us his children still overwhelms me and to discover that I was unconditionally loved was like music to my ears. Grace was a new concept in our world where we spent our lives trying to appease the gods. Nothing has ever tasted as sweet as this grace we discovered when Paul introduced us to Jesus Christ. There were no demands made on us, we didn't have to meet any special requirements, we only had to believe what we had heard.

The truth of what we heard not only affected how we saw ourselves but how we saw others. To be honest, before this I don't think I would have listened to someone who was sick because I would have assumed that they had displeased the gods in some way. But Paul explained that the life we were being introduced to in Christ was possible because God would give us His Spirit who would teach us and empower us to live in a different sort of way.

Up to that point most of us were only concerned with our own interests. Paul explained this was living to please 'the flesh' but Christ was calling us to take a different path, to learn to walk by the Spirit and this would produce a completely different set of values in our lives.

We started to understand that what we were getting involved in was not just an individual thing but the beginning of a new community where people would be loved and accepted no matter who they were. Jesus Christ forgave our past and made us new people; we had been given a brand new identity as children of God.

*But when the time had fully come God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba Father". (Gal.4: 5-6)*

*So I say, live by the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. (Gal.5: 16)*

*The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. (Gal.5: 22)*

*You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves in Christ. Here is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Gal.3: 26-28)*

*It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm then and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. (Gal.5: 1)*

## Priscilla Reid

The word on everybody's lips was freedom, not some kind of self-centred anarchy with everyone pleasing themselves but a freedom to live for God who loved us so completely. There was a freedom to look out for each other and set aside old prejudices and attitudes. I suppose the best way of putting it is that we were offered relationship rather than religion.

We started off with such high hopes, with a freedom charter, which was the foundation of our lives together. We had a vision to build a community based on our new prophetic identity as children of the living God rather than old allegiances and prejudices. We were bound to the Lord and to one another, not by a series of rules, but with an overpowering sacrificial love. We were part of a community where every person could feel accepted and equal, where we would seek to serve each other.

I have just come back from hearing a letter read that Paul has written to our church. It has really made me think. I suppose I just went along with what the new teachers were telling us because I thought as they were Jews they probably knew more about a relationship with God than I did. They have been putting great pressure on those of us who were Gentiles to be circumcised and to start observing the ceremonies of the Jewish faith. The freedom and joy that my new relationship with Jesus Christ had brought seems to have been whittled away and recently I have been feeling that I will never measure up.

Paul has accused us of being foolish and I must admit it does feel as if we have been duped and manipulated into thinking that what Paul taught us was incomplete and needed to be added to. They threw doubt on Paul's apostleship and on his teaching but it was his teaching that brought us freedom. Their teaching has been like a heavy burden being placed on our backs. How could we have so quickly deserted the magnificence of that initial vision of being a community of grace, living in true freedom under the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit?

*You were running a good race. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth? ... You brothers were called to be free... The entire law is summed up in a single command: 'Love your neighbour as yourself'. (Gal.5: 7,13,14)*

*Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. (Gal.1: 7)*

*You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was portrayed as crucified. (Gal.3: 1)*

# CEPU →

*In the last issue of Lion & Lamb Esmond Birnie wrote an article about the work of ECONI describing the organisation as an expression of Liberal Evangelical Post-Unionism (LEPU). Esmond sought to contrast the characteristics of LEPU with what he defined as the more traditional CEPU (Conservative Evangelical Political Unionism). In response to that article Ken Irvine has written the following piece as a testimony of one Conservative Evangelical Post-Unionist.*

## **Ken Irvine**

In this piece I will attempt to state some of the things that have meant so much to me in living in a community of conflict, looking to God's word for answers. Involvement in ECONI has helped me in my search for what God wants in our community and there has been mutual encouragement to trust God's word and attempt to apply it within a local setting.

### **A Personal Relationship with God the Father, through the Son, by the Spirit (Eph.2: 18)**

While theology is important, without a real relationship with God theology in itself is dead. Conservative Evangelicals stress the importance of this personal relationship with God. People do not enter into God's family by birth, tradition or coming up to some acceptable standard but by trusting solely in Christ. This means that we do not trust in ourselves but in the one who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. There is no other way to God. This stands for me as of ultimate importance for without this relationship, no matter how good the theology, it would prove lifeless.

