

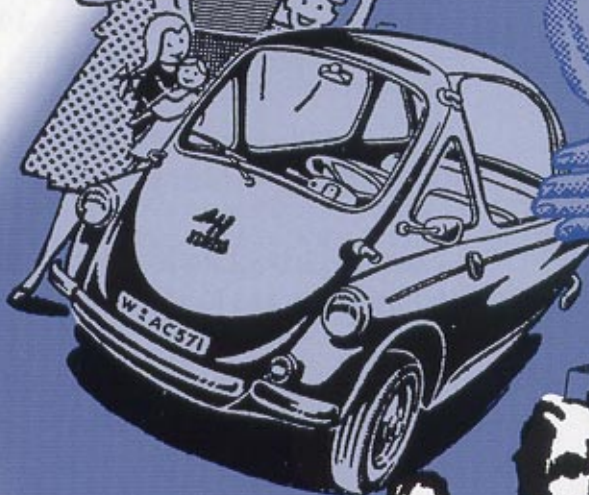
lion & lamb



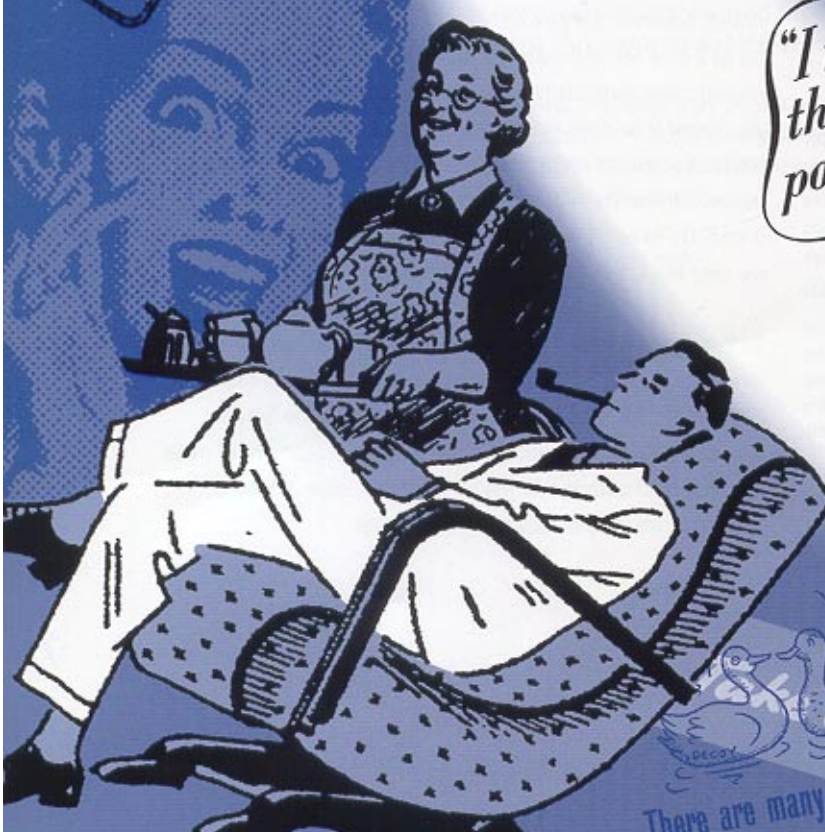
Stay calm
all through
hectic day...



There's nothing to equal
'Ducella'
REGD.



"I never
thought it
possible..."



There are many imitations
but only one from the
original

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Exile & Homecoming

The theme of exile and homecoming invokes a rich biblical metaphor for the people of God. The actual historical experience of exile was a defining moment for Judaism and seen as a consequence of God's judgement on the community's disobedience. Yet, paradoxically, the experience of abandonment and dislocation did not result in despair but innovative theological reflection that enriched Israel's understanding of Yahweh and a deeper insight into the nature of their divine vocation. The exile therefore represents profound loss, which is deeply felt and cannot be minimised, but also startling recovery, for hidden in the pain of defeat are the gifts of vision and the seeds of restoration. The possibility of new fidelity, the rediscovery of essentials and the energy to live differently are promises that are inextricably bound to brokenness. As Walter Brueggemann suggests, "It is not an overstatement to say that the exile became the matrix in which the canonical shape of Old Testament faith is formed and evoked."

It has been suggested that exile is an appropriate metaphor to describe the position and condition of the Church in a post-Christian world. The sense of marginalisation that the church feels in an increasingly secular pluralist society is just one symptom of a major shift in the Church's location in the world. This sense of exile raises enormous issues for Christians in Northern Ireland who, as a result of the conservative effects of conflict, are encountering these changes relatively late. The issues, however, are now in our face and like Israel they raise for us a new set of theological questions. How can we make any ultimate truth claims in the ideological supermarket of pluralism? How does the story of an empty tomb resonate in a world of scientific reductionism? How do we speak of a value-based community in a culture of hedonism and individual greed? Or, to put it more biblically (and poetically), 'How do we sing the Lord's songs in a strange land?'

At the moment most of us are not sure as we watch the language of faith fall like the proverbial seed among thorns. However, in the movement towards answers is the future shape of our Christian witness as out of the judgement of exile the vitality of faith is reformed. I hope this issue of **Lion & Lamb** will be of some help on that journey.

Derek Poole
Editor



from the Ardoyne Road ...

At the time of writing, the dispute on the Ardoyne Road in North Belfast is still ongoing and is well into its third week. Without doubt these have been the most demanding weeks of my time as minister of Ballysillan Presbyterian Church, one of the local churches in the area. It is still too early to be able to reflect adequately on all the issues and lessons to be learned - not least because the full resolution of the dispute is still some way off. However, I feel privileged to be given the opportunity, even at this stage, to offer some comment and reflection.

The first, and perhaps the most difficult issue, is how to maintain a biblically faithful ministry in the midst of conflicting expectation and the actual realities on the ground. To condemn out of hand is to rubbish the underlying hurt, even despair, of the local people and the community. Not to condemn is to come rather too close to giving approval to some dreadful incidents - such as the throwing of the blast bomb on the third day of the protest. At a different level, one has to find ways of reaching out the hand of christian love to those in the nationalist community, without jeopardising the relationship and the trust built up with one's own people. The atmosphere is extremely fraught and tense. There is nothing new in this dilemma, and 30 years on in the 'troubles' it seems as difficult as ever.

The second main issue, still largely unexplored, is how the wider church and its leaders relate to the local community. As one community leader put it to me, "Are they going to shepherd us or slaughter us?" There is much work to be done in thinking this question through to a conclusion that helps deliver effective Christian ministry on the ground. Again, thirty years on we still appear to have no coherent answers on this one.

At a more personal level, I have been aware of the enormous amount of informed and passionate prayer offered, not only for the situation and the people but for myself. The spiritual protection offered by that prayer is perhaps evidenced in the fact that out of about the 200 letters, emails, letters, cards and calls I have received so far, not a single one has been negative or hostile.

Even at this stage it is clear that there are huge opportunities for new christian ministry opening up in the area as a result of our involvement. Can we see clearly enough how those opportunities might be taken? Not at present, but we need to get a handle on this within the next few weeks, otherwise the agenda may move on and the opportunity be greatly diminished.

The situation on the Ardoyne Road may be the one currently in the public eye or of most recent memory, but most certainly it is not the only one of its kind either in Belfast or Northern Ireland as a whole. That fact alone makes it all the more important that we discern clearly and urgently what 'the Spirit says to the churches'.

We invite you to help us in that task.

Norman Hamilton
Ballysillan Presbyterian Church



There have been numerous occasions since 1969 when the parochial concerns of our conflict have either connected deeply with the affairs of the wider world or been put in proper perspective in face of greater human tragedy. Connectedness and perspective combine in the events of the eleventh of September 2001 and will mark our lives for years to come.

News of the suicide attack by militant Islamic warriors, driven by their hatred of the Western world and aided by their distortion of faith, community and eternal destiny, struck a deep chord with many throughout N Ireland. The number of dead is beyond our grasp, but, proportionally, we know the impact such violence against humanity exacts in our small community.

Fear, pain and grief give way to anger and the need to avenge. We feel guilt because we are unable to forgive and powerless because we know that terrorism thrives and succeeds if we resort to methods that serve retaliation rather than justice. Through all of this is the inability to grasp the apparently incomprehensible. Where does this bitterness and hate, anger and violence come from?

Here is where our conflict begins to resonate with a world that is torn apart by bitter enmity between its peoples. It is a simple fact of history that tribes, nations and even the most benevolent empires rarely prosper except at the expense of others. Land and resources, freedom of cultural, political and religious identities as well as life itself are casualties of the struggle for wealth, power and security. This is the plight of a fallen humanity and there is not a community in the world that is not scarred by such histories.

