

lion & lamb



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NOT OF THIS WORLD

Last year ECONI commissioned Glenn Jordan to research the current attitudes, beliefs and practices of evangelicals in Northern Ireland. During the intervening period Glenn has interviewed 72 people who broadly identified with the evangelical tradition and who were willing to comment on a variety of themes ranging from evangelicals and politics to evangelical identity. The outcome of this research will be published as a book under the title **Not of this World**, available from ECONI and local bookstores from March 2001.

In the meantime, we invited three disparate people to comment on a draft of Glenn's work and their reviews appear in this issue of **Lion & Lamb**. The three contributors. Derek Tidball (Principal of London Bible College) believes '*Jordan has written a revealing and disturbing book*'; Wallace Thompson from the Caleb Foundation concluded that '*the book is, in essence, a propaganda exercise*'; Malachi O'Doherty, a freelance journalist, found that Jordan's research confirmed his experience of evangelicalism, as a culture '*constructed around a conviction of being right*'.

To give you a brief taste of Glenn Jordan's work we have published his 'Epilogue', in which he offers some personal reflections based on his research. These include the need for evangelicals to develop a deeper appreciation of their particular history and of Christian tradition in general; the cultivation of a new theology of community in order to help our understanding of the Bible; a challenge for evangelicals in Northern Ireland to engagement with Catholics in a more gracious and understanding manner.

In our major article, **Evangelicalism at its Best**, Patrick Mitchel (Director of Studies at the Irish Bible Institute) reflects on four attractive features of evangelicalism: Historic Orthodoxy, Good News, Relevance and Radicalism. He argues that evangelicalism is an empowering tradition which is '*enormously adaptable to changing social contexts*' and a liberating experience, because its '*fluid and open nature reflects something of the radical boundary-breaking message of the New Testament*'. In an important aside, Patrick seeks to differentiate evangelicalism from fundamentalism, identifying the latter as a child of the early twentieth century, born out of reaction to modernity. He argues that the distinguishing differences between these traditions are discernible in the issues of separatism, cultural criticism and social withdrawal.

Finally, we are delighted to have a short article from David Hewitt, a founding member of ECONI, who was recently appointed as our first President. In **Truth to Live** David appeals for an evangelicalism that is distinctive in its faith values and commitment, unapologetic in its fidelity to scripture, confident in the relevancy of its witness yet open, humble and gracious in its engagement with the world.

I believe this is an important edition of **Lion & Lamb** and that the issues we are considering are significant for the future of evangelicals in Ireland. However, many of you reading these pages may not necessarily identify with an evangelical faith perspective and I hope the material does not seem too incestuous. On the contrary, I trust the genuine process that ECONI is engaged in - to help discern the nature of Christian witness in our divided society - will be insightful to all who are concerned with the integrity of the church and the healing of our wounds.

Derek Poole
Editor

comment

Joyce Greenaway

Is you is, or is you ain't ...?

Picture the scene: a wet, wintry evening after the clocks go back. A deadline for an unfinished article looming, the 'personal view of the invited writer' on 'Why I am an Evangelical'. The last half hour of 'Louis Theroux's Weird Weekends', compliments of BBC2. No competition. With freshly brewed coffee in one hand and remote in the other, the writer sinks into the sofa and succumbs. Compelling viewing.

No, really. Regardless of the obvious attractions of doing anything but the thing I really ought to be doing, it was compelling viewing. The disingenuous Louis Theroux engaging with key figures of the New Orleans world of 'gangsta rap', including the enigmatic 30 year old 'Mr P', one of the richest young men in the United States, thanks to the rap scene. His message on how to be a rapper: 'Have heart'. 'Keep it real'. 'Be true to yourself'. In other words, do not create a persona, a life, a lie. True rap speaks from the heart, from who you are. If you come from the ghetto, you rap about the ghetto. If you don't, you don't. (Hence Louis had to rap about showers, wine and his small, non-automatic car...) 'TRU' was even tattooed across the chest of a muscular bodyguard to bear enduring testimony to the mantra.

Notwithstanding the sinister and disturbing nature of gangsta rap, this simple and indeed sincerely proffered advice struck a chord. Be real. Be true. It brought back memories of how, in the mid-1970s, on being asked if I was a Christian like my older sister, I found myself saying, "Oh yes," in a less than wholehearted way. Technically speaking, it was true in that I had prayed the prayer and believed the gospel, but the reality of a Christ-centred life was fairly alien to me. I remember vividly the feelings the exchange evoked in me because, even as a child, I knew something was not quite right. I was not quite 'real'.

I was faced with a similar situation in the Christian Union scene at university, where the terms 'evangelical' and 'sound' suddenly entered my world as seemingly interchangeable words. I knew instinctively that 'sound' was good, and I *wanted* to be sound, so as a keen fresher, I embraced 'evangelical' with an eagerness that belied the underlying feelings of unease. I could not at that time have written this article with truth and reality.

After some simple research, however, I discovered that 'evangelical' was in fact definable. I could see if the label was authentic to my life experience and beliefs. So I learnt that, if an evangelical is someone who believes in the centrality and supreme authority of Scripture, God's revealed plan of salvation through Christ's work on the cross, the need for personal appropriation of salvation, and the calling to a Spirit-filled life of service and mission in response, I was an evangelical all the time!

But why evangelical? Much is due to the influence of others on my life, partly hinted at in the previous anecdotes: our family life being based on Scripture, never defined as evangelicalism as such, but lived out in substance; the prevailing Christian evangelical culture of Northern Ireland in Scripture Union, UCCF and church fellowship; the teaching and example of great writers and preachers, like John Stott; and the discourse and practical witness of colleagues and friends.

As one who tends to eschew labels as divisive, whether designer or otherwise, I also find it refreshing to be part of a movement which appears to cross denominational boundaries and unite Christians of all traditions on common basics whilst admittedly strongly disagreeing on other areas of faith. It further appears to present a clear and objective paradigm for faith and living, which is helpful in a society heavily influenced by the 'pick 'n' mix' philosophies of post modernism. I see it as faithfully representing the basic truths of the gospel ... and what I believe.

So I end the story of how and why I am an evangelical, which I trust has heart, is real and is true to who I am. Sorry it doesn't rhyme.

Joyce Greenaway is a solicitor and a member of ChristChurch, Belfast.



we have a president

TRUTH TO LIVE

Evangelicals dominated church life in 19th century Britain. They felt a need to band together to defend the relevance of biblical Christianity. The same desire was growing in Europe and America, leading to a gathering in London in 1846 of over 800 Christian leaders from various countries who ‘... *found in one another’s company a unity which was instantaneous and intoxicating. All seemed to join in the spirit and to regard the moment as a foretaste of the harmony and joy of heaven*’. The Evangelical Alliance was voted into being without dissent. A doctrinal basis was debated and agreed. However, before the close of the conference differences arose. The British wanted a resolution passed that no slave owner could be a member of the Alliance. The Americans demurred, knowing it would have split their Christian community. The aim of having an international Evangelical Alliance had to be abandoned, leaving each country to form its own national alliance.

History bears witness to the splintering tendency of evangelicalism. This is regrettable but perhaps inevitable, for two reasons. First, those who are most committed to the Bible as containing God’s self-revelation will take most care over its interpretation. Thoughtful study begets convictions, not all of which are inspired. At times they fail to see the wood for the trees. *“You search the scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness of me; yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.”* Second, those who most sincerely want to acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord of their lifestyle will feel distinctly uncomfortable, even angry, at the shallow, false and sometimes blatantly self-indulgent value system of the world around. At times they retreat to the comfort zones of piety and fellowship, parting company from fellow Christians who fail to retreat with them.

Those of us who were shaped by the writings of Alan Stibbs, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, James Packer and John Stott will never question the importance of theological centralities. They are basic to evangelicalism. Church history illustrates why these must be identified and defended. But it is the security of this foundation of truth that sets us free to treat as non-essential those other matters of debate that can so easily divide believers. Do not the scriptures themselves caution us about delusions of certainty on every issue? Jesus did not have confidence in his disciples’ ability to distinguish the wheat from the weeds, and said they should be allowed co-exist until harvest-time. Paul, despite special divine revelation, was conscious that his understanding was only partial. Even if we can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and have a faith that moves

mountains, but have not love, we are nothing. Our salvation is by grace, through faith, not by our understanding of the doctrines of grace and faith.

How we live in this world as disciples of Christ cannot be taken lightly. The prince of this world is Satan. We must not conform to the world’s values. The world’s wisdom is foolish. Friendship with the world is hatred towards God. If the world hates us we should not be surprised. We will never be regarded by the world as the nicest people to have around. We should expect the world to think us odd. Our call is to be different. Moral positions are often resented. “Persecution,” says John Stott, “is simply the clash between two irreconcilable value systems”.

But we are in the world and for a purpose. If Christ is Lord, we have no alternative but to do what we can to understand the values he taught and lived, and try in some measure to follow them. He said he did not come to condemn or to judge the world. He seemed to go out of his way to break the rules of institutional religion by associating with and helping outcasts, beggars, lepers, women, prostitutes, Samaritans, publicans and sinners. He kept himself unspotted from the world but not by physical separation. The incarnation was a messy business. He prayed that his followers would not be taken out of the world, but that they would be kept from the evil one, as strangers in the world, commissioned to influence it for good in the saving of souls and social action. “With God so interested in the world, it is a wonder that contemporary religion has often seemed so uninterested,” writes Jim Wallis in **Faith Works** (Random House 2000).

ECONI’s strength and influence will require that we maintain a commitment to the doctrinal centralities of evangelicalism. We cannot therefore be comfortable with liberal ecumenism on the one hand or, on the other, with a fundamentalism that elevates non-essentials to doctrinal centralities. But we should continue to maintain good listening relationships with both of these groups and all others who have a voice in our community, including those who are critical of us. We should enjoy and exploit the freedom, born of our commitment to doctrinal certainties, to explore the implications for our community of the radical gospel of Christ, without the paralysing fear of having to look over our shoulder. We must respond when our conscience, honed by scripture, compels us to be part of the risky process of healing relationships in our still seriously divided community. We will not always get it right. But we will certainly get nothing right if nothing is all we ever do.

David Hewitt was appointed the first President of ECONI on 20 November 2000.



not of this world

Evangelicalism at its best

Patrick Mitchel

John Stott argues that evangelical christianity, founded on the teaching of Jesus himself, is 'authentic christianity, true, original and pure.'¹ The purpose of this article is to explore the basis for this high claim by looking at evangelicalism 'at its best'. In other words, what is the appeal of a movement that is now perhaps the most dynamic and fastest growing stream of christianity in the world?

This narrow focus means that I am not concerned with the debate on defining evangelicalism² or discussing the problems associated with contemporary evangelicalism's apparently boundless diversity (see Glenn Jordan's article elsewhere in this issue). The question before us is, what is it that attracts people to a christian faith that is distinctly evangelical? First, however, for a sense of balance and realism it is worth commenting on the 'imperfect' side of evangelical life.