### **The Place of the Word of God (2 Tim.3:16-17)**

What we believe about the Word of God is very important in the life of a Christian. Does the Bible contain the Word of God or is the Bible the Word of God? There is a danger in attempting to categorise the Word of God into sections that are treated as narrative and sections which hold more teaching content. It was a major battle for me in the Christian ministry to read the historical books of the Old Testament with faith, and not to treat them as if they were just cold history. Studying theology as an academic subject can lead us to an assessment of the historical books as merely a record of human life without any real spiritual significance for today. With this approach the Bible soon shrinks in size when we cut out what we consider to be irrelevant for today or judge some subject matter unworthy of note because its cultural background seems too far away from the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

I remember hearing one preacher say that he was able to thank God each day that he had not been asked to defend God's Word, understand it all and explain it all. For him the call to preaching was defined as God asking him to proclaim the word. To me the Bible is the Word of God. It is the whole truth of God revealed for our salvation.

This does not mean that all Conservative Evangelicals will interpret the Word of God in exactly the same way. There is room for differences of interpretation when the desire in the heart is to have the Word of God as the only standard and rule. Then there is freedom to let the Holy Spirit bring understanding, while being open to teaching by others who have different insight and knowledge.

### **Theories of the Atonement**

Some have described theories of the atonement as different windows on the Cross. There are numerous theories. No one theory, or a group of theories, or the total sum of all the theories will ever be able to sum up completely what was accomplished on the Cross. For me the substitutionary theory of the atonement is very meaningful and was at the heart of my conversion experience. This does not permit me to deny that others will see the cross through different windows or that the light of the Cross can shine on people in different ways. It would be difficult for me, if someone whose understanding of the Cross was seen through another window then proceeded to deny the substitutionary nature of the atonement. In a modern society the seriousness of sin is often ignored or denied. To know that on the Cross sin has been dealt with and the punishment, power and shame of sin has been laid on Christ is of crucial importance.

### **The Church as a Prophetic Community**

With such an emphasis on the importance of an individual relationship with God it is possible to have a very low concept of the church. The church and a personal relationship with God are not mutually exclusive. The people who heard the preaching of Peter were saved and added to the church. The

# a personal testimony

church was to be 'salt and light' in the world. Too often the church has taken sides and compromised the truth for the sake of being popular. If, for instance, the church identifies with one particular political party, can it still speak the Word of God clearly and boldly if it would seem to go against party policy? Many church leaders have been criticised for speaking difficult words from the Bible to our community and they have been accused of taking political sides. The church can lose the right to speak when it becomes identified with a particular political philosophy. I remember well my theology being questioned and held up for ridicule because it seemed that I did not toe a particular party line. God has words for us to speak in Northern Ireland today. The vision I have is that the church as God's agency will speak his word to all the people. ECONI has helped the whole process in thinking Biblically about political issues and has equipped people to deal with these issues sensitively.

## Where does the Christian belong?

One of the great privileges in being a Christian is that we become a part of God's kingdom in the world. Being a member of God's kingdom teaches me to put less weight on what is happening within worldly kingdoms. It is not that I do not have pride in my native country and do not have real struggles when its security is attacked and undermined. The question of identity is not being British or Irish (I probably feel a bit of both) but is in being a part of God's kingdom. He has not promised this piece of land to me or mine, but he has given us a kingdom that will never be shaken and will remain and stand when others fall. Our citizenship is not of this world because as far as this world is concerned we are aliens and strangers. This leaves us with a difficulty - how to be good citizens of our country and yet not so tied in with everything in it that we put its importance above that of the kingdom.

## Forgiveness, Repentance and Reconciliation

It is a command of God to forgive. *'If you hold anything against anyone, forgive...'* (Mk 11:25). Therefore, since the commands of God are not burdensome, it must be possible for us to forgive others. This command of God would seem to leave us without a choice; we must forgive. Forgiveness is not

forgetting, minimising or ignoring. It is choosing by the grace of God to leave the whole judgement to him and seek his grace in helping us to walk in the forgiveness we have chosen. Forgiveness is not an emotion, it is an act of the will before God even when hurt and pain rise up, inside, causing us to question whether or not we have actually forgiven. It is not automatic, it may take time and is a process that leads to an ongoing decision of the will.