In his recent book, *The Shape of Irish History*, under the title *The Cain-Abel Business*, ATQ Stewart quotes Amos Oz on the Palestinian / Israeli conflict:

[There is] a popular European inclination to assume that every conflict is essentially a misunderstanding, and with family counselling and group therapy everyone will live happily ever after. But there is no misunderstanding between Israeli Jew and Palestinian Arab... Rivers of coffee cannot solve the issue of land. We need compromise.'

So Stewart states:

Similarly, there is no misunderstanding between Catholic and Protestant in N

Ireland, none whatsoever. Nor do they need to get to know each other better. They know each other only too well, having lived alongside each other for four centuries, part of the same society yet divided by politics and history. This is not just a clash of culture; it is a culture in itself, a point overlooked by most observers.'

A culture of conflict is the common legacy of every contested relationship between groups around the world. The attacks in America come in the context of centuries of bloody conflict between the Muslim world and Christendom. Confrontations in North Belfast are but the latest manifestation of the sectarianism that erodes relationships throughout our society. People hurt when murder, death, violence, fear, poverty and injustice erode their humanity. The journey to the bitterness and hate that fuel further division and violence is a short one. But it is a journey that God calls us to abandon.

God does not call us to compromise with evil and murder. *'You shall not murder'* is unambiguous in its demands. No just cause is served through murder. But God requires that we overcome evil with good.

- Good requires that justice be upheld and those responsible for violating the sanctity of human life and distorting human potential are made accountable.
- Good is willing to face enmity between ourselves and others, our people and other peoples, repenting the abuse of power by which we allow our interests to be furthered at the cost of others.
- Good is concerned for the hurt of thousands in America and beyond, and for the welfare of innocent Afghans, a people who over recent years have seen millions killed and maimed and countless others afloat on the 'sea of the global refugees'.
- Good is as eager to battle the poverty, exploitation and inequality that fuels the hate as it is to battle those who vent their hate in destruction.

'Do gooders' has become a term of ritual abuse for those deemed to be naïve, whose interference betrays an apparent failure to face the world as it is. In reality the Good News of God's reign is uncompromising in its demands, and in a world broken and scarred by violence and hate it is a costly path to take. There is no naivety or failure of nerve in Jesus' words: *'Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you'*. Rather he starkly states the breakdown in human relationships, there are enemies, and he invites us to a better way.

David Porter

exile and homecoming

**Knowing who we are ...
the need for a biblical spirituality
David McMillan**

It was so much easier when everyone just conformed! When church was church and being a Christian (in evangelical terms anyway) was much more clear-cut. Church attendance, total abstinence, avoidance of the cinema and the dance floor provided good, clear guidelines for what it meant to be a believer. While the diversity of denominationalism was alive and well the common ground of the mission hall and other nondenominational and parachurch meetings ensured a cohesiveness of lifestyle and belief that provided clear boundaries and ground rules for an evangelical lifestyle.

Generations have arisen who know not, and care not about, the holy grails and shibboleths of previous generations. It is not uncommon to hear young people tell of how friends at school or work express shock at the discovery of their Christian faith – usually when they express a Christian perspective on some contemporary issue. The friend of one young Christian exclaimed, ‘You’re so normal!’ The comment was taken as it was meant – a compliment – though I suspect that for some

in the evangelical family it would be seen as further evidence of the slippery slope of compromise and worldliness among degenerate Christians.

I well remember hearing many sermons in my youth in which the text of 1 Peter 2:9 was either implicitly or explicitly the basis for encouragement to conformity to the unwritten Torah of evangelical lifestyle as the means of being distinctive. *‘But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people ...’* Far too peculiar was the view of many of us who listened to such sermons. The tentative questioning of the definition of worldliness and godliness presented from the pulpit opened the way for a revision of thinking which is manifest today in the radically different lifestyles of many Christians and the radically different lifestyles among Christians.

But the questioning was not just about lifestyles and legalism, it was also about integrity, meaning and reality. Puritanical lifestyle did not necessarily bear witness to godliness in relationships or love of neighbour. Pious religion seemed more about escapism than establishing, or expressing, any real purpose or sense in being placed on this planet by God in the first place. Preaching and belief did not appear to engage, or be capable of

engaging, with the contemporary world. As questions were asked and answers failed to be forthcoming or convincing the fragile authority of the pulpit over the lives of those in the pew crumbled – and no bad thing either.

The problem now is that for many Christians – both those within local church and denominational structures and those alienated from them – there is no clear, simple sense of knowing who we are in the world or what we should look like. But what a great opportunity – with Christians scattered across the whole spectrum from legalism to licence, from conformity to crisis - to address the question of who we are as Christians living in the twenty-first century.

The place to start is not with tradition, or how it used to be, but with scripture and, I would argue, with the very text that under-girded a whole subculture of dubious legalism decades ago – ‘... *ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people*’.

It does no justice to either reason or common sense to abandon parts of the scripture that have been misused or abused in the cause of promoting a position that lacks integrity. 1 Peter 2:9 is one of those passages that has often suffered such a fate. So instead of neglecting Peter’s teaching to the early believers, the more appropriate response is to re-examine what he was saying.

This ECONI Sunday we hope to encourage that process by taking as the theme ‘Exile and Homecoming’ and basing the study material on 1 Peter. The parallels between the traditionless first generation church in Asia Minor and the post-modern disintegration of traditions within evangelicism in the twenty-first century are

striking. Both require guidance as to how they should think of themselves in a world that doesn’t really understand what they are about, what they believe or why they believe anything. Both require a way of thinking about themselves that is true to their love for Christ and that makes sense in the contemporary world. Peter provides just such guidance.

There is one other problem. How do we approach what Peter has to say without defaulting to the use of scripture as a means of producing another, even if slightly different, list of things to believe, things to do or things to avoid doing that lacks any ring of vitality or engagement? The answer is to read Peter as offering to the early church, and to us, a holistic spirituality that helps us understand who we are and why we are here.

Obviously there is a potential difficulty for some in that the term ‘spirituality’ is often associated in the minds of evangelicals with the promotion of ‘extra’ and ‘non’ biblical concepts to an authoritative status that undermines the authority of scripture in the life of the Christian. Indeed we often feel that talk of ‘spiritualities’ is the thin end of the liberal, Jesuitical or ‘New Age’ wedge! However, while ‘spirituality’ is not a New Testament term it is a useful way to speak of the integrity of the whole of the life of the believer in relation to God and the world. Paul in Romans 12:1-2 does precisely this when he speaks of the offering of our bodies and renewal of our minds as true spiritual worship and goes on to spell out the practical implications of that in the rest of the chapter. ‘Spirituality’ in this context should be thought of as the interaction of doctrine, discipleship, worship and lifestyle. The weaving of these together is what constitutes the form of spirituality on display, or the lack of any coherent ‘spirituality’. To speak of a ‘biblical spirituality’ is, therefore, to identify some of

the scriptural principles that enable the believer to weave together the various strands of life that produce a faithful image of the likenesses of Christ in any context or generation. Peter most certainly provides the structure and material necessary for a coherent spirituality and the value in reading and presenting Peter's material in the framework of a structured approach to spirituality far outweighs any likely difficulties.

For this reason the ECONI Sunday material is presented under three sections: vocation, model and rule – the kind of terminology associated with religious orders down through the centuries. It may well be that Peter, who would not have been unfamiliar with religious orders in his own day, such as the Pharisees or the Essenes, actually understood Christian life in such terms. Peter and the other believers were known as 'followers of the Way' before they were nicknamed Christians. There clearly must have been an order and pattern to their lives to solicit a title that has clear overtones of a recognizable religious community. But we do not need to force on Peter, or his historical situation, religious models with which we are familiar in order to justify the use of concepts such as vocation and rule in our approach to contemporary Christian living. The principles arise within the text itself and to borrow the framework of a religious order is merely to borrow a recognizable framework on which to display the material Peter presents to us.

But why the title **Exile and Homecoming**? Peter's inherited sense of identity is rooted in the concept of God calling Abraham out of his own land and people to become a new nation, a new people who would be light to the world, a light to the Gentiles. Abraham understood himself as an alien and a stranger in the world. Throughout most of his life, as far as we know, Abraham

did not own land. It would appear that the first piece of ground Abraham owned is recorded for us in Genesis 23:4 when he required somewhere to bury Sarah, his wife. Although he was an extremely wealthy man and highly regarded by the communities among which he lived, he remained a nomadic herdsman with nowhere to bury his family. He says of himself:

*'I am an alien and a stranger among you.
Sell me some property for a burial site
here so I can bury my dead.'*

Moses too had a profound sense of being an alien and stranger. A Hebrew child, brought up in Pharaoh's palace, he found himself in the land of Midian after the killing of an Egyptian and in Exodus 2:22 he says:

*'I have become an alien and stranger in a
foreign land.'*

When the law is given to Israel after their deliverance from Egypt it is not insignificant that it emphasises that Israelites must ...