To Err is Human

Evangelicalism is far from flawless and has no shortage of stern critics. External commentators have pejoratively dismissed it as fundamentalist, fanatical, arrogant, superficial and divisive. Internal critics are all too aware of evangelical shortcomings. At times, when living in a christian community used to test her sanctification, a patient godly lady I know used to joke, "To live above with the saints you love, that will be glory. To live below with the saints you know, well, that's another story!" Authors on evangelicalism acknowledge the reality of the movement's 'dark side'. Alister McGrath notes evangelicalism's predilection for guilt trips, burn-outs, intolerance and authoritarian leadership. After over sixty years of christian service, John Stott continues 'to be profoundly grieved by our evangelical tendency to fragment.'³ Derek Tidball asks the question, "Would Jesus be an evangelical today?" and concludes, "Sadly the answer cannot be an unequivocal 'yes'." Jesus would affirm many evangelical priorities. However, a reading of the Gospels suggests that ... he would not be at home in today's evangelical subculture with its emphasis on external behaviour and unimportant matters. He would burst through the bonds of humanly-created evangelical traditions as he did the humanly-created Jewish traditions of his own day. In view of his forthright criticisms of the scribes and Pharisees one cannot help but feel he would voice similar criticisms of much that goes on within contemporary evangelicalism. Its pride, arrogance, sense that evangelicals have it right whilst others do not, its acceptance of people on the basis of their spiritual achievements, rather than out of grace, would all merit his censure. His wide embrace of others, his identification with the rejects, his association with the immoral, his willingness to be entertained by the suspect, breathe a different atmosphere from much contemporary evangelicalism. There was, in him, none of the rigidity and defensiveness that one can encounter in the evangelical ghetto.⁴

Many readers will be all too aware of the accuracy of Tidball's criticisms. As a movement propelled by imperfect people, evangelicalism is marred by sin. Therefore, as we move to a consideration of evangelicalism's 'best' qualities, we need to do so with humility. Evangelicals have a double motivation for practising humility. First, we have much to repent of and be humble about. Second, the nature of the gospel of grace destroys any basis for human pride (Gal 6:14).

The Appeal of Evangelicalism: Historic Orthodoxy

What then is so attractive about evangelical faith? At least four different themes can be identified. As the opening quotation makes plain, evangelicalism claims to be nothing else but original, historic, orthodox christianity. Evangelicals wholeheartedly affirm all the great ecumenical creeds (like the Creed of Nicea, the Apostle's Creed, Chalcedon etc.) that define the fundamental truths of the christian faith. An examination of a standard evangelical 'statement of faith' should substantiate this point. As James Packer puts it: *Evangelicalism is not just one 'ism' among many that our age has bred.*⁵ It is later diversions, such as Catholicism and Liberal Protestantism, which are 'eccentricities and novelties'.

Historically the term 'evangelical' can be traced backwards from its widespread use in the nineteenth century, an era of unparalleled evangelical influence. In the eighteenth century the term was used to refer to the 'evangelical revival' led by men like John Wesley and George Whitefield. In the previous century, it had been applied to the Puritans in England and the Pietists in Germany. Sixteenth century reformers like Luther adopted the designation *evangelici*, short for *evangelici viri* (evangelical men). As early as the fifteenth century, the precursor of the Reformation, John Wycliffe, had been called Doctor Evangelicus. Modern evangelicals claim as 'proto-evangelicals' earlier figures who accepted the twin pillars of evangelical belief, namely the absolute authority of scripture and salvation in Christ alone. For example, John Stott includes Augustine in this category. Irish Evangelicals happily endorse St. Patrick (amongst other early Irish christians like Columba and Columbanus) as an example of a christian informed by scripture and motivated to mission by his deep awareness of God's grace. From these early christians it is but a short step back to Jesus and the Bible, the ultimate source of authority for contemporary evangelicalism.

The significance of this long historical legacy is that evangelicalism 'at its best' is firmly rooted in the theological essentials of the Apostolic Gospel. It is noteworthy that during the recent global resurgence of evangelicalism there has been a significant decline of liberalism. Emptied of the supernatural, shaped to suit fickle modern trends and lacking conviction, clarity and purpose, liberal christianity had become simply an insipid reflection of secular society. As Alister McGrath remarks, it had managed to turn wine into water. A vital element,

therefore, of evangelicalism's attractiveness is a continued commitment to its theological essentials. Anchored in scripture and focused on the gospel of the cross of Christ, evangelicalism will continue to offer the ancient yet radical message of the christian faith to each generation. If, as some fear, it ever loses touch with its historic confessional core, it will be in grave danger of following liberalism's demise.

Good News

A second feature of evangelicalism's appeal is its focus on the *evangel* – the Good News (Luke 4:17-21). Not surprisingly, a defining characteristic of evangelicalism is evangelism (there is something amiss when the two become divorced in the life of a church or an individual). Evangelicals are people motivated to communicate a message. Given a great commission by their Lord (Mt. 28:18-20) to make and teach disciples in all nations, evangelicals are committed to the truth and life-changing power of the gospel. Towards the end of his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul reminds them of the basic facts of the gospel (1Cor 15:1-5a). It is by this gospel alone that they experienced salvation. The gospel is of 'first importance' and is based on real historical events. It depends on the substitutionary death of Jesus 'for our sins'. It hinges on the fact that 'he was raised on the third day', an event witnessed by the Apostles and others. Therefore, at the very centre of evangelical faith is a profound awareness of the astonishing and inspiring nature of the gospel. It is a movement sustained by a sense of worship, thankfulness, love and obedience to a God who 'so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son.' Evangelicals engage in evangelism not to manipulate people to 'join their group', but because they are convinced of the eternal significance and attractiveness of the message they have to share. It is a cold, rationalistic evangelical faith that believes merely in a set of abstract doctrines. At the heart of the movement is a shared experience, shaped by a shared theology. Donald Bloesch captures this balance well. An evangelical is ... *one who affirms the centrality and cruciality of Christ's work of reconciliation and redemption as declared in the scriptures; the necessity to appropriate the fruits of this work in one's own life and experience; and the urgency to bring the good news of this unmerited grace to a lost and dying world. It is not enough to believe in the cross and resurrection of Christ. We must personally be crucified and buried with Christ and rise with Christ to new life in the Spirit ... we must also be fired by a burning zeal to share this salvation with others. To be evangelical therefore means to be evangelistic.*⁶

Relevance

Authentic evangelicalism believes it is relevant because it is right. This is not arrogance. As we have noted, evangelicalism must remain faithful to the truth of the evangel regardless of the changing cultural context in which it exists. The evangelistic task, however, is to

communicate the historic gospel in an intelligible way to the modern world. Evangelicalism 'at its best' will be able to tread a middle path between compromise with the secular agenda of the world on the one hand (liberalism) and withdrawal from the world on the other hand. This is where it becomes necessary to distinguish evangelicalism from fundamentalism. Evangelicalism stands between liberalism and fundamentalism (although closer to the latter than the former). Fundamentalism is a child of the early twentieth century, born out of a reaction against the over-confident claims of modernism. Despite unity on the 'fundamentals' of the christian faith, evangelicalism and fundamentalism soon parted ways. An important factor in the severance of the two movements was that of how to relate the gospel to the modern world. Historically, three symptoms of fundamentalist and evangelical differences on this question are respectively:

Separatism	from both the world and other christians, as opposed to association with other christians;
Cultural criticism	rather than cultural engagement;
Social withdrawal	as opposed to social action.

Another way of putting this is to use the theologian Richard Niebuhur's model. Evangelicalism believes in Christ **transforming** culture whereas fundamentalism adheres to Christ **against** culture. Evangelicals believe that fundamentalism is seriously flawed on this and other issues (James Packer once described fundamentalism as ... *'evangelicalism at something less than its best'*). Evangelicalism 'at its best' seeks to reflect the graciousness of God's acceptance of sinners in Christ in its relationships with other christians (see Rom.15:7 *'Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you'*). It believes that it is being biblically faithful in proclaiming the apostolic gospel in ways that engage with contemporary culture (witness Paul's evangelistic address in the Greek Areopagus in Acts 17). Such contextualisation of the gospel is not compromise, but amounts to responsible christian apologetics. Contemporary Evangelicalism has also 'rediscovered' the place of social action alongside evangelism. Nineteenth century Evangelicals in particular had an outstanding record on social action. This emphasis was lost for much of the twentieth century due to evangelical reaction against liberalism's 'social gospel'. The highly significant evangelical Lausanne Covenant of 1974 expressed ... *'penitence both for our neglect of our christian social responsibility and for our naïve polarization in having sometimes regarded evangelism and social action as mutually exclusive'*.⁷ It went on to affirm that christian social duty finds its biblical foundation in four doctrines, namely the doctrines of God, man, salvation and the kingdom.

Radicalism

Two key tenets of evangelicalism, derived from the Reformation, are 'Scripture alone' and 'Christ alone'. Evangelicals recognise no higher authority than that of Scripture. They reject that salvation lies anywhere else but in personal faith in Christ. As the Reformation showed, these beliefs have radical implications. Evangelicalism 'at its best' therefore has a questioning, sceptical attitude to institutional religion. No human tradition, whether a church or system of doctrine, is exempt from the probing searchlight of Scripture. The individual does not need any third party through whom to approach God. Evangelicalism, not being a denomination itself, transcends denominational boundaries and interests. This is at once practically empowering and immensely liberating.

It is practically empowering, in that evangelicalism is enormously adaptable to changing social contexts. David Bebbington concludes, towards the end of his masterly study, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s*, that 'nothing could be further from the truth than the common image of evangelicalism being ever the same.'⁸ While the movement's core characteristics may have remained constant, during this period evangelicalism was transformed, both outwardly in terms of social composition and political attitudes, and inwardly in terms of theology and behaviour. Such flexibility is appealing. Evangelicalism is a dynamic, not an 'establishment', faith. At its best, it enjoys continual reformation and renewal. Historically, if trapped within an institutional straitjacket it inevitably breaks free, whether through a 'Great Awakening' or some other means.

It is liberating, in that evangelicalism's fluid and open nature reflects something of the radical boundary breaking message of the New Testament. In his embrace of 'sinners', lepers, Gentiles, women, tax collectors, Samaritans, prostitutes, the weak, the sick and the powerless, Jesus undermined the social, religious and cultural barriers of his day. Paul was only echoing the example of his Lord when he declared that 'there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus' (Gal. 3:28). Evangelicalism is right to give priority to individual faith and to emphasise the biblical doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. Individuals matter to God, regardless of their identity. Evangelicalism's egalitarianism is immensely appealing. It offers a radical counter culture to the values of a world obsessed with status, achievement and identity.

¹ J. R. W. Stott, *Christ the Controversialist* (London: Tyndale, 1970) 13.

² For further discussion see Alywn Thomson's excellent article in *Lion and Lamb*, No.14, Autumn 1997.

³ J. R. W. Stott, *Evangelical Truth* (Leicester: IVP, 1999) 9.