Repentance is when wrong is acknowledged by the guilty person and there is a turning away from doing wrong and an apology given for the damage caused with a desire to make things right. If forgiveness has already happened in the life of the injured party then whenever the guilty person repents there can be reconciliation. If there is no repentance there can be no reconciliation, but if there is forgiveness then there can still be freedom for the injured person. Following on from this there has been a comparatively recent encouragement for people to repent of the wrongs of past generations. I am not sure that there is a Biblical warranty for anyone to repent of the sins of another. The sins of the past have an effect on the present. Does it bring freedom if I repent of my father's or grandfather's sins? The sins of the past have an effect on my perceptions and actions, but I wonder if I would be better repenting of what they have caused me to do rather than washing my hands of any responsibility and looking back to blame past generations. We need a way to deal with the past without absolving ourselves from the wrongs of today.

## Facilitating Active Listening and Open Debate

Where there are major areas of conflict it is important to facilitate people both to be able to express themselves and to help them know that they have been heard. We all need to take a journey in understanding people who differ from us. We are so used to sound bites and slogans. We are able to sum one another up from many of our perceptions and caricatures of each other. Every time I read James 3:13-18, which speaks of two different kinds of wisdom, I cannot help relating it to the whole political debate going on over the last fifty years. If we had a good dose of the wisdom that comes from above then I

am sure it would facilitate real change. We have heard enough of the bitter envy and selfish ambition that is destructive and 'of the devil'.

My roots are in the protestant/unionist community. I understand the ethos and history. I understand the degree of feeling when certain words are used, yet I have heard from those whose backgrounds are totally opposite and have found that genuine dialogue is possible. Even though I am not a member of any political party, I have found myself explaining the whole unionist ethos and fears to those who would find them obstructive and irrational. I may not have agreed with specific policies formulated by unionism but I believe that as God has called Christians to be peacemakers, we can aid open honest discussion. A strong attitude of demand is witnessed on every side of the political spectrum. Surely there must be a Christian answer to this barrier to progress.

### **Evangelicals and Roman Catholics**

We cannot ask politicians to do things that we Christians are unwilling to do with others who profess faith in Jesus Christ. To deny the validity of their experience of Christ because of theological differences would be to go against all that we know of God's acceptance of those who call upon him to be saved. So we have a unity in the Spirit with all who are Christians no matter what their denomination. We may not have arrived at a unity in the faith but the ministries that Christ has given to the church - apostle, prophet, pastor, teacher and evangelist - are for the purpose of bringing us to such a unity. There are many ways that we can join with Catholic brothers and sisters and it is my belief that we should take every opportunity to do this without anyone being asked to compromise their beliefs. There are many areas of co-operation in which we can stand together to present a Christian, caring response. It has been effective to have a joint approach to social, economic and political issues.

### **Conclusion**

It has been helpful to see the emergence of Evangelical Systematic Theologies such as that of Wayne Grudem. It holds fast to the Word of God yet it opens up various traditions which can be considered such as the Calvinistic, Arminian, Episcopal. We need to have such an openness to explore one another's beliefs without giving up that which is precious. The evangelical church can either be apart from the problems in Northern Ireland or it can be a part of God's answer to the

problem. ECONI has encouraged dialogue and research and it has sought to help Christians think biblically about the conflict. Christians who are active in political parties or are regular voters for one particular party need to ask the question: "Where does the final authority rest?" It cannot be with a party or any political philosophy but only with God and his Word. Rather than less we need more of God's Word applied in love in our society.

**Ken Irvine is senior pastor of Kings Fellowship, Bangor, and director of CARE AND COUNSEL, a community outreach to the marginalised and vulnerable in Bangor. He is also a member of the ECONI Steering Group.**

18 April 2000

## **Fancy Models or Straw Dolls?**

With reference to Esmond Birnie's article LEPU? (Lion & Lamb, Spring 2000), I believe that the validity of arguments based on composite models like Liberal Evangelical Post-Unionism (LEPU) has to be challenged. That is because such theoretical constructs can often represent the impressions, perhaps even the prejudices, of the person who makes them rather than the actual beliefs of the people to whom they are attributed. It is hard to resist the conclusion that such models are caricatures, more properly to be regarded as straw dolls handily erected for the purpose of easily knocking them down. Based on Esmond's analysis, I cannot identify a single person whom I could regard as even a half-fledged adherent of LEPU. The concept therefore seems to be something of a flight of fancy, its alleged characterisations and their extended implications bearing little relation to ECONI reality as I understand it.