*'not oppress an alien; you yourselves
know how it feels to be aliens, because
you were aliens in Egypt.'* (Ex 23:9)

Even at the height of Israel's empire this is still a term that we find used of Israel as a nation. In 1 Chronicles 29:15 (when David is responding to the people's generosity towards the building of the temple) we read:

*'Everything comes from you, and we have
given you only what comes from your
hand. We are aliens and strangers in your
sight, as were all our forefathers.'*

This concept of being a people called by God to live as aliens and strangers – resident aliens – extends right from the very beginning of Jewish consciousness and the call of Abraham through to the point when Israel is at its zenith as an empire under David into the life of the early Church.

When Peter addresses first century Christians as strangers or resident aliens he is marrying the concept of the vocation arising from God's call (as with Abraham) and the term used of the Jews in their contemporary experience of exile and scattering among the nations – the 'diaspora'. Many of the believers to whom he writes are now exiles in their own communities but faith in Christ united Jew and Gentile, slave and free, Greek, Asian and Palestinian into one community. They were a new community, a new people but without a land. Without territorial boundaries to give security to their identity, they were called to live like exiles among the nations: *'God's elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.'* (1:1)

The concept of Homecoming is not merely reflecting an eschatological hope that could inform and inspire their journey – the living hope of an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade, kept in heaven (1:3-4). Homecoming is the present experience of the believer who knows how to follow Christ as an alien and stranger in the world. Peter speaks of how these aliens and strangers have *'returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.'* (2:25) Peter expresses this wonderful tension of being at one and the same time 'aliens and strangers' who have like straying sheep 'returned' to the shepherd of their souls. Peter presents us with a paradigm that stretches the imagination and forces us to think about living beyond the boundaries of culturally inherited identity. Only those who have joined this religious community with Christ at its head and have come to be exiles in the world have begun to find their true identity as human beings.

Exile and Homecoming is a fresh look at the concept of *'in the world but not of it'* – a worthy concept but so

often overlaid with sub-cultural legalism that for many it no longer has any relevance or value. Exile and homecoming explores themes of vocation, model and rule because there is a need to know who we are in this world and what it means to be a Christian. Perhaps by beginning to think of ourselves in such terms those alienated from traditional churches and those committed to ministry and life within them will find the capacity to re-examine and re-engage in the discovery of who we are and why we are here.

David McMillan is pastor of Windsor Baptist Church and a member of the ECONI Central Co-ordinating Group.

be careful what you wish for

A new northern Irish identity, or a Celtic Tiger's breakfast?

Gareth Higgins

During the past thirty years of civil conflict, if you had asked a northern Irish person who they were and what their identity meant to them, likely as not, you would have heard more about what their identity **didn't** mean. It has long been apparent that the peoples of northern Ireland have tended to define themselves as much in terms of what they are **not** as what they are. (*I use the terms 'northern Irish' and 'northern Ireland' as an attempt to address the controversy over what this people and place are actually called.*) For many, 'the Troubles' caused us to 'lead lives of quiet desperation', constrained to invest ourselves in crisis management rather than living creatively. A constituent part of this has been that Protestant/British and Catholic/Irish identity have continued to be predicated on a zero-sum competition (real or imagined) between two notions of 'nationality' or ethnic identity, each of which were until recently pledged to squeeze out the space for each other's legitimacy.

To the caricaturist, Northern Ireland has consisted of two types of indoctrinated people, including the 'blunt Prods' who know what they want and know that they're right, the romantic Republicans who will sacrifice to defend the 'most oppressed people ever', and the horse-owning species known as 'Cultra wo/man', to be spotted at the yacht club claiming that they don't understand and have no responsibility for the mess we're in. Of course these are stereotypes, and there are many more

people groups than these in this society, but it is true to say that identity in northern Ireland, while complex and partly rooted in real fear, trauma, and competing ideas, has to a large extent reflected the indoctrinated stereotyping of others.

A stereotypical view of the conflict claims that it has been a religious war between two intransigent ideologies with a high faith- or myth-based content. Although this view is unnecessarily simplistic - what about the role of Britain or the pro-reconciliation faith communities - it is important to acknowledge the role that religion has played in structuring the boundaries that have kept us apart and reinforced the logic of the conflict. boundaries that have kept us apart and reinforced the logic of the conflict.

From the Plantation in the sixteenth century through Partition in the 1920's through Good Friday 1998, 'Protestantism' and 'Catholicism' have meant things to the people of Ireland that have no resonance anywhere else in the world. The reason why 'Protestant' and 'Catholic' have remained salient markers of identity for so long in northern Ireland is that no other significant lines of social cleavage emerged to compete. The pluralistic lines of cleavage (class, gender, race, etc.) that have emerged in other Western societies did so as a result of factors such as industrialisation and immigration, whereas such

processes did not occur, or actually reinforced the sectarian social structure in northern Ireland. Early industrialisation merely continued Protestant/Catholic difference in northern Ireland, as Protestants were 'shooed in' to better jobs, and the island's isolated geographical position on the edge of Europe has meant that it has been a launching pad for emigrants, eager to escape to the American dream or Australian city life, or Scottish universities, rather than the first choice potential destination for immigrants from other places! But all this may be changing...

We may feel that the word 'historical' is in danger of over-use these days, and not without cause. Tony Blair's 'hand of history' may well have been on our collective shoulder in April 1998, but an epidemic of 'peace-process fatigue' gradually broke out as the initial euphoria which greeted the Belfast Agreement was replaced first by very cautious optimism, then frustration at the interminable period of argument about the 'D-word', and finally a sense of annual summer dread that we might be headed back to what have been termed (with characteristic Blairite understatement) 'the dark days'. This fatigue contributed to the almost universal lack of celebration (more party poopers than poppers) when the Executive was finally set up, followed by the various institutions that are meant to formalise the peace. However, the early stages of the Executive's existence were characterised by scenes that would have been thought inconceivable even a short while ago: Martin McGuinness at his desk in Bangor (is he the new Cultra man?), David Trimble and Seamus Mallon, seated next to each other, answering questions in the Assembly, and the venerable Gerry Fitt suggesting that the Orange Order/Garvaghy Road question should be settled by the tossing of a coin!

This is imperfect, but progressive politics, which seems to have the potential to gradually cement the possibilities for peace and prosperity about which Messrs Blair, Ahern and Clinton constantly wax lyrical. But a problem and an opportunity are presenting themselves here, which Christians must take seriously. If we didn't know who we were before, our identity is more than ever being prescribed for us by forces beyond our

control – the 'peace junkies' in the British, Irish, and American governments, the media, and international public opinion has now pigeon-holed us as 'the people who have just had a peace process and to whom we all have to be nice for the time being'. We are told that now it is time to 'bury the past' and 'move on' to the promised land of peace and prosperity. The joint efforts of those good-natured Europeans and Americans who, of course, only have our best interests at heart, along with the Celtic Tiger, are sure to lead to lots of jobs and greater material comfort for us all, and then won't we all want to forget that nasty stuff about sectarian hatred, and physical violence being seen as the normal way of dealing with political/ideological disputes and questions of justice? Statutory bodies throw money, possibly just inflated promises of money, at victims' groups, sometimes apparently in the hope that they too might disappear into the past. And, so the received wisdom goes, our grandchildren will grow up in a society where the trauma of thirty, or eighty, or four hundred, or eight hundred years, is a distant memory.

But this 'vision of the future' is as simplistic as the stereotyped ideas of Ireland's past. **We will not deal with the past by forgetting it.** Psychologists tell us that dysfunctional families must return to the source of their trauma, and face it, including the possibility of apology and the offer of forgiveness before they are able to find stability. The same is true for the 'family' of the peoples of northern Ireland – we must not deny or bury the past. To attempt to do so would be to create a hostage to fortune – to simply suppress our society's nature as a dysfunctional family writ large, and make it ready to explode again. Only when we have begun to face our past, and take responsibility for how we have lived will we be able to develop a northern Irish identity of which we can be proud. We have a choice – to deny the past and our collective responsibility for our collective trauma, or to take responsibility for the process of apology and reconciliation that must occur at individual and communal level.

As we emerge from decades of crisis management, we are rather like the university graduate faced with a myriad of

choices, along with the knowledge that pursuing one choice will shut the others down. Northern Irish identity will be in a state of flux for some time to come, but choices made now will reverberate beyond the lifetimes of even the youngest person reading this article. As the Jewish Christian philosopher Simone Weil said, "We possess nothing in this world other than the power to say 'I'". It is the exercise of this choice by each of us as individuals that will determine our future together. The people of God are not exempt from this responsibility.