⁴ D. J. Tidball, *Who are the Evangelicals?* (London: Marshall Pickering, 1994) 239.

⁵ J. I. Packer, 'Fundamentalism' and the Word of God (London: IVF, 1958) 38.

⁶ D. G. Bloesch, *The Future of Evangelical Christianity: A Call for Unity Amid Diversity* (New York: Doubleday, 1983) 17.

⁷ J. R. W. Stott, *Lausanne Occasional Papers: No. 3 The Lausanne Covenant - an Exposition and Commentary by John Stott* (Charlotte, North Carolina: Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, 1975) 15-16.

⁸ D. W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s*, (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989) 271.

Patrick Mitchel is Director of Studies at the Irish Bible Institute.



not of this world

A PERSONAL REFLECTION (Final Chapter)

Glenn Jordan

As evangelicals we are not given to much introspection. Our reactions, our thoughts, our comments tend to be direct, reflecting a prior established position on just about anything. That position once arrived at, sometimes gets so firmly fixed it is resistant to change or alteration. I use 'we' for the first time in this book because I want to identify myself with this diverse community. I am an evangelical. But like many of those who have spoken to me in the course of this research I am uncomfortable taking the name without some attempt to qualify it for myself. I know that there are some evangelical readers who will turn to this chapter first, perhaps rightly, in order to discern where I'm coming from and to gain clues as to why I have said what I have said. My qualification of the term will therefore be important not just for me but also for those who will agree or disagree with my conclusions.

I'll start with a recent chance encounter with a prominent evangelical clergyman who expressed surprise at finding me at an Anglican event. "This guy is confused" he said, "He was raised a Catholic, worships with the Presbyterians, was married in the Church of Ireland and works for the Methodists." What he may not have known is that in the early years following my conversion experience I worshipped with the Brethren, and following my move to Northern Ireland I joined up with a, by now, well known New Church. And yes, for all but the last 13 years I lived in the Republic of Ireland. All of this either makes me ideally prepared for such a research task as this, or radically disqualifies me!

My upbringing was in a devout Roman Catholic family in Bray, Co Wicklow. I was an altarboy in the Queen of Peace Parish in the town, and continued to serve there for several years after my conversion, even as I was attending a Brethren Sunday School in the afternoons. My evangelical conversion was a fairly traditional one, on the South Beach in Greystones at a beach mission. I have no idea of the date other than it was sometime in late July. Though the circumstances that brought about my eventual departure from the Catholic Church are strange, and also clouded for want of a good memory, insofar as I know myself I do not bear any ill-will or animus towards Catholicism, as is the case with many former Catholics who have embraced Protestant evangelicalism. On the contrary, I owe Catholicism a profound debt of gratitude. The spiritual nurture I received as a boy through church, school and family created a deep sense of awe for God that, sadly, I find is missing in much of contemporary evangelicalism. I have yet to experience there the sense of transcendence I knew in the Catholic church. For all our talk of new worship styles and experiences we are still earth bound in much of it. That sense of fear and awe is still with me and continues to influence my approach to the things of God, to the Scriptures and to preaching. It is also a sense that often sets me at odds with even my closest friends who have been brought up within Protestantism. This awe is more than the kind of fear that exists in the absence of grace—the kind of thing that unthinking Protestants often ascribe to Catholicism. It is the fear of otherness and mystery. No doubt it has also influenced some of the things I have said in this book.

Evangelicalism has given me other, equally valuable things. The small Brethren Assembly where we worshipped - over a period of years all of my family came to worship there - rooted deep in me a love of Scripture which served to complement the experience of God that was mine from my upbringing. Student life in University College, Dublin, and the Christian Union that met there also helped to develop me as a believer and to prepare me for future steps. When I moved up North I encountered a new community, a new political environment and new challenges. Six months after I moved I realised that other than people I encountered professionally in my job I didn't have a single non-evangelical friend, which was a startling realisation. It required a deliberate decision to begin moving out of that cocoon and to develop relationships which I still cherish today. I worshipped with a New Church till I married, yes in the Church of Ireland, and we moved house and eventually settled in a local Presbyterian Church. I'm still there, eleven years later, though I'm not sure that I am yet qualified to call myself a Presbyterian. And now I work, in an inner city context, with a well established Methodist Mission.

That potted history will help some to understand where I come from on this matter. My Catholicism taught me to fear a holy God, Brethrenism gave me a love for the Scriptures, the New Church helped me experience worship and community, Presbyterianism and Anglicanism enabled me to understand the value of tradition and liturgy. Today, with the Methodists I am being confirmed again in my commitment to the need to root Gospel truth in the reality of people's lives. And I still want to call myself an evangelical. I am thankful that I have encountered God in so many ways, in so many varied situations and in so many people. Through it all I remain deeply committed to an evangelical confession of faith, though I fear that it is becoming more and more a cultural phenomenon rather than a living branch of Christianity. I fear that as in Luther's time and Wesley's time faith is being locked into a peculiar cultural milieu which serves only those who inhabit it and distances those who don't make the standard required by the insiders. I say it because I fear the fundamentalists want to make evangelicalism their preserve. However much some quarters of evangelicalism would want to disown them, much as they wish to disown the rest of us, it can't be done. We may not appreciate the fact that some of the family have precious few manners, or that others don't seem to care what company they keep, but we must acknowledge that we are all part of the wider family. I say it because I fear we are becoming increasingly alien to those outside the movement. Regrettably it is the case that the loudest voices dominate the room, and because of that evangelicalism is perceived to be loud, intolerant and conservative to the point of reactionary. Outsiders see little of the grace, the humility, the warmth and goodness of countless evangelicals who are embarrassed and shamed by the angry voices of evangelicalism. It is my hope that this book will help those of you who are not evangelicals to catch a glimpse of the vitality and variety that is so much a part of us. We are more than our loudest voices.

I offer here a few thoughts based upon my experience of this research. To those who have done some thinking about these things there may be very little that is new, but some things bear repeating. At the very least let them stimulate you to further reflection. I recognise also that perhaps this is a chapter more suited to those on the inside of the movement. Having given ourselves a health check this may be part of the prescription necessary to move towards better health. For those of you outside the movement and sympathetic to us, this chapter might help you to be patient with us as we chart our way into the future.

History and tradition

I have before me a long list of names. Many of them would be recognised by any evangelical who is even vaguely aware of the evangelical firmament outside of Northern Ireland. They are the brightest stars in our small patch of sky - the writers, scholars, preachers and celebrities that have contributed to the growth of evangelicalism in recent years. Most of the rest of the names would be recognised only by a few, in some cases only by those who mentioned the names to me in our interview. For these are the personal friends, peers or family members who have lived a consistent Christian life within the horizon of those of us feeling our way into the world of faith.

Evangelical history is a thin crust resting over the laid down faith strata of two millennia, and the list of names reveals that our history is both overwhelmingly recent and intensely personal. There are some notable exceptions, of course. Some clergy felt obliged to mention certain icons of their particular denominational heritage, Calvin or Luther, for instance. Others were moved to mention missionary heroes of the nineteenth century who had fired their vision of faith in their younger years. But on the whole we offer little more than a backward glance to the places from which we have come.

Like the prodigal son we have left the security of the family home. Caring little about exactly who has lived there over the years, we are enjoying life today on the wealth stored up by those now consigned to ancient history. I think it is time we came to our senses. In a world increasingly xenophobic about history and tradition there is a great temptation to believe that whatever success we may attain in connecting faith and contemporary culture, it is achieved solely with contemporary tools. But we would be fooling ourselves.

We are suffering today from a contemporary disease and the cure may very well be found in two complementary remedies. Firstly, I think we need to revisit our history as evangelicals. Throughout the world today evangelicalism is on the rise. It is estimated that by 2010 the Pentecostal version will be the largest Christian expression of faith in Latin America, overtaking even Roman Catholicism¹. Recent figures in the UK reveal that in the 1990s, the decade of evangelism, as overall church attendance plummeted, evangelical churches were running against the trend. The Evangelical Alliance claims to speak for over one

million evangelicals and can frequently claim the ear of the most powerful in the land. Here in Northern Ireland it is estimated that 33% of religiously active Protestants would consider themselves evangelical, approximately 12% of the entire population².

To that long list featuring New Church Evangelicals, Charismatic Evangelicals, Presbyterian Evangelicals, Anglican Evangelicals, Methodist Evangelicals, Baptist Evangelicals and so on we now add Roman Catholic Evangelicals, even though many would be confused by the latter phrase, or even see it as internally contradictory. We shall return to this issue later. Everywhere one looks there is growing evidence in support of Alister McGrath's bold claim that 'the Christian vision of the future now seems increasingly to belong to evangelicalism'³.

Numerically, academically and in terms of access to political and social power evangelicalism is in a healthy state in many parts of the world. But we were here before. By getting in touch with the history of evangelicalism we may learn from both the successes and the failures of the past. In the early 1800s evangelicalism reached an influential peak. Yet by 1870 the decline of evangelical influence was unmistakable and Britain had reached what has been called the 'Victorian Crisis of Faith'⁴. The movement was ill-prepared for the cold winds of modernity in the form of Darwinism, biblical criticism and the explicit assaults of Lecky and Huxley, among others. In such an unfavourable environment, many found shelter in the isolated cove of fundamentalism and they remained there till after the Second World War.

Secondly, we need to recover the merit of Christian tradition. Evangelicalism has always been a populist movement and we have tended to avoid the mysteries of sign and symbol. Our churches reflect this in that they are generally plain and functional to ensure that nothing should distract us. But this flight from mystery has been elevated to a principle that is no longer useful. I think we need to recover the value of ritual, liturgy, sign and symbol that has come down to us through centuries of Christian practice. We need to root ourselves again. Otherwise our worship, for instance, will be shaped solely by what is current. Is it any wonder that critics of current worship movements within evangelicalism have pointed to the self-centredness and pseudo-romanticism of our new music, that seems to owe more to the therapy culture than to reflection on theology?

Rooting ourselves in a wider and deeper Christian tradition may help us to develop a more robust spirituality capable of thriving in an era of cultural upheaval. It may also be necessary for our evangelism as we offer, with much else besides, a sense of rootedness to those in our society growing increasingly aware of a lack of connection to anything other than the immediate. We can be confident that ours is a history that stretches further back than John Stott or Billy Graham, further back than even Wesley or Edwards. In fact the so-called Magisterial Reformers themselves, like Luther and Calvin, were building on a tradition that stretched back to the earliest Christian centuries. As evangelicals we need to redeem that depth of

spiritual heritage to ensure that what grows in our thin crust of history will have deep roots to serve our descendants well for the future.

We need to constantly check our practice of the faith to ensure that we don't popularise God and reduce our understanding of grace. The temptation for evangelicals is to see grace linked solely with atonement. But by doing that we risk losing the capacity for awe as we bottle up our imaginations in the straight-jacket of systematics and plain-walled churches. We need more colour in our faith, more creativity and more art. Eugene Peterson says it best when he says, '*Right now, one of the essential Christian ministries in and to our ruined world is the recovery and exercise of the imagination.*'⁵ To rightly serve our world we need first to recover imagination for ourselves.