Given my reference to fancy models and straw dolls, I don't propose to address all Esmond's assertions, but I feel I should touch on those that seem fundamental to his case. He suggests, for example, that LEPU is characterised by 'a moral agnosticism' that makes it reluctant to 'distinguish between the morality of the unionist and republican positions'. He wants a decisive distinction in favour of unionism, and fears for the future 'if there are no Christian commentators who can give an explicitly moral judgement'. Yet he doesn't provide a single example from our supreme Christian Commentator of any such judgement as between the rival political movements and factions of the early foundation period of Christianity.

It therefore hardly makes for moral agnosticism if likewise some Christians can't see Ulster politics as a straight moral drama between good and evil. But if we are to engage in political judgement, Scripture requires that our judgement be righteous and, unlike that of the Pharisees, that it begin with ourselves. Selective judgement and self-vindication will not do. Thus a righteous judgement might well favour the politics of the Union, yet reject the Orange doctrine

of conditional loyalty; Carson's armed rebellion against the Crown in Parliament; the Belfast pogroms; the gerrymandering; discrimination and the State violence – all of which were part of that politics. Equally, a righteous judgement would reject republican violence, and yet might regard the *res publica* as a noble idea – as indeed some conservative Christians do. Thus the notion that, unlike republicanism, unionism essentially inheres righteousness, law and order, and peace is just a product of revisionist amnesia. Political moral judgement is possible, but might not necessarily vindicate one side over another in circumstances where we might have to conclude that “all have sinned”, whatever the degrees of that sin may be.

I find it strange that Esmond, who wants moral judgement on political movements other than his own, should make the point that it is LEPU which ‘tends to emphasise a structural evil’ in contradistinction to his favoured conservative emphasis on personal moral responsibility. This seems contradictory. He wants the censure if not the condemnation of republicanism, but how can a collective movement *per se* be judged solely on the basis of personal and individual moral responsibility? But whatever the basis of our judgement, why should this not also apply to unionism? When the finger is pointed at unionism Esmond is so keen to dissociate himself from the idea of a collective guilt as to deny it altogether – a concept which, by implication and in effect, he doesn't hesitate to apply to republicanism.

One would have thought that structural evil or collective guilt were valid concepts in the context of an often violent politico-communal conflict, and could be seen as necessary principles for the exercise of any related moral judgement. In fact, the use of these concepts is no cop-out, but is in itself an exercise in moral judgement and one that certainly doesn't preclude or remove personal responsibility. Yet, although Esmond rightly acknowledges that ‘these positions need not be mutually exclusive’, he persists with his LEPU straw doll as though they were. I have no difficulty with the concept of collective guilt, and equally I know of no politically liberal-minded Christian, or indeed any Christian, who doesn't see the importance of personal moral responsibility. Scripture speaks clearly about both.

It is significant that Esmond has difficulty with the concept of collective guilt because he has a theological objection to it. But what if that objection is misplaced? He argues that a collective guilt would require ‘an equivalent substitution and atonement for that guilt on the Cross’, and would mean that Christ took upon himself the guilt of the ‘Ulster protestant community’, of ‘German anti-semitism’, or ‘white colonialism’, etc. But is there such a requirement? Even if we ignore the fact that his objection as stated actually does not in the direction of collective guilt, his whole proposition and its premise are biblically invalid. For the scriptures do teach collective guilt, often on a universal scale and sometimes in national or even group terms. As to groups, the Pharisees and the Sadducees

come to mind, as do the Cretians whom Paul in writing to Titus described as ‘liars, evil beasts and slow bellies’ – a collective judgement that did **not** require him to say that Christ took upon himself the guilt of the Cretian community *per se*. Salvation from that guilt was the common salvation that had appeared to all men, and came to those Cretians who received the grace of God in Christ, ‘*who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity*’ (Titus 2:11-14).

Paul in Romans teaches that collectively in Adam the whole world is guilty before God; that Israel is a disobedient and gainsaying people; and together with the Gentiles are alike all under sin (see chapters 9-11). But collective guilt at whatever level – be it universal, national or group – does *not* imply an equivalent collective substitutionary atonement, nor equivalent universal salvation. Nor does it deny an objective atonement. What the work of redemption does is to establish what can be described as the corresponding collectivity of God’s new creation. So Paul goes on to write of the antithesis of fallen man in Adam – the collectivity of the ‘all in Christ’. As regards Israel, there is a believing remnant within the collective ‘all Israel’ that shall be saved. As to the Gentiles, there is their collective ‘fullness’, described in Revelation as ‘the nations of them that are saved’. And so there is a theology of collective guilt and a corresponding collective redemption of the new creation in Christ. The objection to collective guilt is therefore unfounded, and the reason for that objection a *non sequitur*.