Will we trample over the pain of our society's wounded because they shame us into remembering the past, or will we dignify all those who have suffered by including them in our new society, and seeking to walk their broken paths together? Will we choose to feed our well-known lack of service culture and 'I'm all right Jack' social attitudes, or will we allow our collective experience of trauma to be transformed into deeper compassion for all who suffer in our world? Will we allow ourselves to be swamped by the materialistic technophilia of multi-national corporate investment and soulless jobs, or will we refuse this by embracing our Celtic creativity and appreciation of the natural world, time we can enjoy and air we can breathe? Will we re-focus our bigotry onto other groups, now that Protestant/Catholic sectarianism is supposed to be a thing of the past, or will we take seriously the call to build a pluralist society for a pluralist people, where discrimination on the basis of religion (Hindu?) and race (Chinese?) and gender and age and sexual orientation is not only illegal but genuinely anathema to all? Will we plunge headlong into busier lives, for better pay and shorter life-spans, owning more **things** than we could possibly need or use, or will we choose lifestyles which prefer to suck the marrow of friendship and community, valuing that which cannot simply be bought at Habitat or Sainsbury?

At the time of writing, we have only a kind of stability in our society, not yet peace nor reconciliation. But we also have a magnificent creative opportunity to **choose what we want to be** – a fresh start. Nobel Peace Laureate and President of the

Czech Republic Vaclav Havel wrote from prison that "...responsibility for oneself is a knife we use to carve our own inimitable features in the panorama of Being; it is the pen with which we write into the history of being that story of the fresh creation of the world that each new human existence always is". Across the complexities of the northern Irish peoples, from the stereotypical to the extraordinary, we can remain prisoners of the 'isms' of the past, doing violence to ourselves by embracing exclusive and easily categorised ideological identities. Or we can acknowledge, with Havel, that "... one's identity is never in one's possession as something given, completed and unquestionable", and that "... responsibility does establish identity, but we are not responsible because of our identity; instead we have an identity because we are responsible". To be northern Irish will certainly mean something different in the future than it has meant for most of us in the past and until now. And it is those who take responsibility who will define that identity. This is what Christ calls us to – to show the way by living as if the kingdom of God has already come. Those who have (often heroically) worked for peace, and those who would follow, must now transform their crisis management into the **creative incarnation of the hope of what we could be**. I don't know what that will look like, but if the church does not lead the way in this, someone else will.

Gareth Higgins is a Belfast based research consultant and director of the ZERO:28 Project - a post-sectarian peace building initiative. He may be contacted at: g.Higgins@qub.ac.uk

bonfire reflections

Alwyn Thomson

I remember my friend, my Catholic friend, Jim, sitting on the kerb outside his house on the street where we both lived. It was the eleventh night. "There's another one up," he would call out sarcastically, mocking our excitement as we scanned the darkening sky, me and my Protestant friends, searching for the tell-tale signs of rising smoke and flying sparks that revealed another bonfire flickering, then surging, into life. "There's another one up," we would cry out.

Jim mocked us, but in his voice there was something else – anger, disappointment, envy. After all, we were no more than ten or eleven years old. Our parents told us, "Don't play with matches!" "Get away from the fire!" Yet here we were – on the one day of the year when we got to play with fire, got to stand close in the darkness, daring one another to edge closer to this immense crackling, sucking, shifting, searing pyre, this monochrome rainbow. It dried our skin, burned our eyes, sucked the breath from us, and as we fought to reclaim the air we tasted the smoke in our mouths and sensed the heat in our lungs.

We walked off to find the bonfires and left Jim sitting on his kerb. Those were primary school days. Not long after we moved up to secondary level. He went to his school, we went to ours. We didn't see much of each other after that.

I had another Catholic friend, Daniel. We were thirteen or fourteen years old now. Daniel didn't sit on the kerb on the eleventh night mocking us in disappointment and anger. Daniel came with us. I remember a bonfire being built at Whitehall on the Ormeau Road. Daniel was there. He was dragging a white wooden panel door on his back. Trailing over the ground, bouncing off the kerbs, it made a fearful racket.

When we had had enough of Whitehall, we walked – with Daniel – down to the bonfire at Somerset Street, then to Walmer Street, then to Annadale Embankment. Everyone knew Daniel was a Catholic, but nobody seemed to mind – even though there were plenty of 'hard-men' on the streets we walked along. Perhaps it was his innocence, perhaps it was his enthusiasm, perhaps it was that Daniel had a slightly strange appearance – a head that seemed too big for his body. Maybe the hard edge of hatred was softened.

Walmer Street was the best bonfire in the area I grew up in. Squeezed into a tiny street between two gable walls, it seemed as tall as the little terrace houses packed around it. Almost every year the fire-brigade was called out as the bricks on the gables became hotter and hotter. The performers knew their lines: "Mister, don't put out our fire" – maybe a threat, maybe a plea. "We're not going to put out your fire love. We like bonfires too" – a word of assurance, a peace offering.

The hoses were unrolled and a stream of water played on the gable walls, now so hot the water at first turned to steam. We watched the stage before us, enthralled at the performance. The walls glistened as the water rolled down them, the billows of steam were sucked into the flames of the fire. A solitary flute played the sash somewhere on the far side.

We watched the streetlights melt, the plastic covers starting to twist and then to flow. We listened for the pop as the bulbs exploded. Sometimes we weren't expecting it and it took us by surprise. It was exciting to imagine that we were under attack. Cowboys and Indians in Walmer Street – we were the good guys.

Some of those who stood round the bonfire with us on those nights exchanged the imaginary gunshots for the real in later years, becoming involved with loyalist

paramilitaries. One, suspected of murder, became a victim himself, shot dead on the Ormeau Road. For another, his greatest enemy proved to be his own friends: beaten to death, they found his body outside a pub. What malice there was in their hearts as fourteen-year-old boys standing by the bonfire in Walmer Street I don't know, but in their adult years, it seems, there was malice aplenty.

They grew up in the same streets I did, went to the same primary school I did - Ulidia Primary School – stood by the same bonfires I did. But our lives turned out very differently.

At some point – I can't remember when exactly, maybe when I was sixteen or seventeen – I stopped going to the bonfires, stopped watching the bands. I don't know why. Perhaps friends drifted away, perhaps it just stopped seeming like innocent childhood fun. But I remember going back again a few years ago. We went to Sandy Row. I was bemused, horrified, disgusted, embarrassed. It was pitiful, it was pathetic – it was surreal. Here a band of Christian evangelists conducting an open-air meeting in their finery. There an unruly crowd of young men in Rangers tops, bottles in hand bellowing our Protestant songs. In the background an open-air disco: boom, boom, boom – it is old but it is beautiful – boom, boom, boom. People pushed prams, weaving along the road. The prams carried the babies and propped up the parents. Everywhere Tennents and Harp.

In the same way that the eleventh night I knew as a child was not the eleventh night my parents knew in their childhood, so the eleventh night I experienced as a thirty something adult was not the eleventh night I knew as a child. But then they lit the fire.

Slowly at first, then taking a hold, the heat rising, edging further back. The smoke billowing. The dryness of the air.

The crackling of the wood. The skin stretching tight across my face. Wondering how much hotter my clothes could get without bursting into flames or melting.

Fire has always been a powerful symbol – sometimes a symbol of warning, sometimes a symbol of rejoicing, sometimes just a symbol. I found myself drawn by the fire, to the exclusion of the raucous scenes around me. What it symbolises for me I do not know – childhood, perhaps, times that seemed more innocent. Or maybe it is just the fire itself.

Some years ago I edited a book called **Faith in Ulster**. We asked people to comment on the phrase 'For God and Ulster'. One of our contributors was the political scientist Arthur Aughey. In his piece he wrote of the effect a passing band parade had on him: "The sound of a loyalist band can stir emotions and identifications which are not simply momentary, not simply illusory, but real. 'The accent of one's birthplace,' as La Rochefoucauld said, 'persists in the mind and heart as much as in speech.'"

As with bands, so with bonfires.