What encourages me is that among young evangelicals in particular there is evidence of just such a recovery. They are increasingly dissatisfied with what they are receiving from their leaders and those of us who are older need to encourage this dissatisfaction. They are more open to the exploration of sign and symbol as aids to understanding faith and we need to provide space for them to question our practice of the faith, and space also for them to try new things. We need to give thought to the Christian education and formation of our young people. By all means spend time in developing new forms of liturgy but our children and young people need help to understand, appreciate and experience the reality of the centuries old traditions and practices of the Christian church. Rather than sealing them in the vaults of history, we could give these traditions some fresh air, and maybe by so doing we will receive some fresh insights.

Community

As a Christian movement we are sadly lacking in a sustaining theology of community. This is due, in no small part, to our insistence on the personal dimension of faith and relationship with God. In no way should this be undermined. It is of course essential that each individual engages with God, but we must be careful of confusing personal with individual. If we are to remain relevant as a movement we need to develop our thinking on and practice of community. Our congregations, parishes and assemblies must be more than Sunday morning preaching stations but must look also to the nurturing of community life. The growing presence of small groups in local churches, and even the phenomenon of the cell church, where the faithful meet almost exclusively in the context of small accountability groups, is testimony to the growing realisation of the need for community.

Though many evangelicals are members of small Bible study groups there are many more who wouldn't countenance such a thing. It must be said that many of the small groups that do exist lack real focus. There is a felt need for a support network but should they be Bible study

groups, fellowship groups, discipleship or accountability groups? By lacking a clear purpose the groups often try to fulfil all of these needs and do none of them very well.

We need a new theology of community in order to help our understanding of the Bible. Most of us have grown up within a tradition that stressed the necessity of reading and studying the Bible. Again this is important and a crucial element in growing to maturity in the faith. Many of us, however, have read these centuries old writings without any reference whatsoever to how these same writings have been understood and interpreted in the past. Our private reading and interpretation may also be a contributory factor to the fracturing of evangelicalism. With the rejection of the Pope of Rome has come the establishment of a myriad of individual popes each with the ability to speak *ex cathedra*. With a recovery of a theology and the experience of community will come a renewed sense of the Church as an interpretative community. It is noticeable, for instance, that in many evangelical groups the practice of biblical discipline by the leadership is virtually non-existent. Many clergy and leaders will express privately the concern that this is because their flock will not countenance such a thing. Giving such a role to the Church to execute effectively will require a new approach to the reading and interpretation of the Bible.

Understanding Catholics

Most evangelicals gain their understanding of Catholic theology from other evangelicals. Rarely, if at all, do they learn about it from direct conversation and debate with Catholic people themselves. The focus of the learning is almost exclusively on the controversial issues. Insofar as the same is true of Catholic people in their understanding of evangelicals, the tendency is for both groups to be reinforced in their prejudice and strengthened in their ignorance. Elsewhere in the world there appears to be a warming of relationships as both communities battle a common secular foe. It is probably too much to hope for such a development on a wide scale in Northern Ireland, though it is happening in a small way. Perhaps if political developments contribute to the overall sense of confidence and security more space will be provided for dialogue. In the meantime it would be helpful, and less condescending, if evangelicals resolved to hear about Catholicism from the adherents themselves rather than from the implacable foes of Rome. The difficulty here is that with such a strong conviction of truth, evangelicals are not always the most gracious when faced by someone with whom we differ. Nor are we all that attuned to nuances, preferring our truths in the meat and two veg variety—plain and simple with no fancy stuff! Catholic people may take a crumb of comfort perhaps in the realisation that our difficult relationships with you are not confined to you. We also have difficulty with ecumenists and liberal Christians. We even fall out among ourselves. The challenge to grow viable and sustainable relationships with those who differ from us will remain a significant challenge for evangelicals.

Conclusion

A comment from Des has stayed with me. He was pessimistic about the future prospects of evangelicalism, fearing it was becoming too insular and self-absorbed. He commented that in his experience it was churches outside the evangelical mainstream that were actually asking the profound questions about the church in society. Evangelicals often call these churches the liberal wing of Christianity yet, following a period in the doldrums, they appear to be re-emerging now and taking the territory that was once in the possession of evangelicals. Is it perhaps true that mainstream evangelicalism is retreating from the real task of relating faith to life? On the surface it would appear that this is not the case. On the surface church attendance at the prominent evangelical churches is still healthy, but are we growing as a movement? I'm not sure. So much growth in the 'successful' churches is through the poaching of disaffected members of other churches. The crying need for evangelicalism in Northern Ireland is to look outside. Just as the internationalising of the political issues here helped move the community towards some form of resolution, we need to start looking at the struggles and challenges faced by evangelicalism overseas.

I am not quite so pessimistic as Des, though I wouldn't be complacent either for there is undoubtedly much pain ahead for the evangelical family. Those who learn to adapt the profession of the Gospel to the demands of a new day will thrive, the others will be marginalized, and eventually fade. Whether we like it or not we are in the world, left here by our Lord for a purpose. We may wistfully dream about our eternal destiny but we cannot be excused from involvement in the here and now. The shape of that involvement must be determined by each succeeding generation as it works out the implications of the truth for that time. What is certain therefore is that the evangelicalism of the future will be as unlike the evangelicalism of our day as our day is unlike that of Wesley or Luther. The confession will not change, but the working out of it will, and for that I'm glad.

¹ Quoted in 'Defining Evangelicalism'

² A Future with Hope (ECONI 1998) p.9

³ Alister McGrath, *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1994) p. 1

⁴ cf. David Bebbington, 'Evangelicalism in Modern Britain, A History from the 1730s to the 1980s' p 114ff

⁵ Eugene Peterson, *Subversive Spirituality*, Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Co. (1997, Grand Rapids) pg 133

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not of this world

NOT OF THIS WORLD: An Exercise in Self-reflection

Derek Tidball

Anyone trying to write about British evangelicalism, as I have done, faces a stiff challenge. What is it that the diverse and often quarrelling members of the evangelical family together have in common? Why is it they argue so much? And how is it that in spite of all their failures they remain a strong and vibrant branch of the church; in fact, the only branch which is growing and countermanding the social and spiritual forces which are leading the rest of the church into decline?

Glenn Jordan's task is even more challenging since he writes out of the situation in Northern Ireland and seeks to introduce the evangelical family and the often perplexing place it plays in Ulster both to those outside it and those already within it. His chosen method is not to draw a map of the churches and institutions which make up evangelicalism but to let a diverse sample of evangelicals speak for themselves. So, after the briefest of sketches on the nature and history of evangelicalism, Jordan weaves together around common themes excerpts from seventy-two interviews he conducted with a cross-section of evangelicals. The result is that the reader almost feels as if he or she is eavesdropping on a conversation - sometimes a heated one - between friends.

The topics chosen for discussion are evangelical attitudes to spirituality, church, protestant identity, political engagement, Roman Catholicism, ecumenical and other relationships, violence and the future. Each topic is itself further divided so that it covers the important territory. So, for example, under spirituality the questions of conversion, daily devotions known as the Quiet Time, evangelism and the church are reviewed. Under relationships the questions of ecumenism, the charismatic movement and relationships with the Irish are covered.

The consequence of this method is that one is left with a strong impressionistic sense of the complexity of the evangelical subculture (the subject of the fifth chapter) whilst perhaps wishing for a few more explicit signs to help us read it. The diversity of the family is very evident and the selection of comments is marked by integrity. Real feelings, sometime raw feelings, are reported and criticisms, even of ECONI the sponsoring body, are frankly voiced. Whilst Glenn Jordan inevitably exercises a steer on the conversations, he has a very light hand on the tiller and only occasionally, usually towards the end of each chapter, do some of his own comments become explicit. We have to wait for his concluding comments in the Epilogue before we really learn much about him or his views.

The book is eminently readable and Jordan has a nice line in the use of imagery. He compares the confusing branches of the evangelical family to members of a mediaeval walled city. The various stances they adopt are categorised according to their reactions to the comings and goings of the city. Each wants to guard the gate and monitor the influx of the outside world which they regard as a threat. But they each do so in a different way. Oppositional evangelicals occupy the keep at the centre and keep a watch on the enemy from a distance. Inclusivist evangelicals are the diplomatic class. Confessional evangelicals monitor the flow of comings and goings with the outside world according to the traditions of the city. The bulk of ordinary citizens are cultural evangelicals and pietist. Lastly there are mystics - charismatic evangelicals - who identify that there is an enemy to oppose every bit as much as the warrior class but they identify a different enemy. The pity is that having developed the analogy Jordan does not make as much use of it as he subsequently could, although he returns to it occasionally.

Later he describes evangelicalism as an 'awkward teenager who desperately wants to be liked but who is ill-at-ease and rather gauche in company'. Relations with others don't come easily and signals of suspicion, even hostility, are transmitted which cause difficulty in relationships with other sections of the church.

It is perhaps this image which is the most telling one but one which could be taken a stage further than Jordan does. Perhaps evangelicals are not so much like one awkward teenager as a whole family of uncertain teenagers who have a great capacity to fight with each other, aggravate each other, distrust each other and fail to communicate in any meaningful way with each other and especially with their parents. It's not just that they are ill at ease with those outside the family, they are ill at ease with those in the family too.

The image follows through in several respects. Each family has its own routines and rituals, though teenagers often regard them as pointless and empty charades. Some contemporary evangelicals struggle with the spiritual disciplines, like the Quiet Time, inherited from a previous generation. Many teenagers use the home as a hotel, a place where services are provided (forgetting of course that you have to pay for them), rather than a genuine home. Evangelical attitudes to the church can sometimes be like that with denominations, in particular, becoming a 'flag of

convenience' under which the evangelical sails rather than carrying any real conviction. Some teenagers reject the family upbringing altogether, finding it too archaic or stifling. Jordan rightly points out that there is a dark side to evangelicalism with a drop-out rate of which we cannot be proud and a need for a group akin to 'Alcoholics Anonymous' to enable 'recovering evangelicals' to regain their faith.

When it comes to protestant identity, evangelicals are marked by confusion and angst just like the teenager struggling to find a secure adult identity. Jordan argues that Protestants suffer from 'victimhood' - another mark of teenage emotions - in sharp contrast to the enterprise culture of Catholicism. If this is so it is a complete reversal of an historical trend which is both worrying and fascinating at the same time.

When it comes to political engagement, whilst most avoid extremes there is no united view of the role which evangelicals should play. The fault-line between those who see the world as a wrecked vessel from which people must be rescued and those which see it as the property of Christ to be redeemed is all too evident. In relationships with others the squabbles continue with some still regarding the Roman Catholic church as the anti-Christ and others happy to use terms like 'Evangelical Catholics'. Whether it be the WCC or the Charismatic movement, opinions are no more united.

The chapter on violence contains some moving stories and overall reveals the utter revulsion most show towards the use of violence and when the language of the Kingdom of God is hijacked for loyalist paramilitary ends. Yet there is a worrying undertone that evangelicals are 'desensitised to violence' perhaps as a result of all that they have endured, just like some teenagers are desensitised to what's going on around them.