*The concept of collective guilt, being biblical, doesn’t carry with it any of the consequences Esmond has imagined pursuant to his hypothesis. One feels, however, that the denial of such guilt can be part of a political ‘hand-washing’ process involving a good deal of high-minded hypocrisy. It is all too convenient to make republicans the scapegoat for all the political sins in Ulster, and to ignore our own contribution to the situation. Many are now at it, but this is not the way of the Gospel, or the way to reconciliation. If we are to engage in moral political judgement we must judge righteously, in accordance with the scriptures, and start with ourselves. Show me a person who identifies with the collective political guilt of his/her own country or community, who can weep over his/her own Jerusalem, and who equally believes in a penitential moral responsibility for personal failure, and I will show you a person who has the mind of Christ and who, whatever else, is certainly no moral agnostic.*

**Bill Brown**

**Loughbrickland**

## Christian Mission and Modern Culture

### THE CHANGE OF CONVERSION AND THE ORIGIN OF CHRISTENDOM Trinity Press International £8.50

Alan Kreider

In this powerful little book we see how the early church before Constantine was converted and how in the centuries afterwards church and state together sought to bring all peoples under its umbrella. Not being either a theologian or a church historian, I found the title of this book confusing. Given that the objective for the series as set out in the preface is to help the church 'understand its missional responsibility in a culture of crisis' I wondered if the book itself would be accessible and of any benefit to me. However my concern fast disappeared as the author first told his story and then continued by telling the stories of individuals who figured in the first six centuries of church history. The author is a storyteller, so here we find real characters with whom we can identify.

The first two people we meet, Justin and Cyprian, are not portrayed as heroes suffering for their faith in the face of the antagonistic Roman society and culture of their day. Rather we see how their conversion involved changes in their 'beliefs, belonging and behaviour'. They, along with the Christian community, searched for ways of 'dealing with sex, the occult, wealth and violence that would be in keeping with the teachings of Jesus. What comes over strongly is that they were highly motivated in so doing, with well-developed programmes of teaching for those wishing to 'espouse the Christian way'.

The 'question-posing' behaviour of the early Christians aroused suspicion and concern. They did not witness publicly, 'they had no 'decades of evangelism'. Nor was their worship designed to attract non-Christians. The author argues that their community life, their beliefs, the sense of God's power in healing and exorcism and the 'beauty' of their lives were attractive. The reality of the living faith of these early Christians resonates with truth and is deeply inspiring.

The author portrays the early church as not making it easy for people to join. Potential members had to go through anything up to five years as catechumens before they were baptised and allowed to participate in common prayer, 'the kiss of peace' and communion. Becoming a Christian was a deliberate and demanding process involving distancing oneself from one's former life and developing practices and priorities of this community.

Following the 'conversion' of the emperor Constantine, there were initially inducements and then compulsion on the part of the authorities for people to become Christians. By the time of Augustine of Hippo (early fifth century) fear was motivating people to become catechumens and the attractive life of Christian people was less in evidence than it had been earlier. Christian commitment and behaviour became diluted, not all Christians believing that changes in behaviour should precede baptism.

Through the sermons of Caesarius, a bishop in Arles in the first half of the sixth century, we are shown how conversion became more perfunctory. Infant baptism was becoming common, and a picture is painted of church life that is anarchic. The people resisted the demands of the church to change their behaviour, conversion was too costly, especially if it involved loving one's enemies. They continued with their pagan worship and practices, developing a community religion. The church's response was to preach conversion, the result of which was the development of monasticism. The author becomes more reflective at this point, beginning to examine how the Christian message can be introduced into a cultural framework. He summarises succeeding centuries of church history as Europe became 'Christendom' by a further diminishing of catechetical teaching and an augmenting of the power of the host cultures.

In the final chapter the author reverts to a more analytical approach in providing a catalogue of the characteristics of Christendom in terms of belief, belonging and behaviour. Following a brief examination of today's post-Christendom western world, he suggests three 'clues' in the early church which are relevant to Christian mission in Western culture. He queries if insight into truth grows out of action, in contrast to the view, prevalent in the Protestant traditions today, that experience is the most important ingredient of conversion.

This little book is well worth reading. The title describes the content quite well but it would have been helpful to have more stories and insight into how Christendom affects both the church and western society today.

The author has carefully not written from a given position. All sectors within the church should feel uncomfortable in reading this book. We are being given the opportunity to learn from the past, seeing where our roots have arisen but also appreciating how others have grown. Like the listeners to Jesus' parables, it is up to us whether we want to be taught, whether we want to change.