Alwyn Thomson is Research Officer with ECONI.

rights, relationships and responsibilities

... with particular reference to the PARADES ISSUE Kelvin McCracken

Undoubtedly one of the most overworked words in the English language during the past 30 years is the word 'rights'. During the 1960s the issue of 'civil rights' came to the fore in many parts of the world, not least in Northern Ireland. Almost simultaneously the 'right' of the mother to choose abortion became enshrined in legislation in the UK. Since then the Animal Rights Movement, the Gay Rights Movement and others have established power bases in society. Recently the UK Government has established the Citizen's Charter setting out the rights of the individual in relation to many aspects of civic and corporate life. Within Europe, Human Rights legislation has been strengthened and the rights of workers have been further underpinned. Nearer home we have seen the application of Equality Legislation in relation to gender, race and religion and await the completion of a Bill of Rights as part of the outworking of the Good Friday Agreement. We have also heard much from Residents' groups about their right to live peacefully without the 'provocation' of Orange Order marches whilst Orangemen have been equally vociferous and intransigent over their rights to march on the Queen's Highway. The issue of 'rights' brings us straight to the issue of relationships since, in every instance quoted above, insistence on a particular 'right' by one group or individual has inevitable consequences for others. For example, in the case of abortion, the 'right' of the mother denies the rights of the unborn child. In many cases, however, including most of the legislation mentioned, society agrees to a certain curtailment of 'rights'

for one group in favour of the greater good of others. However legislation cannot provide a panacea. Such is the case with the Parades issue where the painful consequences for both sides and for the RUC, caught in the middle, have been all too obvious to the whole world. While we should give thanks that some progress has been made in Londonderry and that Drumcree and the Ormeau Road situations were much better this year than many had feared, the Parades issue is still a festering sore in our community which must be addressed.

Whilst the actual words 'rights, relationships and responsibilities' are not found at all frequently in the Bible it has much to say about these issues and we are left in no doubt as to what God expects from those who claim to be followers of Christ. The general principles can be applied to all the types of situation mentioned above but it seems to the writer that they come most sharply into focus when we consider the Parades issue because here we have one group (Orange Order) who stoutly affirm their allegiance to Christ and to the centrality of the Bible as the infallible Word of God. It is reasonable, therefore, to expect that they will seek at all times to act in accordance with the principles set forth in His Word.

What then are the principles which should govern our relationships? How do we balance the 'rights' of one group against those of another? What are our responsibilities as Christians towards God and our neighbour? Without doubt the over-riding principle is established in the Torah and re-affirmed throughout the Old and New Testaments:

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. (Deut. 6: 5)

Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people but love your neighbour as yourself. I am the Lord. (Lev. 19: 18)

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind ... and love your neighbour as yourself. (Luke 10: 27)

The parable of the Good Samaritan puts a very human, and very disconcerting, face on the neighbour but long before that we are given much practical advice and direction about how to show love. For example, the Commandments first of all establish our relationship with God and then with our 'neighbour':

Honour your father and mother, do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not bear false witness, do not covet.

In Leviticus 19 the people were admonished to 'be Holy because I, the Lord your God, am Holy' and then were given a series of rules for practical living:

v9 When you reap do not reap to the very edges of the field. Leave them for the poor and the alien.

v11 Do not steal. Do not lie. Do not deceive one another.

v13 Do not defraud your neighbour or rob

him.

v15 Do not pervert justice ... but judge your neighbour fairly.

v16 Do not do anything that endangers your neighbour's life ...

v17 Do not hate your brother in your heart ...

v33 When an alien lives in your land do not ill-treat him ... love him as yourself for you were aliens in Egypt.

Exodus 23: 4-5 takes the concept of neighbour even further: '*If you come across your enemy's ox — be sure to take it back to him. If you see the donkey of someone who hates you — do not leave it there*'. Proverbs 25:21-22 gives an even stronger message: '*If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this you will heap burning coals on his head*'. Completely consistent with this, Jesus (Matt. 5) re-emphasises and extends the principle of love for enemies: '*But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in Heaven ... If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?*' Perhaps, however, one of the most challenging statements of Jesus is that in Matt. 5: 38-42: '*But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also*'. Did Jesus really mean what he said? Well, it would appear that he did. In Isaiah 50: 6 we have the prophetic words: '*I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting*'. When he was

arrested he refused to use force in self defence (Matt.26: 52; Mark 14: 48; Luke 22:51). Before the Sanhedrin and before Pilate he remained silent (Matt.27: 14; Mark 15: 5; Luke 23: 9) and suffered spitting and striking (Matt.26: 67), flogging (Matt.27: 26; Mark15: 15) and, finally, crucifixion. Thus he fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies and placed his perfect seal on his teaching in Matt. 5 : 11-12: *'Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you'*.

In summary, then, the kind of love spoken of and demonstrated by Jesus is unconditional, offered to those who were his enemies (Rom. 5:10) and affects every aspect of our relationships with others. But, some may say, *'We cannot be expected to live up to the standards set by Jesus and surely God gave the people of Israel rights to inherit the Promised Land, to drive out and kill those who were already there and to worship him in the ways he ordained through Moses and the Prophets'*. However, when we examine the nature of the Covenant which God made with Abram (Gen.15) and confirmed with Moses (Ex. 24), it relates to the calling of a people who would be 'a Kingdom of Priests and a Holy Nation' (Ex.19: 5-6) and their future was dependant upon obedience (Lev. 26; Deut. 28). Furthermore, God made it plain (Lev.25: 23-28) that the land was his and the people were 'but aliens and my tenants'. Interestingly, the Levites were not given any part of the land (Deut. 18:1-2; Josh. 13: 14): *'The Lord is their inheritance, as he promised them'*. When we turn to the New Covenant we see that those who claim the name 'Christian' are described as being *'crucified with Christ'* (Gal.2:20) and as being part of 'a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ', 'a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God' and 'aliens and strangers in the world' (1Peter 2: 5,9,11). Taken in this context we can see the Promised Land as the forerunner of the New Jerusalem, the driving out of idolatrous nations (Deut. 7) as the forerunner of the defeat of Satan at Calvary and the nation of Israel (and particularly the Levites) as the forerunner of the Bride of Christ. In this context the catchphrase 'For God and Ulster' must be seen as a blasphemous abuse of the Covenant relationship.

In terms of our 'rights' the Bible has a powerful message, as

expounded in John 1: 12 *'...to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God'*, in Rev. 2: 7: *'To him who overcomes I will give the right to eat from the tree of life'* and in Rev. 3:21: *'To him who overcomes I will give the right to sit with me on my throne'*. The only other direct reference to individual rights in the New Testament is found in I Cor. 9, concerning the rights of an Apostle. Even here, having established his rights, Paul goes on to say: *'But we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the Gospel of Christ'*. In contrast to the demand for 'rights' the Bible denounces pride (Ex.5:2; 2Chron.32:35; Esther 3:5; Dan.5:23; Pr.16: 18-19; Is. 2:17; 1 John 2:16) and self-righteousness (Deut.9:4; Pr. 12:15; 2 Cor 10: 17) and commends humility (Micah 6:8; Luke 14 : 10; Rom. 12: 3; 1 Peter 5 :5; John 13:5; Phil 2: 8), self-sacrifice and suffering for righteousness' sake. As mentioned earlier, Jesus said (Matt. 5:11-12): *'Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad — for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you'*. Paul (Heb.11) lists those who suffered for their faith and James 5:10 holds up *'as an example of patience in the face of suffering ... the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord'*. In Heb.12, Paul goes on to encourage his readers to consider what Christ had suffered *'so that you will not grow weary and lose heart'* and to *'make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy... and see to it that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many'*. Elsewhere he lists the trials and tribulations which he endured for the Gospel and, in three different letters (Eph. 6; Col.3; 1 Tim. 6), admonishes slaves not to demand their freedom, as we might think right and proper, but to *'obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it ... with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord'*. Likewise, Peter (1 Peter 3 and 4), encourages his readers, *'Do not repay evil with evil, or insult with insult but with blessing' saying it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil' and 'Rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ'*. In short, it is incumbent upon those who dare to claim the name of Christ to seek to live by the standards set by Christ *'who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness and became obedient to death ... even death on a cross'*.

Finally, in relation to the attitude of the Orange Order to the Parades Commission, a body legally and properly established by the Sovereign Parliament, it is worthwhile to consider what the Bible has to say about submission to authority. Throughout Scripture we have the acknowledgement of the 'delegated authority' of Kings and Rulers under God. Many of them 'did evil in the eyes of the Lord' but were, nevertheless, permitted to rule for a season. Indeed we even have examples of foreign rulers being used in the will of God; for example, the King of Babylon carrying off the people of Israel into exile (Daniel 1) and Cyrus and Darius permitting and encouraging the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem (Ezra). In Ecclesiastes 8:2-6 we are advised to 'obey the king's command — and whoever obeys his command will come to no harm'. Jesus, when tested by the Pharisees, replied 'Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's' (Mark 12:17). Undoubtedly the three passages in the New Testament which most directly address this issue are Romans 13: 1-7, Titus 3: 1-2 and 1 Peter 2: 13-17. All three are very direct in their message and in harmony with the Old Testament view of authority delegated by God. In Romans 13: 1-2, Paul states without equivocation that *'Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established ... Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted'*. When we consider that Paul, albeit himself a Roman citizen, was writing about an authority system which gave no particular consideration to the followers of the Way, this is a challenging statement. Likewise, Peter is forthright and further suggests (v13) that submission *'to every authority instituted among men' is 'for the Lord's sake' ... 'that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men'*. Of particular interest, in all three passages, is the context in which these statements are made. In the case of Romans 13 the passage is preceded by Chapter 12 which (v2) admonishes us, *'Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind'*, encourages brotherly love and hospitality and then finishes (v17-21) with words similarly challenging to those of Jesus (Matt. 5 : 38-48) including the words from Prov. 25: 21-22 mentioned earlier, concluding with *'Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good'*. Similarly, in 1 Peter 2, we see Peter placing emphasis on the new nature of the Christian, reminding his readers (v9) *'But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation. a people belonging to God,*

that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light'. His emphasis is on holy living and it is particularly poignant that the verse preceding the reference to submission to the authorities encourages the reader to *'Live such good lives among the pagans that, although they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good works and glorify God on the day he visits us'*. Of equal importance to the context of verses 13-17, is the one immediately following, addressed to those who had no rights whatsoever. *'Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh'*.