It is in looking to the future that Jordan becomes most explicit, suggesting that those who pin their hopes on revival are escapist (another teenage characteristic) whilst those who envisage any political scenario are 'incredibly naive on detail' (shades again of teenage years). The future of the church, he posits, is marked by increasing fragmentation with there being little or no sense of being part of a movement. Positively, he comments on evangelicalism's ability to adapt the gospel to the demands of the day and trusts that this will continue.

It is in the epilogue that Jordan becomes most directive. His plea is for a worship which is characterised by awe rather than the self-centred and pseudo-romantic worship which typifies so much evangelicalism. He longs for a delivery of evangelicalism from cultural captivity so that it might once again become a living movement. He calls for evangelicals in Northern Ireland to look beyond their own shores to the wider evangelical family who might be able to move them beyond introspective preoccupation and further fragmentation and decay. He equally pleads for evangelicals to revisit their own history lest in failing to do so they repeat the errors of the past. Finally he pleads for the creation of an adequate theology of community which will be sufficient for the needs of a post-modern age.

The vista which **Not of this world** presents is wide. But is it accurate? Insofar as the voices of ordinary evangelicals are allowed to speak for themselves, it is. The naivety, angularity, uncertainty, fragmentation and judgementalism are all to be found in what used to be an evangelical movement. Yet maybe the overwhelming impression one is left with is too pessimistic. There are references to constructive social action and to genuine warmth of community and pastoral care many find within the evangelical church. But perhaps the many good aspects of evangelicalism do not come sufficiently to the fore. I know of a number of adventurous projects where evangelicals are committed to faithfully working out their discipleship at the sharp end of a divided community in a way which models the gospel of reconciliation. Such things don't really figure too prominently in Jordan's account, perhaps giving rise to a more gloomy picture than is warranted.

Given that the picture is a recognisable one, what are we to make of it? As a totally committed evangelical and a sympathetic observer of the Northern Irish scene I would argue that Jordan's own evaluation at the end is significant but not sufficiently radical. If his picture is accurate then we are failing lamentably to be the Bible people and the gospel people we claim to be. The picture which emerges is of people who in reality do not order their lives according to the scriptures to anything like a sufficient degree. We are in practice a people caught in a subculture which is shaped by past history, social conflicts and political agendas. Loyalty to the Kingdom of God does not call us to rise sufficiently above those more human contextual factors. Commitment to particular political arrangements, lack of openness to fellow believers, superficial worship and the maintenance of skin-deep evangelical rituals, our working for 'decisions' in contrast to genuine disciple-making and suspicion of the Holy Spirit's ability to do that which is new today all bear witness to an evangelicalism which has seen better days and now 'gone to seed'.

Jordan gently points this out time and again. Take, for example, what he writes about evangelical and political involvement. Commenting on the growing unease with the peace process he writes: *For a people so rooted in the Scriptures, so aware of their heavenly citizenship and so confident of an ultimate destiny there is remarkably little optimism on any side. This is perhaps another expression of the way in which evangelicals have so confused faith and politics.* Where indeed is the spirit of the biblical men and women of faith who, like Abraham, 'were longing for a better country - a heavenly one' (Heb. 11:16), or, like Moses, whilst working for righteousness and justice on earth, chose to be mistreated and bear disgrace because he was 'looking ahead for his reward' (Heb. 11:26)?

Jordan has written a revealing and disturbing book. He holds up a mirror to us and shows us what we're like. It is not altogether a sight of which we can be proud. But it should prove a powerful incentive to improve not just our appearance but the reality. It provides us unselfconsciously with a call to return to the heart of evangelicalism and to the revival of a genuine movement based on the Bible and the gospel - for the glory of God and the good of Ulster.

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how often should we forgive?

• Alan Wilson

Matthew 18 is one of those chapters that people love to misquote, especially verse 20. Jesus is teaching on forgiveness and reconciliation. An in-depth study of the chapter will show that he expects his disciples to take reconciliation and forgiveness seriously. When the disciples first heard this teaching and the radical nature of authentic forgiveness, their reaction was summarised by Peter's question:

Then, Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" (Matthew 18:21)

If we are honest with ourselves we have all asked this question. Surely there must be a limit to our responsibility to forgive? The question Peter asks is very revealing and

helps us understand how most of us think about forgiveness. So far in this passage, Jesus has been teaching that forgiveness has to be an issue of the heart. It is obvious from the question that he did not understand this. He perceived forgiveness as a rule, as something that you can measure. Peter asked how many times he should forgive his brother when he sinned against him. Why would people ask such a question? There are a number of possible reasons.

Pain In Their Hearts

They may be in pain, and because of that they feel that to forgive again is unreasonable and unfair. The hurt may be recent or it may be pain of the past that has not been dealt with in a spiritual way. Sometimes people try to get off the

hook of forgiveness, because they are hurting and even though that has nothing to do with the person whom they need to forgive, they attribute that pain to them anyway.

Limited Understanding Of Forgiveness

When we say in our hearts "How many times shall I forgive?" we are revealing that our understanding of forgiveness is incomplete. The very essence and nature of forgiveness is such that it would never put a limit to what it is prepared to do in order to be reconciled with an offending person.

This does not mean that when we have a forgiving heart, we bury our heads in the sand, ignore our pain, and pretend that everything is fine. Nor does it mean we do not hold people accountable and responsible for their actions. However, it does mean that if we have a forgiving heart we will not become hard and bitter. We will not close ourselves off from others, or withhold love from our enemy.

When we ask, "How many times?" we limit our grace, our love and our mercy. We convince ourselves that because we have forgiven a number of times in the past, we are exonerated if we do not forgive in the present. We can even justify holding on to anger and bitterness. We think to ourselves, "I can do no more. They have pushed me too far."

Forgiveness Is A Rule

Peter was a devout Jew, and as such he knew all about the rabbinical teaching on forgiveness. It was a settled rule that forgiveness should not be extended more than three times. Therefore, if a good Jew extended forgiveness three times, he was fulfilling the rabbinical teaching. For the religious Jew in Jesus' day forgiveness had become like everything else in his religious life, a rule, an act, a performance. Forgiveness was never an expression of the heart, or of reconciliation or love - it was just a rule.

When we forgive as a rule and not as an authentic expression of love, we become self-righteous and proud, and we look down upon the object of our forgiveness with a sense of superiority. There is no change in our relationship with the person we have apparently forgiven. Expressing false forgiveness as a rule is just as bad, if not worse than showing no forgiveness at all. There will be no healing or reconciliation.

To forgive is to be honest and real. It is to open our heart and express our pain. We become open and vulnerable, sharing our pain with the person we need to forgive, not to add to their guilt or increase their shame, but in order that they might see it has not affected our capacity to love them.

Jesus' Reply

Jesus answered, "*I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times*". His reply to Peter is amazing. Basically he is saying that true forgiveness does not keep a record of how many times it has been expressed. Can you imagine the emotional energy and resources it would require to keep a record of how many times you have supposedly forgiven someone?

What Jesus is saying is, "Peter, you want a number by which you can measure how many times you should forgive someone. Well how about seventy-seven times? It will be very easy to lose count, so make sure your record is correct; be careful that you don't forgive seventy-eight times, for that would be breaking the rule."

The point Jesus is making is about having a heart that forgives, a heart that is not counting, a heart that does not keep a record of wrong, a heart that has nothing to do with keeping rules, but expresses love.

I realise that many people reading this may have suffered sorrow and grief beyond words or imagination, and you are finding it hard to forgive. You may not even want to forgive because of the severe hurt you have suffered. Maybe you are echoing Peter's question. Jesus understands that pain. He shared it on the cross. However, I believe that through the process of forgiving others he brings healing into our own hearts.

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NOT OF THIS WORLD: An Exercise in Propaganda

Wallace Thompson

In the epilogue to his book, Glenn Jordan suggests that some will turn to the last chapter first 'in order to discern where I'm coming from and to gain clues as to why I have said what I have said'. However, I simply started at the beginning and quickly realised that the book is, in essence, a propaganda exercise, and a very poor one at that, on behalf of ECONI. While Jordan's purported theme is a study of Ulster evangelicalism (something which has attracted ECONI's malevolent interest on several occasions over the years), it is in reality a thinly veiled attack upon historic evangelical Protestantism. True Biblical evangelicalism has always had its bitter, and easily identified, enemies, but in recent years we have witnessed the growth, from within professing evangelical circles, of a new and very dangerous version of neo-evangelicalism which is full of error and compromise. It is that version which is promoted by ECONI and Glenn Jordan. The seeds of Jordan's arguments can be seen in the 1985 document **For God and His Glory Alone** (which was subscribed to by some who, I think, might now regret their involvement) and subsequent ECONI booklets and statements. Jordan himself says that 'ECONI's actions in the mid-eighties created opportunities for evangelicals to dissent from the traditional line'. This is a significant admission as both Jordan and ECONI have departed from the historical position.

It is galling to think that this book will probably be promoted as a serious study of evangelicalism in Northern Ireland, for it is exactly the opposite. It is a most frustrating book in terms of tone, presentation and style and, like many of ECONI's publications, it is also often factually inaccurate and fundamentally flawed in its analysis and conclusions. At times I felt that the author of **Not Of This World** was not on this planet.

Whilst Jordan occasionally pays lip service to the concerns and feelings of evangelical Protestants, he is generally patronising towards them. In contrast he treats with much greater respect those who have, in large measure, repudiated their Protestantism and who are suggesting alternative expressions of evangelicalism.

We see this right from the start. In chapter 2, Jordan presents us with his own 'classification' of Ulster evangelicalism into a series of arbitrary and entirely artificial groups. Traditional evangelical Protestantism is described as 'oppositional' whilst the version promoted by ECONI is broadly 'inclusivist' or 'confessional'. Jordan accepts that his classifications 'are not watertight' and that many evangelicals will 'feel they straddle a number of categories'. However, I believe that he has concocted this system in order to marginalise evangelical Protestants who are variously portrayed as insecure, introverted, aggressive, not that well educated, and not likely to have travelled abroad much. 'Inclusivists', on the other hand, are portrayed as displaying the opposite characteristics. They are seen as broad-minded, outward-looking, confident, well-travelled, educated, valuing openness and engagement, and aware that evangelicalism must be constantly redefined. And so the scene is set.

A major weakness of the book is that it is high on rhetoric and hearsay but low on factual evidence and sound analysis. Arbitrary use of terminology is matched by minimal use of written sources of evidence. For example, in the brief history of evangelicalism from the Reformation to the present, assessments of key figures and events are extremely superficial and rarely supported by historical evidence. Interestingly, too, Jordan jumps with one bound - from the Reformation to Wesley and Whitefield. Whatever happened to the seventeenth century and its Puritan giants? Jordan has conveniently forgotten about them.