The author also applies his practice of examining belief, belonging and behaviour to our own culture. Are we holding on to beliefs, ways of belonging and behaviour which have been shaped more by the values and lifestyles of society in past generations rather than critiquing these and seeking to understand our society today in the light of God's Word? What is the Gospel in a society where truth is relative, where experience is reality?

Alan Kreider helps us observe how Christians became 'residents' rather than being 'resident aliens'. In many parts of the world today Christians are 'resident aliens' but in Northern Ireland many Christians have an expectation that those who accept their particular brand of Christianity and political affiliation should be 'resident' whilst those who do not are deemed aliens. We see political threats and in turn expect political measures to defend our culture, our particular religious, national and ethnic identity. This abuse of power and concern for political and ethnic identity is both deeply at odds with Jesus' life and teaching and detrimental to our discipleship as evidenced so clearly by the change in conversion reported in this book.

**Ethel White is a member of the ECONI Central Coordinating Group.**

# Certificate in Biblical Peace Building

Autumn 2000

This year we launch the Certificate in Biblical Peace-building, a two-year course aiming to equip Christians to address community division in Northern Ireland and the long term task of peace-building.

The Certificate in Biblical Peace-building brings together the individual courses, which ECONI has facilitated in the past. Each course may be taken independently or you may wish to consolidate your experience by enrolling on the Certificate course. Attendance at previous ECONI courses can be credited retrospectively, and details are available from the office.

The Certificate is awarded on completion of six modules, which are offered over a two-year period.

**Module One**                      **Journey in Understanding**  
Thursday nights  
**28<sup>th</sup> September 2000 – 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2000**  
7.30pm – 10.00pm

This six-week course, aims to provide a framework in which participants can examine the nature and consequences of division in Northern Ireland in relation to the identities we nurture and hold. Integral to the course is a desire to provide a Biblical basis to address the implications of identity and division, for authentic Christian witness.

**Module Two**                      **Bridge Builders 1 – Building Peace in a Divided Community**  
Tuesday nights  
**10<sup>th</sup> October 2000 – 5<sup>th</sup> December 2000**  
7.30pm – 10.00pm

Designed to inform, motivate and equip Christians in the task of building peace in the communities in which we live. Over ten-weeks this course explores issues of identity and conflict, and sets out a Biblical mandate for peace building. This course also includes a field visit to consolidate the learning from the course material.

Courses are held in the ECONI offices.

Full details on these courses and the Certificate in Biblical Peace Building are available from Lynda Gould 028 9032 5258 or [lynda@econi.org](mailto:lynda@econi.org)

ECONI is looking for a

## Volunteer Business Manager

Main responsibilities include:

- Drafting Budgets
- Preparing cash flow projections
- Monitoring the allocation and use of designed grants

Other tasks in the administration of ECONI Ltd in support of the Director and financial management are also required.

We believe the post requires around 20 hours per week and may suit someone who has taken early retirement. Full competency in appropriate computer programmes would be necessary.

For further information contact  
David Porter or  
Gwen Montgomery at ECONI  
on (028) 9032 5258



# and finally

## CENTRE FOR CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIANITY

### SEEK THE WELFARE OF THE CITY

#### Church and Society in Scotland and Ireland

The Centre for Contemporary Christianity is organising a major conference in September. Local speakers will be joined by guests from churches in Scotland. Together they will explore the challenge to the identity and role of the church, both in ministry and mission and in public witness to society.

Our final two speakers are now confirmed. They are Rev Tony Davidson (Minister 1st Armagh Presbyterian) and Rev Drew Gibson (lecturer in Theology Belfast Bible College). See the enclosed brochure for details.

**Dates** 25-26 September 2000 in Belfast

## THIRD CATHERWOOD LECTURE

- Tuesday 26 September 2000
- Speaker - **Professor Duncan Forrester**, Professor of Christian Ethics and Practical Theology at the University of Edinburgh, and Director of the Centre for Theological and Public Issues.
- Subject - **Trust and Risk: Christian Virtues in Politics?**

The third annual Catherwood Lecture will bring the conference **Seek the Welfare of the City** to a conclusion. For further information contact Alwyn Thomson at the ECONI Office Tel: **028 9032 5258** or email [alwyn@econi.org](mailto:alwyn@econi.org)

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Thinking Biblically **Building Peace**