Clearly, then, we can summarise all of the above by stating that, as Christians, we have responsibilities to God and to our neighbour, that our chief responsibility is to show unconditional love, that this will affect every aspect of our relationships, both vertical and horizontal, and that if we wish to 'walk as Jesus did' (1 John 2:6), we must be prepared to sublimate our 'rights' in favour of our neighbour. In plain English, the only way that Christ can be glorified in this, is by the members of the Orange Order choosing to waive their 'rights' to march down the Garvaghy Road or any other where their presence causes pain or offence. There can be no justification for the attitude adopted by the Orange Order towards the Parades Commission, a legally and properly appointed body which has been faced with an almost impossible task. It is depressing that an organisation which claims to be centred on Christ and the Bible as God's infallible Word, has failed to show any real understanding of what it means to 'Love your neighbour as yourself'. In the wider sense it should be a matter for serious concern within the Christian community that much of the impetus for establishing and promoting Human Rights in this generation has been largely by those who would not claim Christ as the cornerstone of their lives. However, the writer is also reminded of Jesus' words, *'If anyone of you is without sin, let him be the one to cast the first stone'*.

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wilson

SUFFERING AND SCRIPTURAL ABUSE

“Let the day of my birth be cursed,” he said, “and the night when I was conceived. Let that day be forever forgotten. Let it be lost even to God, shrouded in eternal darkness. Yes, let the darkness claim it for its own, and may a black cloud overshadow it. May it be blotted off the calendar, never again to be counted among the days of the month of that year! Let that night be bleak and joyless. Let those who are experts at cursing curse it. Let the stars of the night disappear. Let it long for light, but never see it, never see the morning light. Curse it for its failure to shut my mother’s womb, for letting me be born to come to all this trouble. Why didn’t I die at birth? Why did the midwife let me live?”

Not the kind of words we like to hear, they make us feel uncomfortable, and threaten our sensitivities. Yet these are the words of a spiritual man. In fact as far as God was concerned Job was blameless and upright. Yet he was able to be real and honest about how he was feeling. God could cope with Job’s honesty, but his three friends couldn’t. They were thinking, “How inappropriate, how irreverent, a godly person should not talk in that way.” So in an attempt to silence and control Job they attacked him with long spiritual speeches, avoiding Job’s reality.

To our shame many of us, when faced with someone else’s suffering and pain, fall into the same category as Job’s friends. We want to use scripture as a sand pit where we can bury our heads, quoting well worn clichés to protect ourselves from facing the discomfort that reality brings. Well meaning people come at times of trouble and glibly quote Bible verses as if they had some magical power to take the pain away, or change the difficult circumstances. But their attempts are counterproductive and add confusion and pain to an already difficult situation.

When people are feeling under pressure they don’t always have the emotional resources or mental concentration to apply the word of God adequately and appropriately. Sometimes, in sheer desperation, they cling to verses that they have taken out of context. This in turn leads to false hope, wrong expectations of God, and further disappointment and disillusionment.

suffering

So how can we receive the genuine comfort and consolation that only scripture can give, without misusing the word of God to anaesthetise our pain and escape from reality? In the midst of severe suffering it is natural to have a desperate need to try and make sense of it all. We have questions, doubts, fears, and sometimes we may even feel abandoned by God. But if we are going to find God's comfort then we need to remind ourselves that God's intentions are always good. Joseph could say to his brothers, "You intended to harm me but God intended it for good." If we blame God we will not experience the good that could result because of our suffering. Suffering is one of the ways God uses to bring change and transformation into our lives, and it is in the context of that transformation that we are able to receive and be strengthened by the comfort that only God can give.

We began with some strong words from the book of Job. Job's speeches may disturb us; they are what I call 'messy worship'. Job was being thoroughly real. He brought the content of his heart to God and did not use scripture as a detergent to sanitise his grief in order to make it more acceptable. The book ends with Job receiving comfort as he encounters God for himself. The comfort of scripture will come as we face reality and learn that to be brutally honest is not contrary to humble submission to the purposes of God. The question I have is this: Are we in the Church ready and willing to allow hurting people to be totally honest, or do they have to go on denying their pain and hiding behind those awful words, "No, honestly, we're fine!" Lots of people have fallen away from God; could it be possible that we in the Church are partly responsible with our trite and superficial use of scripture? If so, then may God forgive us!

Alan Wilson is a regular contributor to Lion & Lamb.

poems

This year's ECONI summer school was once again a rich and challenging experience (see the enclosed ECONI Newsletter). The event is always demanding as participants commit themselves to four days of exploration into the theological, cultural and political realities that shape life in Northern Ireland. As part of the Summer School programme we have been keen to include opportunities for more reflective moments and the introduction of a number of arts workshops has provided participants with a creative space in which to process their experience of the week and to give some emotional expression to what they have been discovering. Out of this year's poetry workshop came a number of poems that reflect this process and we offer them here as an alternative way of considering the persistent issues that face us as we continue to work for peace and reconciliation in our community.

bonfire in sandy row

Out of the night sky a distant rumble roars,
A shaft of power strikes the ground.

Around the fire the crowds converge,
Dance to Athenry, to Sash, to dark pulsating beat.
Raw energy wells up and strikes the pyre.
The heat, the searing, burning light,
The crack of deadly, frightened guns proclaim the pain of Sandy Row.
The pain of ones who feel sold out,
Sold out for fancy flats, for ministerial car.

When will the pain strike next?
Which innocent will feel its searing heat?

Kevin Brew

forgive?

I followed him outside
that day,
just like every day.
It was spring, and the early rain
left a tender scent
of kissed earth,
that day.

I said goodbye to him
that day,
just like every day.
The sun glistened
on the damp grass
and new life from the earth
that day.

When sound exploded
in the stillness of the morning,
and flames licked the air,
I sank to my knees.
No strength to breathe,
no strength to understand:
I could not comfort my children
and I could not weep
that day.

Forgive?
Every fibre in me burns
to see screaming pain and trapped terror
in their eyes.
Who would not ask for that,
and who would not grant it?
No, I'll not forgive. I'll hate,
and I'll propagate
the vengeance culture
of my land.

For only a Spirit stronger than iron
could lift that weight of violent desire.
And even stronger still,
to bear the weight of accumulated justice
that our history demands.

Sarah Parkinson



faith and practice

Debbie Watters (Greater Shankill Alternatives)

Debbie Watters is Project Manager of Greater Shankill Alternatives, a centre whose work is based on the principles of restorative justice. Debbie is a native of County Derry. After study in the University of Ulster at Jordanstown, she lived for a time in the United States of America. Four years ago she returned to Northern Ireland and now lives and works in North Belfast. We asked her to begin by defining the term 'restorative justice'.

Restorative Justice

'Restorative Justice' is basically a different way of dealing with crime and conflict. It tries to humanise crime and conflict by looking at who has been hurt by crime, who has been hurt by conflict, who is the victim, who is the offender, and what the obligations are on the part of the offender. It is very much rooted in biblical teaching in that it is about healing broken relationships. It is about bringing people together, helping them to understand that when they are involved in wrongdoing there are consequences and obligations. Basically it is about healing, moving forward and trying to create a better future.

The role of the victim is pivotal to the whole process and we would see that as being very, very important. Victims are often left out. They don't have a voice; they are not empowered; they feel very much marginalized and re-victimised by whatever process follows their initial victimisation. Restorative justice says that victims need to be included; they need to have a voice.

Greater Shankill Alternatives

We asked Debbie to give us a picture of restorative justice and its effectiveness on the Shankill Road.

In Northern Ireland restorative justice has emerged at a grass roots level. It is very much indigenous to the community, and emerged initially as a response to paramilitary punishment attacks, which we see as a

legacy of the conflict. In Northern Ireland generally, restorative justice looks very different than it does in other countries. For example, in America Restorative Justice Programmes would operate mostly in white middle-class areas. On the Shankill it provides a non-violent positive alternative to paramilitary punishments. In some ways we have already moved on because the number and level of punishment attacks have decreased dramatically since we opened our doors. That is partly because the paramilitaries have agreed to refer young people to our programme.