Jordan rightly states that 'it is impossible to understand evangelicalism without understanding the importance evangelicals attach to the Bible'. However, and amazingly for a book which claims to be an evangelical study of evangelicalism, he seldom tests the views expressed (including his own) against Biblical teaching. His conclusions on a whole range of matters (such as 'revival' and 'backsliding') would surely have been radically different if he had searched the Scriptures. He states that 'evangelicals may disagree as to the exact methodology of inspiration and the nature of the authority of the scriptures'. Among true evangelicals, however, there is no disagreement, for to them the Bible is the inerrant, inspired

and infallible Word of God. The Reformers and Puritans, together with their 'oppositionalist' heirs such as Wesley, Whitefield, Harris and Edwards, had a faithful attitude to Scripture for they believed in its sufficiency – a view clearly not shared by Jordan and ECONI.

Rather than base his work on hard evidence, Biblical or otherwise, Jordan subjects us to a whole series of comments from evangelicals (and alleged evangelicals) whom he had interviewed for the book. People are, of course, perfectly entitled to express their views, but it is impossible to gain a proper understanding of important issues on the basis of the sort of wild, sweeping, unsubstantiated and subjective statements which feature on almost every page of this book.

In keeping with the overall thrust of the book, key terms such as 'Roman Catholic' and 'Protestant' are handled in a loose and partisan manner. Jordan says that the word 'Protestantism' is 'a decidedly slippery term', and we are confronted by 'evangelicals' who speak of their embarrassment about being described as 'Protestant'. Several interviewees have no difficulty in engaging in joint prayer with practising Roman Catholics. Although Jordan is a converted Roman Catholic, he openly confesses to a continuing respect for his spiritual roots, and this has an obvious effect upon his pronouncements and conclusions. Jordan wishes that evangelicals (whom he accuses of 'dangerously patronising attitudes') would hear about Roman Catholicism from its adherents rather than from other evangelicals, and he almost gives the impression that those who reject the ecumenical movement and Roman Catholic doctrines are intellectually incapable of grasping the issues. Whilst dialogue and debate are certainly worthwhile, a proper understanding of Roman Catholicism can only be gained by an examination of its official documents instead of relying, as Jordan does, on subjective statements by individuals.

The book also refers to 'spirituality' experienced by those prepared to look beyond their Protestantism to pre-Reformation times. But evangelical Protestantism already possesses a rich, and substantial, spiritual legacy. It can also feast upon pre-Reformation notaries such as Savonarola and Wycliffe, and back through the Waldensians to the apostles themselves. I suspect that, in Jordan's eyes, these are not particularly helpful writings as they are solidly 'oppositional', Biblical and Protestant in nature.

I was interested in Jordan's assessment of Orangeism. Several interviewees disparage it, and Jordan himself describes the Twelfth parade as a 'Protestant version of the Stations of the Cross' and a 'Protestant penance, a pilgrimage to the Field'. He makes no attempt to understand Orangeism or its role and rights within Ireland in the 21st century. In chapter 10 there is an implied link between Orangeism and paramilitary and other violence. For someone who is so sensitive about how people speak, Jordan's double standards are striking. True Orangeism is not cultural or political, but religious, and Jordan greatly underestimates its support base within evangelicalism. Of course, this fits perfectly with ECONI's blatant anti-orange

agenda. Some time ago, in response to an invitation from ECONI, I submitted a reasoned and Scriptural defence of the rights of Orangemen to march. Other articles appeared in 'Lion and Lamb' urging the re-routing of orange parades, but ECONI failed to publish my submission.

Another important element of the book is the attempt to drive a wedge between evangelicalism and its historical associations with unionism. Jordan reminds us that the signatories to the **For God and His Glory Alone** document intended it 'as a direct response to what they perceived to be Protestant tendencies to identify God and territory in an unbiblical way'. He also claims to detect a trend among evangelicals towards voting Alliance, and disenchantment with unionism. These things, he asserts, are evidence of a flight from the hard line which 'may actually represent the majority of evangelicals'. However, he produces no evidence to substantiate any of this. Ironically, Jordan is setting up his own political scenario within which he feels evangelicalism must operate, one which is pro-Belfast Agreement and ecumenical in spirit.

It is also interesting to note Jordan's 'inclusivist' enthusiasm for remaining in apostate or pluralistic denominations, contrary to the clear command of the Lord and the apostles that His people should withdraw. He refers briefly to Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones' 1966 call for separation but makes no attempt to explore the vital issue, which has been a consistent principle of evangelicalism throughout the ages.

In conclusion, Jordan's book may have some value if it opens the eyes of evangelicals to the dangers we face from the agenda it is promoting. The battle lines are being firmly drawn between those who wish to destroy mainstream evangelical thinking and practice, and those who are prepared to contend for the faith once delivered to the saints. What Ulster needs today is not the neo-evangelism of Jordan and ECONI, but a revival of the sound Biblical evangelicalism of the apostles, reformers, puritans and leaders of the evangelical awakening. This could transform the whole political and spiritual climate of our Province to the glory of God and for the good of all.

Wallace Thompson is an elder in Knock Evangelical Presbyterian Church and a member of the Caleb Foundation.



not of this world

NOT OF THIS WORLD: I am not an evangelical

...nor am I likely to become one.

Malachi O'Doherty

For most of my life I have known very little about evangelicals other than that I was not one and did not want to be one. My encounters with them accustomed me to disliking them. They were people who sat beside me on buses and wanted to talk about Jesus. They were people I met through work who wanted to talk about Jesus. They were people gathered on city centre street corners declaring themselves saved by the blood of the Lamb and telling me that my worthless life was leading me only to Hell. I do not believe this, and I doubt if the most reasonable or persistent evangelical could persuade me of it. I regard proselytising as an impertinence and people who would proselytise me as a nuisance. Those who befriend me only because they want to bring me to Jesus are not welcome in my life. I have more time for those who would befriend me and bring me to the pub.

Those who understand their own truths to be the only truths which are appropriate for me are dismissing me as a person, denying the possibility that I live a life founded on my own valuable insights and experience. They may want to love the holy spirit in me, but I do not feel that they want to love me.

Yet I have a growing interest in the culture of evangelicalism, and I have been almost startled to find in this book that many of the perceptions which I have about evangelicals are honestly considered by many evangelicals themselves. Some, at least, are not ignorant of how they are perceived outside their culture, but we on the outside have been ignorant of the questions they ask themselves.

What I did not expect in this book was that an evangelical writer would acknowledge the problems that arise from evangelicals separating themselves from the world or that they would be asking the same questions about their positions that the secular world asks of them too.

Not Of This World explores the fracturing of evangelicalism, fundamentalism, the subculture, the disaffection with politics, the suspicion of Catholics and their church. Jordan has a detached ethnographer's eye for the diversity within evangelical tradition. One interviewee frets over the attitude

taken to him by fundamentalists: *'It makes me angry that these people are taking the place of God in judging me'* - yet that is what even the liberal evangelicals quoted are doing with people that they do not class as Christians. For people of other Christian traditions, the most offensive thing in evangelicalism, by the way, is the appropriation to themselves of the term Christian and the right they claim to deny that title to others.

I found the author difficult to locate within the factions of evangelicalism that he describes, until I came to his personal disclosure in the Epilogue, but took him for an inclusive evangelical. I was shocked however by some of his remarks' for example, the assessment that 'unthinking ecumenism is as hazardous ... as unrepentant sectarianism'. I cannot believe that any effort to mingle with people of a different spiritual tradition can be as hazardous as any refusal to. Occasional remarks like that reminded me how far removed my own thinking was likely to be from his.

The book describes a culture which is constructed around the conviction of being right. What evangelicals might learn from Catholics, if they thought about it, is how they made their own transition from being 'the one true faith' to accommodating pluralism and dissent. The remarks quoted about the Catholic church, however, betray a complete obliviousness to any such transition having taken place. This, as the author says, is probably because evangelicals are learning about Catholicism only from other evangelicals. This is one of the core areas where the author wants change.

Evangelicalism appears to be an isolationist culture within which at least some people are becoming aware of the contradictions and stresses their aloofness from the world creates. As people affirmed by their inner experience of grace and their communities, that they have nothing to learn about faith from anyone outside themselves, they appear to the outside world as smug and small minded. Yet this book questions whether evangelicals stand on sure ground. One man tells the interviewer that he has experienced the whole Trinity, yet gives no plausible account of awe-struck enthrallment. There are far more

plausible accounts of epiphany from many secular writers than from virtually any Northern Irish Evangelical testimony that I have heard.

The author finds many evangelicals who simply don't want to take any interest in political problems or accept any responsibility for them. *'It is surely inexcusable that young people can be allowed to grow up in a faith context and be completely illiterate about the realities of community division ...'*

The exploration of this phenomenon reveals that evangelicals do not want to see themselves as part of that community division, declining labels like Protestant and asserting that their problems with Catholics and the Irish Republic are only theological. To the secular eye, these people have found a comfort zone within which they can absolve themselves of responsibility and criticism with the fantasy that they are the only people who know the truth.

Yet other evangelicals wrestled with their consciences. Some were appalled to find themselves less concerned about the murder of Catholics than about the murder of Protestants. Some few were pure pacifists and some wanted a strong security crackdown, primarily on the IRA, and had contemplated arming themselves for Loyalism.

The author, as a former Roman Catholic, speaks of the sense of awe which he experienced in the religion of his childhood and, pointing to flaws in modern evangelicalism, declares that it fails to recognise its own history and that it lacks the sense of mystery that ritual and symbol would give it.

He wants evangelicals to form a new sense of community, to relate to evangelicals internationally and to learn about Catholicism from Catholics rather than from other evangelicals.

His description of the fracturing of evangelicalism gives me more hope than I think it gives him, for it is always good news when people have begun to think for themselves. The human imagination grapples everywhere with the idea of God. Different religious faiths are different attempts to imagine an infinite, indefinable God. All can only ever be wrong, but when they assert that they are right, and that they can comprehend the Infinite as a person, they risk persuading themselves that an infinite consciousness is only a little more interesting than their own grandfathers. This is what shocked me most about what evangelicals said to Glenn Jordan, how low and mundane their expectations of God are.

The question that remains to puzzle me is the validity of the transformative experiences which people declare. Were evangelicals really given a new life, a new perception and a new love of God and neighbour, would we not see the fruits of this in their conduct and their culture?

The author accuses fellow evangelicals of a 'flight from mystery'. He says he wants evangelicals to awaken their imaginations. I wonder if they would continue to be

evangelicals if they considered that many wonderful things can happen in the imagination, that are healthy and within the natural range of human experience.

The evangelical is 'born again', sometimes by a sudden and specific memorable moment of grace which affirms the centrality of Jesus and the Bible. From within the evangelical culture as described by Glenn Jordan, there seems to be a wide range of experiences which can be accepted as manifestations of that grace. These range from a conscious decision to accept Jesus, to a palpable and critical intervention in a person's usual way of thinking and feeling.

It may be that people who experience these interventions are really discovering depths of emotion that they had not considered possible from within their restricted experience. It may be that they are undergoing a genuine expansion of themselves, their thinking and their perception, a sudden step forward in their development as people. Or perhaps they are having a good idea that illuminates how conflicts in their lives and relationships might be resolved and integrated.