Part of the process on the Shankill has involved talking to everyone from police to paramilitaries, from victims to young people, getting all of the stakeholders on board. We work intensively with both young people involved in anti-social behaviour and with victims. It is a voluntary process; both parties choose to be involved.

Is it working?

I feel it works, although some people may feel I am biased. I worked in restorative justice in the United States for 4 or 5 years and was a great 'believer' before moving back here. Now, to see it emerge at a grass-roots level, indigenous to working-class communities is amazing. Former combatants and ex-prisoners are working at peace building on the ground, truly committed to a philosophy like restorative justice - a biblical philosophy like restorative justice. I think it is just amazing. Paramilitary attacks have decreased, and the number of young people who engage with us each year proves we offer something different. Victims receive restitution from young people on the road on a monthly or yearly basis. Three of the staff are ex-prisoners, all of the workers in the programme live and work in the Shankill, most of our volunteers are local. It is very much rooted in the community and is very much about healing broken relationships - a biblical concept. People see it as peace building and part of the whole process of conflict transformation.

Is there any cross-community dimension?

Yes, at several levels. Our management committee is made up of both Catholics and Protestants. At a staffing level some are engaged in cross-community boards or committees that work on the 'interface'. We engage with Restorative Justice Programmes from the Republican/Nationalist community and with young people who engage in rioting on the interface. We also work closely with people from the Springfield community, and have some contact with people from the Ardoyne community. Wherever there is a need and a desire we try to build on that. Also, some of the young people are involved in cross-Border, cross-community projects. I suppose that if we are working at helping to humanise victims for our young people we also have to be working at helping humanise the perceived enemy, and that is often the Catholic community.

Personal Involvement

We wondered how Debbie came to be involved in the work of restorative justice.

As a teenager I grew up and was quite heavily involved in church. The story of Jesus in the Gospels was always very important to me. I could never really work out why the church didn't have more of a social conscience. For me the gospel is about being present for people on the ground, people who were hurting, people who were in pain. I could never understand why the church seemed to absent itself from the political conflict (some people would call it a war). That was always an enigma to me. As a teenager I started to develop a social conscience as part of my faith. I began looking at how I could develop myself. At Jordanstown I got involved in youth and community work. In my early twenties I moved on from the whole concept of trying to evangelise people to just being present with them. Whether people adopted or embraced my beliefs or not wasn't the important thing to me. The important thing became that people reach their full potential. And in helping people find healing inside themselves I also began to find healing inside myself. It really helped me develop as a person.

In my mid-twenties I got married to an American Mennonite. The whole Mennonite culture appealed to me because of the peace-building element, because of the mediation. Restorative justice and the apparent embracing of a social conscience felt very good to me,

so when I moved to the States I got involved in their Restorative Justice Programme. In many ways it fitted with what I was feeling inside. I feel very fortunate that when I moved back from the States about 4 years ago restorative justice was a concept that people were willing to begin to embrace. They were ready for it, whereas some years earlier they would not have been. The climate was right for it, and with the release of some life ex-prisoners who really had had transforming experiences 'inside', people on the ground were ready to embrace it and the time was right for me. I was a Protestant, a Christian who had grown up in a Loyalist background. There was an opening. The timing was right.

Personal faith

Debbie next talked about her faith, and about the values which govern her attitude to work.

In terms of my faith I would say that the older I get the greyer it becomes. Trying to live with that greyness is an ongoing issue for me. I would define my faith today very differently from 5 years ago, maybe even 2 years ago. It is continually developing and evolving as I change and grow as a person. My faith is very central to who I am as a person and what I do as a person. My work is a vocation for me. I would say it is a calling. I have always struggled with the fact that, in the Protestant church, ministers are said to have a calling, and that is very special. But I think that everyone has a calling and my calling at the minute is to work on the Shankill. That is as important as anybody else's calling and just as valuable. What I do every day in restorative justice is me acting out my faith. Restorative justice for me is a biblical concept and I work at trying to internalise that on a daily basis. Now I am not always good at that but I really try to treat people as I would like to be treated. I try to have a level of integrity in myself as a person and in the work that I do. I try to be honest and open - about the shades of grey and the lack of answers - and be real and human to people.

The older I get, maybe the less complicated my faith becomes, and theology maybe has become less important as I see people's pain, anger and hurt. I truly believe that is where the real work is. It is empowering people to heal themselves. I would define my faith very much in terms of my humanity and other people's

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humanity. That comes from how I view God and Jesus. I try to walk side by side with Jesus and be there for people, trying not to judge them, trying just to accept them for who they are. That would be one of my core values. People are valuable because they are made in the image of God, so regardless of the choices they make in life, or regardless of the journey they go down, they still are valuable people, loved by God and accepted by Him. It is not for me to judge. My role is to work at changing who I am, at healing myself while being there for others.

Membership of the local church

Currently I am not involved in any church for several reasons. In Northern Ireland I struggle with church life. In some ways I have found my experience of church quite removed from my experience of God. One of my struggles over the years has been finding a role for myself as a female, as a woman who wanted to have a voice and who felt that she had something to offer. I have mixed experiences of church but I still really struggle with the gender issue. I feel very much that women don't have the role that they could and should have. They aren't given the voice that they could and should have. Very little has changed even in the past 100 years in terms of the voice and role of women.

In my teenage years church was a very important aspect of my life. There were men who pushed me on, who wanted me to do well, who wanted me to grow and who really empowered me. What I enjoyed about church then was a sense of community and I miss that. Maybe I find my church in other places like work because it's a vocation, a calling and a community for me. My work is spiritual. I would like to find a church where I could be comfortable, to be part of one that very clearly has a social conscience, that is reaching out genuinely to people who are hurting and in need. I would like to find a church that doesn't judge me because of where I work or where I am at in my life, but embraces me as a person just because I am made in the image of God. So currently I am not involved in church, though I think church can be an important aspect of growing.

Church and Community

We asked Debbie to say something about the relation-

ship between church and community and about the church's response to the Restorative Justice Programme.

I suppose my struggle with church and community has been that church has always seemed and felt quite removed, especially in Protestant communities. People educated themselves, move up in the world and move away. They then commute to their traditional church but don't live in the community. The church therefore isn't engaging with local people. I suppose my question would be how relevant is the church to where people are. Some of the issues on the Shankill obviously are ongoing, like the Ardoyne/Twaddell conflict. Where is the church in that and what role has the church been playing even in a mediation sense, in peace building, in building relationships? I sense that this happens through community groups and not as much through church. I am open to be challenged because I do think there is some good work happening at church level on the Shankill. But my experience of church overall is that they leave out the 'dirty' work - I don't mean that in a bad sense - the real work where you are engaging with real people who are having real struggles on a daily basis. That is often left to community workers and the church doesn't engage. Restorative justice in the States has been pushed on and championed by the Mennonite church. In Northern Ireland, restorative justice has sometimes been seen as an arm of paramilitary groups so therefore people have been very suspicious of it. The reality in Northern Ireland is that paramilitary groups do exist. In working-class areas paramilitary groups have a lot of power. Churches and their ministers need to be talking to people within communities who have power, to people within communities who can and do make a difference. Part of that dialogue is an education process - a mutual education process - because everyone needs to make changes. On our Management Committee we have a local minister from the Shankill, Rev Barry Dodds, who is very committed to restorative justice, a man with a real social conscience who has 'hung in there', year in and year out, trying to make real changes, and be a real presence on the Shankill Road. Barry has such respect at all levels within the community, including paramilitaries.

I think we need to engage and be willing to enter into dialogue. That is difficult for churches because they place a stigma on certain groups within Northern



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Ireland, people who have perpetuated the conflict and have been offenders. In some senses I don't buy into that. I think that we all have been part of the problem here and we should all be part of the solution. I didn't go out and kill anyone in the conflict, but I was brought up with sectarian attitudes, and my church life helped promote those sectarian attitudes at many levels. Churches need to take responsibility for that. What are they doing to help change the mindset of people who attend their churches? What are they doing to challenge people about their stereotypes? My experience of young people on the Shankill Road is that many of them are willing to engage in cross-community work. A lot of churches aren't willing to enter into dialogue with the other community, aren't willing to build relationships, aren't willing to work at breaking down the stereotypes of their 'enemy' and I think Jesus calls us to do that. Jesus calls us to work at how we perceive our enemy and who is our enemy. In Northern Ireland the church does have a lot to answer for. We have grown up with a culture of violence. The church has helped to promote that by its silence.

Silence is also a form of violence. By saying and doing nothing the church chose to stay removed. I think things could have been very different if the church had got involved at different levels and at different stages. Individual ministers and church people have, but the church as a whole, in my opinion, didn't do the job that God called them to do, and didn't walk the path that Jesus walked.