I have had such moments in my own life and I believe that most people have. Some of us are so taken by the import and suddenness of the moment that they attribute it to God. Perhaps in a sense they are right, if God is a metaphor for the healing power of Nature that restores us in other ways too.

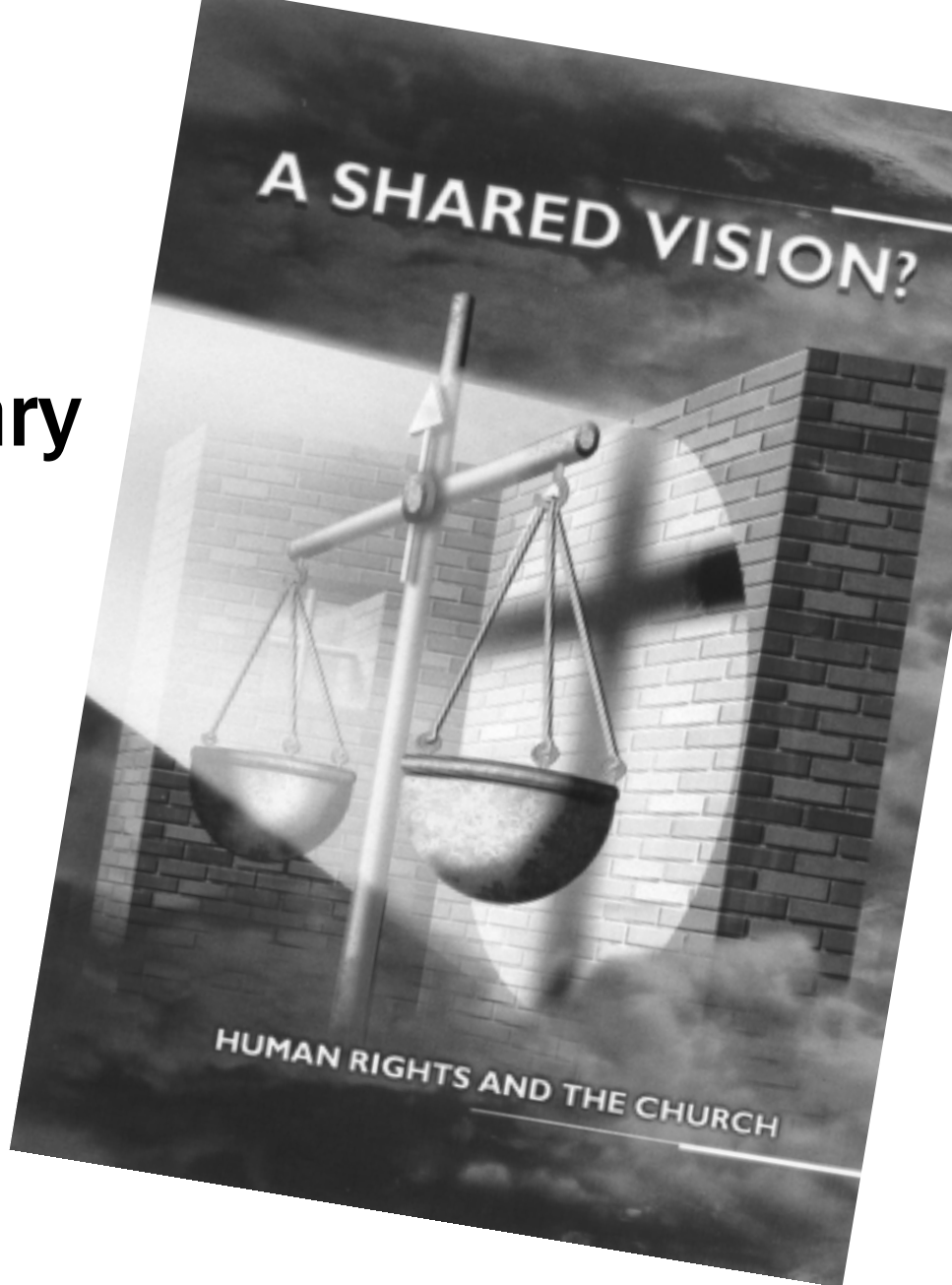
It seems a pity that some who are shaken in this way immediately conclude from the experience that they now know all they need to know about life and cut out the possibility of undergoing further radical upheaval again.

At the time that I was reading this book, I came across a line from Ted Simon in his book, *Jupiter's Travel*, about his journey round the world on a motorbike. Simon wrote of a moment of insight that overwhelmed him: *'As I think about (distance travelled) I have a sudden and extraordinary flash, something I have never had before and am never able to recapture again. I see the whole of Africa in one single vision, as though illuminated by lightning.'* There are several such moments in the experience of a traveller who has lost his bearings among familiar things and opened his mind to infinite possibilities. *'There are in me,'* he writes, *'the seeds from which, if necessary, the universe could be reconstructed. In me somewhere there is a matrix for mankind and a holograph of the whole world. Nothing is more important in my life than trying to discover these secrets.'*

Half the evangelicals interviewed in this important book need to be thrust out into the world they loathe, to learn how to feel and think like this. Some of the others appear to be inching towards realising that.

Centre for contemporary Christianity

Recent Publications



The Centre for Contemporary Christianity in Ireland recently produced a report on human rights - *A Shared Vision? Human Rights and the Church*. The report was published in September and is available from the office. The price is £3.00 + p&p.

This edition of Lion & Lamb has focused on ECONI's forthcoming publication **Not of this World: The Evangelical Protestant Community in Northern Ireland**. The book will be published jointly by Blackstaff Press and ECONI and will be launched on March 17th. The book will be available in bookshops or directly from ECONI at £9.99.

The papers from ECONI's recent conference *Seek the Welfare of the City* are being prepared for publication. If you were at the conference and would like to have copies of the papers, or if you were not able to be with us but would be interested in reading the papers presented you will want to get hold of this publication. We anticipate publication in January or February of next year.

ECONI is undertaking a research project entitled *Embodying Forgiveness*, which will run over the next two years. As part of the project we will be holding two conferences on the theme. The first will take place on Friday 19th and Saturday 20th of October 2001. The main speaker will be Professor L Gregory Jones, Dean of Duke Divinity School. Greg is the author of *Embodying Forgiveness: A Theological Analysis* and many papers on this theme exploring not just the theological dimensions of the subject but also the ethical, social and pastoral aspects of forgiveness. Please make a note of these dates in your diary and we will keep you informed of developments.



FAITH and PRACTICE

FAITH and PRACTICE

Maurice Kinkead

Maurice Kinkead is Chief Executive of the Greater East Belfast Partnership. He is the subject of the third interview in a series that seeks to explore the connections between faith and practice in the workplace.

Maurice has spent almost all of his life in Northern Ireland. Born and raised in Lurgan, the family moved to Newcastle, Co Down in his mid teens. For the past twenty-five years, he has lived and worked in East Belfast. He has a wide experience of employment, ranging from milk-man through the civil service, church work and youth work to his present position as chief executive.

Teenage Years

I suppose I started life as a teenager, because I can't really remember very much before that, and because I had quite a difficult teenage period from about fourteen to seventeen. I suppose most people do. I had a very difficult time adjusting, growing up as a teenager, and gave everybody else around me a pretty difficult time. One thing I recall is that religion was probably a completely irrelevant nonentity at that stage.

When I was living in Newcastle, the person who was probably my closest friend was a Catholic guy. We went to what were called coffee bars, run by various groups of people. That's probably when I first started thinking seriously about religion, because up to then it had just been something that I didn't want anything to do with. So then, having made the decision not to be at all religious I suppose I felt a bit freer to listen to people talking about religion, because it wasn't something that I had to do.

Coming to Faith

I wasn't very successful at school. Basically my education deteriorated year on year, and I eventually just left school and went to London.

It was around the time of the bombing in Oxford Street (Belfast). I remember ringing home to my mother. I was probably quite homesick, and was thinking that she could have been killed in that bomb. I definitely took a decision then that my life was a bit of a mess, going nowhere, really getting nothing out of it, no sense of satisfaction. Maybe all this stuff I'd been pushing away to the back of my mind about God and Jesus and a sense of right and wrong was actually true. Through all of this I came to some kind of faith.

I found a Methodist Church and the minister introduced me to Young Life Campaign. A man there took me to Speakers' Corner. When I look back at this now it looks so ridiculous, including (some times) when he wasn't around and I went a few times on my own. I was about eighteen, heading off with a wee stepladder, and standing up in the middle of Hyde Park Speakers' Corner. It had all the headcases of the day, it was great craic. Two things from that time are still quite important to me. It definitely stopped me getting further into what was becoming an incredible morass and it gave me, maybe for the first time, a conscious sense of values, that there were things in life that were valuable.

Faith and Theology

I started to think a bit about what I actually wanted to do, and eventually made a decision to go to the Irish Baptist College with a view of working full time in some kind of Christian work and ministry. I really wasn't all that clear exactly what I wanted to do, except I suppose I felt at that stage that I had some kind of organising leadership ability or skill. I felt that I wanted to do something to make a difference, not just make an impact.

I stayed at the college a long time. A couple of things struck me when I went to college. One was that the longer I stayed there the more uncertain I became about things. There were different ways of looking at things. I suppose that's part of being educated, and I know there are people who think that's dangerous. I found it quite refreshing, although it was a big struggle at times, because I think I was always looking for some kind of certainty in my faith, and yet the more I thought about my faith the more

uncertain I became. Sometimes that was frightening, and sometimes it was actually quite liberating, and that is part of a tension I probably still feel.

Culture Shock

I was in Strandtown Baptist Church as a kind of student pastor, and went to a meeting in the YMCA in East Belfast. I realised I'd spent most of my adult life either in a college or in a church. I wondered what it was like out there, where there are people who don't actually share your faith, and so I decided to go along to volunteer in the youth club. That was the most direct culture shock I have ever had. It was just like an entirely different world. I asked myself, "What, if anything, has all that I've spent the last number of years learning in theological college got to do with these young people here?" And probably the answer was "Absolutely nothing".

These young people had values, talked to me about things that were important to them. There were kids in there who, when you got to know them, were decent, pleasant kids with whom you can build up a trust, but they're just brushed aside. In our community, our society, they don't count. They don't have any qualifications, they don't get any jobs. Nobody wants them around the place, nobody wants to live beside them, wants to sit on the bus beside them, nobody wants to go anywhere near them, and what has the church got to say about that, what has the gospel got to say about that?

Incarnation

I couldn't possibly go into full time ministry in the church. I wasn't prepared to be the kind of person that I felt people wanted me to be. I couldn't have any integrity as a minister in a church. I wasn't prepared to pretend to be the strong person that people expected me to be. And I certainly wasn't prepared to expect my family to be the kind of family that people expected the minister's family to be.

So I took the job with Frontier Youth Trust because it was with a different kind of people. I'd begun to think that if church isn't relevant to these people then it's not relevant

at all. There isn't anything else worth doing if you can't actually work with people whom society has pushed to the side.