Current Issues for the Shankill

Finally we asked what Debbie perceived as the current issues for the people of the Shankill.

There are a lot of issues, ranging from social to economic to educational. The big issue is that, in terms of the Good Friday Agreement, it is hard for people to see that there is peace. Peace is a process and a lot of people in the Shankill haven't felt that there is a peace yet. The Shankill feud over the last year shows that the culture made of violence is very real. What difference

has peace make for the ordinary people on the ground? The whole economic infrastructure on the Shankill is an issue. It has an unemployment rate three times the national average. Where are the jobs, how safe is it to move off the road and get jobs in other places?

Young people are growing up with violence and trauma, both of which are real not only for them but for adults. Alcohol, drugs and anti-social behaviour among young people are still major issues. Many of our communities in Northern Ireland are very traumatized and I would challenge the church about what are they doing to help deal with the trauma that people are feeling. North and West Belfast are said in a recent survey to have the highest level of medication taken in the whole of Northern Ireland. Stress levels, levels of trauma are great for people on the Shankill Road.

The whole community needs to find itself - some people are beginning to re-define loyalism. Loyalism doesn't have to be what we are against. It can be about who we are as a people, how secure we are in our identity and culture. I see the Shankill as a community that is beginning to empower itself, mobilize itself, working-class people beginning to take control of their own destiny. That is the truly heartening thing about what is happening on the road at the minute. At a grass-roots level people putting their lives on the line every day in the name of peace, in the name of healing and transformation. People are beginning to say, "Enough is enough. For 30 years we have had things done to us. Now we are beginning to 'do' for ourselves, and we want to 'do' for ourselves in partnership with churches, with police, with the education system. Let's move forward together and let's find healing together."

ECONI thanks Debbie for her willing co-operation in this interview and wishes her success as she continues to work with Greater Shankill Alternatives.

Ruth Hutchinson
Assistant Editor

Janet Morris

The article which follows is based on a short talk which I gave at a seminar on forgiveness in July 2000. It was an interesting occasion. The main speaker was a former New York 'cop' who had been severely disabled as a result of being shot in the course of his job. Speaking from his wheelchair, with frequent pauses to suck air from his ventilator, he outlined his struggles to deal with what had happened to him - and his choice (in Christ) to forgive the perpetrators. No one could deny the authenticity of his experience - the evidence was before us - but reactions to his story differed. Some were so inspired by what he had to say that they were following him around different venues, just to hear again how God had worked in his life. Others were very angry, feeling that his message belittled the suffering of victims in N.Ireland. It was obvious that this was and is a subject which rouses deep feelings and that it continues to be much disputed in this community. The following represents one N.Irish Christian's initial attempts to explore some of the issues around a subject which takes us to the heart both of the gospel and of human relationships. In writing it, I was indebted to the work of Dan Allender who works with victims of abuse and Miroslav Volf who writes out of experience of the abuses of war.

What is forgiveness? There are many possible definitions, but one by Allender offers as good a starting point as any. *'To forgive is to cancel a debt in order to open a door of opportunity for repentance and restoration.'*

What does he mean? The debts are the hurt, harm and injury which we suffer from others and which we inflict on ourselves. As we all know, when significant hurt occurs, relationships become strained. Sometimes they break and in some cases that breaking may result in violence. If communion or community is to be restored, this brokenness needs to be dealt with realistically. People need to change, relationships need to be redeemed and restored - to the measure that they can be in a fallen world where things will never be perfect. So forgiveness is at the heart of how we live our lives in relationship with others and with ourselves. It affects the quality of our friendships, our family life, our work

relationships, our churches, our wider community. If any measure of community is to be established in our country, then forgiveness is a key part of the complex of things that need to happen when relationships go seriously wrong, as they so manifestly have done among us.

But this is not easy. On the contrary, it's very hard; it's costly and seems to fly in the face of our sense of natural justice. When serious harm has been inflicted on us or those close to us, forgiveness seems such a scandal, an outrage, a flouting of divine and human justice. How can we even begin to forgive some of the atrocities we've seen in N.Ireland? Indeed some may ask: how dare we? Why should we cancel the debt? It's not going to magic limbs back onto maimed bodies or bring loved ones back from the dead. Why should we open doors of opportunity for those who've hurt us? Indeed, why should we want

them anywhere near us? If we forgave, wouldn't we be denying justice, wouldn't we be trivialising the wounds of the victims? Is not forgiveness really just a weak denial of wrongs suffered, a sweeping under the carpet of heinous crimes, a useless manifestation of a sentimental, appeasing desire to have peace at any price - a pretend peace which delivers nothing and laughs in the face of our communal wounds?

These are important and painful questions, which go to the heart of our moral centres and to the wounds that we carry. They also go to the heart of the Christian gospel. They ask us how we can relate the grace of God, which reaches out to the offender in embrace, to His holy and uncompromising justice. God judges; God requires repentance before salvation can be entered into - of these facts we are persuaded. But we seem prone to forget that God is also the One who, in grace and love, takes the initiative in moving toward those who have offended and hurt Him. His desire for community, for restoration of relationship with His enemies, is so strong that He makes it possible at the highest cost to Himself: the death of His own son. God, the offended one, moves toward us, the offenders, in redemptive love and kindness - *while we are yet sinners*. This is amply illustrated in the parable of the prodigal son. Where was the Father? Sitting at home, lines of resentment etched on his face, determined that the son who had so grievously injured Him, would never darken his door again - certainly not without abject apology? No, the Father was out on the road, heedless of his dignity and status as head of

household, searching the horizon for a glimpse of his rebellious son and embracing him before the lad had had a chance even to open his mouth and deliver his prepared speech of confession and contrition.

This is an extravagant love which many of us in the N.Irish church have not experienced anywhere deeply enough. This is a grace and an embrace that has not been embodied enough in our church communities. Perhaps this is why we often lack the grace to let go of grudges and past hurts (whether in our personal or community lives) because our experience of grace (from God and one another) has been so shallow. In our relationships with others, we want to put justice first, to allocate blame, to demand repentance first, failing to see that if God had done the same with us, there'd have been no hope of gaining the salvation that we so cherish. Convinced of the necessity of the offender's prior repentance, we often forget the reality of the God whose desire for relationship with the offender is so strong that He moves toward him or her to see what may be possible. As Volf says, "God puts grace first in order that justice may be done." Indeed, Allender and Volf both argue that it is the will to forgiveness, which is part of a larger will toward community, which offers the best hope of doing justice and creating genuine peace between people by confronting hurts realistically and beginning to deal with them. This will always be risky, for such offers may be rejected. In fact, Allender argues that such offers of mercy will result either in a repentance which leads towards justice and reconciliation, or in an intensification

of the original evil. He sees this as part of the work of God in exposing sin and evil so that they may be more clearly seen and dealt with.

However, this move towards the offended does not in any way deny the necessity for change. Without repentance, a turning away from wrongdoing, a realistic renegotiation of relationship and attention to the needs of the injured, there can be no true reconciliation, no lasting peace between people. Forgiveness, the cancelling of debts, the letting go of revenge into the hands of God who will repay a right, is not an end in itself. It only makes sense as one of the many steps towards the restoration of community between people. It's a choice, a risk that creates space for movement in the direction of the other. It's not a denial that wrongdoing has taken place, a pretence that all's well when it isn't. On the contrary, forgiveness can only ever happen if our rage is acknowledged and expressed - to ourselves, to God, to those who can listen redemptively to our pain. It can only happen if we truly mourn what we have lost, weep over what has been ripped away from us. And it can also only happen if we are prepared to look at our own wrongdoing, at the sin that lurks in our own hearts. It is not something that can ever be forced. In Christian terms such things become possible when we stand on our experience of the extravagant, gracious, redemptive love that God has lavished upon us. From the security of His arms we can express our rage, weep our tears and look at ourselves - over and over again, for as long as it takes. For this work will never be entirely finished, nor will we

ever do it perfectly, but if we are recipients of God's grace, then we need to be its agents also. Volf writes this: *'Inscribed on the very heart of God's grace is the rule that we can be its recipients only if we do not resist being made into its agents; what happens to us must be done by us. Having been embraced by God, we must make space for others in ourselves and invite them in - even our enemies'*.

This inviting in of others is not absent from our Christian communities in N.Ireland - indeed some Christians here have shown an astonishing capacity to forgive those who have grievously wounded them. Yet, in our churches and our community life generally, we often seem more devoted to building and maintaining barriers than stepping across them. We need to listen again to the gospel, to meditate deeply on the gracious movement of God towards us as sinners, to sit again at the foot of the Cross where justice and mercy meet and possibilities of new life are made present in the offer of new relationship.

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