At this stage I developed my theology along the lines of incarnation, the idea of God coming among people, and often among people whom other people didn't bother with. The one single theme for me was around the idea of justice. I had always thought of righteousness as being linked into things that one's not supposed to do, rather than linking it into the things that one should do. Actually justice and righteousness were exactly the same thing and if anything, theology was based not so much on the Bible as on the character of God. The character of God is probably all the theology I have, seeing that things are right and fair.

Living in the world

Moving from FYT into the Bridge was just a slight change of structure. I was working with both young people and old people. One of the saddest things I've seen is the number of elderly people who live in disadvantaged communities and who have very, very little. If the church is doing anything in the community it has to be addressing issues of unfairness and injustice wherever they are found.

I believe that the main value of the church is that it's a place that gives people some support to live in the world, rather than somewhere to go to get out of the world. Within the church we're not in any way responding as we should to social disadvantage. People are nervous that somehow working in the community will stop them doing what they're really supposed to do i.e. preach the gospel. I don't think that preaching the gospel is more important than caring for the well being of people. To me ministry is doing what you think God wants you to do.

Community

The work of the Partnership is basically an attempt to bring together all players who have an interest in the regeneration of a disadvantaged community like inner East Belfast. I'm living and working in a community that has left lots of people from age eleven onwards feeling 'dumped'. Some children are born into a family who are well educated, who value education, who give them support,



FAITH and PRACTICE

who work with them. Other kids are born into families where there has been little interest in education for a couple of generations. Both these children are exactly the same in God's sight, but they're not the same in the community. There are people who can jump from one to the other, but by and large the Partnership is about trying to address the kind of structured and multiple disadvantage you find here. I would like to think that we as churches and people could somehow value folk the way God values them.

Churches and Community

A number of churches, certainly within Protestant East Belfast play a big part in providing services within the community, but there are issues around who to do it with. They often want just to do it themselves. They don't even do it with each other as churches sometimes, and they have great difficulties doing it with people in the community.

Sectarianism is an issue around the interface areas here, but there's a lot of work going on. I must say the churches are not in the forefront of that, it's primarily on-the-ground community workers. Most of the clergy are living away outside the area all together. School teachers don't live in those areas. Bank managers don't live in those areas. Social workers don't live in those areas. So there's a leadership issue around that. One of the things we need to do is build the capacity of local communities to be able to take on leadership themselves. There's a real learning curve there for churches, because churches tend to think logically. They have a gospel, which they need to give out to people who don't have it, so that they can benefit from it and they use that kind of thinking for all that they do. They're doing things for people all the time. But in fact if you keep doing things for people you leave them where they are, you create dependency, and then of course you're not there whenever they need you.

Conclusion

I would like to see people working together as partners to achieve something, not just working to achieve partnership, because just being a partner doesn't mean anything. Social inclusion is about creating a society where people feel they are included and can make a contribution, and where they are valued.

ECONI wants to thank Maurice Kinkead for his willing participation in the interview, and wishes him continued success as he continues to help build communities in East Belfast.

Ruth Hutchinson
Assistant Editor

16 October 2000

I write with reference to the 'Rights and Worship' section included in your Autumn 2000 (Issue 26) edition of *Lion and Lamb*. It was certainly food for thought. However, I must confess to having trouble digesting the message. At first reading the juxtaposition of the two 'comments' struck me as most unfortunate, for I could not believe that there could be any possible comparison to draw between the two scenarios. I felt it was deeply offensive to our brothers and sisters around the world who daily face persecution to be given a place alongside the complaint of an Orangeman about the right to march. Yet, upon reflection, the placing of the two articles together may actually be a piece of editorial genius - allow me to explain.

If this section is read and understood as a whole it contains a marvellous piece of what we could call 'literary subversion'. In essence the reader is presented with two stories - one of an evangelist in Vietnam who is imprisoned for his faith, the other of a Christian Orangeman who has been prevented from walking his traditional route.

Both are christians and therefore will appeal to scripture and prayer for guidance in their specific situation. Both have been called to be followers of Christ and in the words of Luke 9, ... *to take up his cross daily and follow me*. However, the end result is sadly very different.

Our brother in Vietnam has heard that call and clearly understood the radical ramifications of discipleship - to talk to him of his rights makes no sense - just as it makes no sense to insist on the right to do anything (even worship) after reading the New Testament.

The sad thing is that, placed side by side, these articles show only the failings of evangelicalism in the west, where our preoccupation with rights has eclipsed the priority of the gospel. The picture of Pastor Van Hoang sharing Christ with the woman next door via the water pipe is so potent a picture of gospel priorities it renders the second comment bankrupt of any true credibility. Rather we find it incredible that the issue of Orange marches could so occupy the mind when our brothers and sisters are literally dying for the faith. So the subversion of the second comment is worked by the first.

Perhaps a concerted effort to teach the ramifications of true discipleship, and to explain what 'taking up the cross' actually means would result in christians like Pastor Van Hoang, who having lost their rights, will be freed to do anything to serve Christ.

Yours in Christ,

Stuart Noble
ST.ANDREWS

20 November 2000

I write to comment on 'The Rites of Drumcree' by Mervyn Gibson, which appeared in Issue 26 of **Lion & Lamb**. I find, in my own life, that Jesus' message in the gospels can become submerged when I multiply words. I do that when I get impatient.

I think that Mervyn Gibson could know 'what Jesus would do' if he asked him with no conditions and with an open mind. Our theological preferences will not then drive our choices and hopefully we will not react to those with whom we disagree. As christians we preach the gospel, but should not 'react'. Jesus' kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36; Heb.12: 1-3).

This may be a naïve question. Do the members of the Orange Order take Jesus with them on their marches? Isn't being a member of the church of God and of the body of Christ enough for christians?

Wishing you every blessing

Philip Youngman
SWANAGE



Training Programme 2001

A Toolkit of Techniques...

Have you found yourself planning an event and wondering what game or exercise would help your programme? Have you ever found yourself in charge of a small group and wondered if there were other ways to help people to talk to one another?

If you have had any responsibility for learning in your Church or organisation, then you will be interested in the new courses ECONI is developing for the winter term.

Youth workers, Church workers, Ministers and small group leaders might find one of our practical workshops will meet a need for new resources and ideas.

Our hope is that we can demonstrate the usefulness of an experiential approach which can help people to learn in a safe small group environment.

'A State Apart' and the 'Symbols' CDROMs are great resources for anyone working in the community relations field. ECONI are hosting a second 'toolkit' event on Wednesday 10th January 2001 from 10.00am – 12.30pm

Please contact Lynda at the ECONI office if you are interested in these events.

Skills for the Task : I

The Transforming Bible Study course is a unique combination of theoretical reflection and insight, and practical application of learning. One of the most challenging questions to explore in our situation is one of faithful reading - how can we avoid a 'sectarian' reading of the text knowing that competing interpretations of scripture have historically given rise to wars, bloodshed, hatred and bitterness?

We ask if it is possible to cultivate the skills to handle the Bible with integrity.

This course would be suitable for anyone who has responsibility for Bible study in a local church setting, either in small groups, midweek studies or preaching. This course will run in Spring 2001. Contact Lynda for details.

Skills for the Task: II

Raising the issues is essentially a 'hands-on' workshop experience exploring the skills needed to facilitate change in local Churches. In particular the course will cover issues of identity, conflict and peacemaking in the Northern Ireland context, however the skills explored encompass other contexts such as leading small groups and public speaking.

Workshop Themes

Being a facilitator of change

What makes an effective facilitator?
Building relationships with participants
Dealing with resistance, power and authority
Performing as a facilitator

The Learning Process

How adults learn

Understanding different learning styles
Groupwork as a model for learning

Creating A Platform For Change

Learning to identify needs

Planning an event or course
A toolkit of techniques
Ensuring equality of opportunity in training

Dates for courses 2000 – 2001

Skills for the Task: II

Workshop 1 - Being a facilitator of change

Friday Evening

19th January 2001
7.30pm – 9.30pm

Saturday Morning

20th January 2001
9.30am – 12.00pm

Workshop 2

The Learning Process...

Friday Evening

16th February 2001
7.30pm – 9.30pm and

Saturday Morning

17th February 2001
9.30am – 12.00pm

Workshop 3

Creating a platform for change...

Friday Evening

9th March 2001
7.30pm – 9.30pm

Saturday Morning

10th March 2001
9.30am – 12.00pm

ATTENDANCE AT ALL THREE WORKSHOPS IS REQUIRED TO ACKNOWLEDGE THIS AS A MODULE FOR THE CERTIFICATE IN BIBLICAL PEACEBUILDING.

BRIDGE BUILDERS I

Building Peace in a divided community

Exploring our identity

What happens when identity goes wrong?
Sectarianism and faith
Identity, justice and mercy

Understanding conflict

Exploring the key elements which combine to produce conflict

Building the Peace

Examining the call to and the concept of peacebuilding
Exploring the crucial ingredients in peacebuilding
Considering reconciliation - the goal of peacebuilding

Exploring Protestant Culture - half-day workshop at 'The People's Museum', Fernhill House, Glencairn.

Tuesday Evenings

6th February – 10th April 2001
7.30pm – 10.00pm
ECONI Training Room

BRIDGE BUILDERS II

The role of the Church in a Divided community

The Church as 'Vision Keepers'
The Church in Ireland
The Church and Change
The Church and Ministry
The Church and Hope

This course includes two encounter opportunities. Two half-day workshops will provide an opportunity for participants to encounter people and organisations who are addressing some of the challenges of living and ministering in Northern Ireland.

Thursday Evenings

25th January – 29th March 2001
7.30pm – 10.00pm
ECONI Training Room

Friday Mornings

2nd February – 6th April 2001
9.30am – 12.00pm
ECONI Training Room

and finally

SUMMER SCHOOL TRANSFORMATION July 2001

Back to the Future

This strand promises to provide considerable opportunity for interactive discussion and personal reflection around some of these themes:

- Exploring what it means to be Protestant
- Considering Protestant perception, prejudice and perspectives
- How Protestantism has cultivated a particular cultural identity
- The politics, culture and religious nature of Orangeism

A Spirituality for Social Engagement

Central to biblical spirituality is a concern that God's redemptive love will affect the totality of our lives. Christian spirituality is not an emotional escape from the brokenness of the world, it is a seeking for spiritual resources that will help us in our commitment to the healing of our estranged relationships and the restoration of peace and justice in society. This course will be exploring this theme in considerable depth and will ask many questions that relate our Christian witness and spiritual values to the complexity of our changing world.

Faith and Politics

With new political institutions and new opportunities for political involvement, this strand offers a justification for Christian involvement in politics and suggests ways in which Christians can bring their faith to bear on the political life of the community.

CONFERENCE

- Dates:** Friday 19 – Saturday 20 October 2001
Speaker: Professor L Gregory Jones
(Duke Divinity School, N Carolina)
Theme: Embodying Forgiveness

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