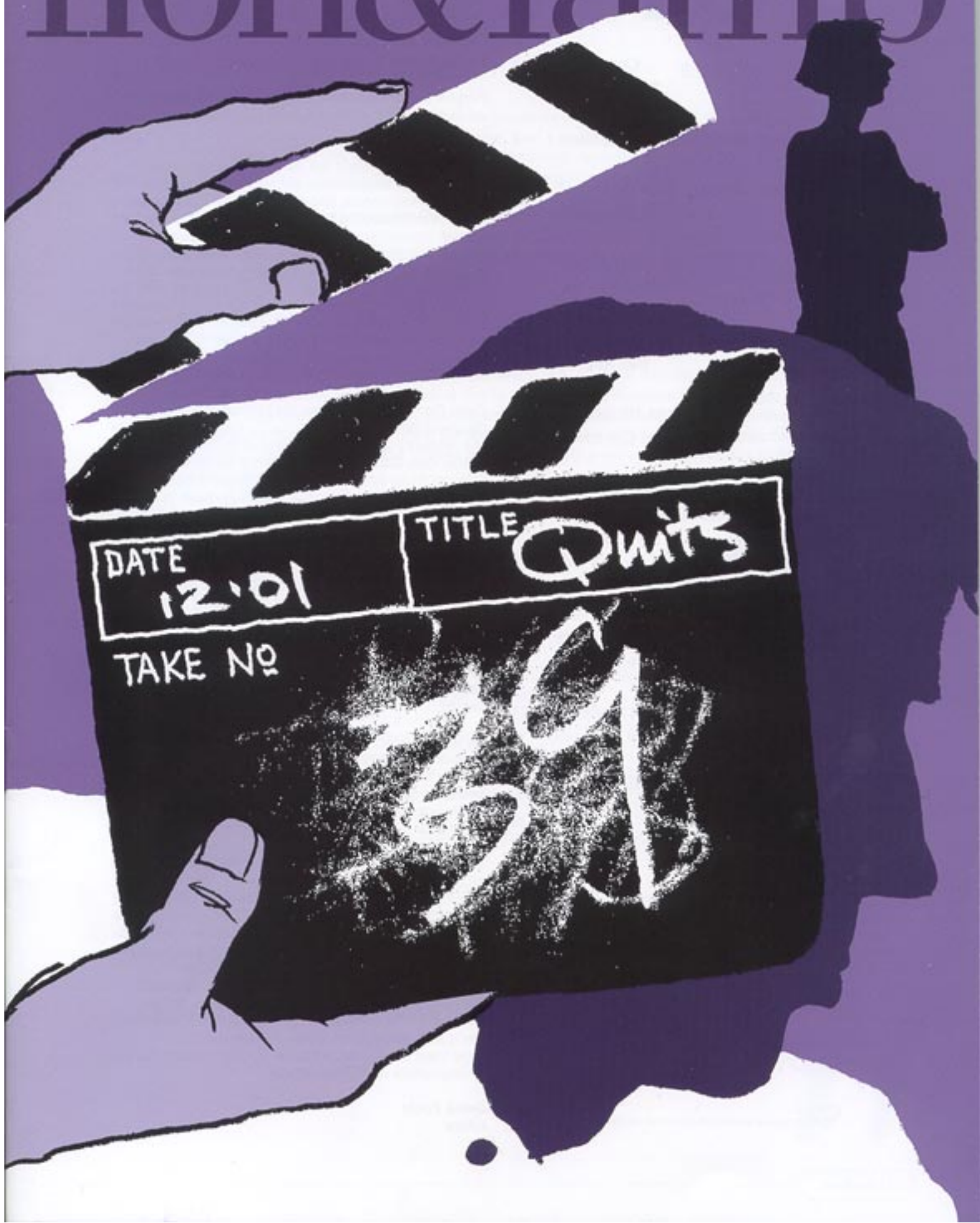


lion & lamb



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Derek Poole
Editor



Let the Church be the Church

Brian Moore

There is a widespread assumption today that the church's role in society has become that of a political commentator, a community relations adviser or a Gallup Poll assessor, rather than a prophet sounding forth the Word of God 'for such a time as this'. Therefore, greatly daring, I would like to urge the church to re-assume its prophetic role and spell out its message in society, not just in passing references, but again and again, loud and clear.

- God is Lord of history and politics and life. There is therefore no reason for despair on our part. We are not at the mercy of the British or Irish governments, loyalist or republican paramilitaries or political terrorists. This does not mean we sit all serene-like, twiddling our thumbs and imagining that things are really other than they are. Rather it will encourage us to continue striving for a more stable, just and peaceable society, trusting in God and staking our life on the fact that Christ's death and resurrection underline for all time that he is Lord, no matter what appearances may lead us to conclude. Out of all the dreadful convulsions of these dark days he will fulfil his purposes and usher in a new day.
- What we are witnessing in the world today and in Ireland in particular is the judgement of God. As an American commentator has vividly put it, "We turn to God for help when the foundations of our life are shaking, only to find that it is he who is shaking them!" This judgement has two sides. It is retributive, a punishment for our we-can-manage-without-God way of life and our utter disregard for his Word and laws. It is also corrective until '*in our despair, against our will comes wisdom through the awful grace of God*' moving us as a people to turn back to him.
- The Christian, as a citizen, has a divine obligation to submit to lawfully constituted authority. This does not mean that we must necessarily endorse the civil administration of the day, either the manner of its setting up or its policies. Indeed we may feel compelled to register opposition. But our opposition must be within the law of the land. Civil disobedience, in its several expressions, only becomes justifiable when our '*rendering to Caesar the things that are Caesar's*' involves an overriding of conscience, a compromise of faith or a rejection of our duty to God. For the Christian the end never justifies the means. However legitimate our end may be we must always subject to close and careful examination the methods we adopt to attain it.
- In our present tragic situation the supreme need is for prayer, corporate prayer, not just once a year on a special day, or on Sundays at our services, but during the week as well.

'Today we have lost too much the spirit of prayer. We do not believe in it as Christ believed in it. By prayer Jesus routed the demons of the desert. By prayer the apostles shook down the throne of Nero. By prayer Francis, Luther, Wesley and many another brought from the four winds the breath of God to breathe upon the dry bones of an effete ecclesiastical institution, and the dead bones sprang to life, an exceeding great army. By real, concentrated, believing prayer the church today could change the present dangerous situation out of recognition. The real malady of the church is not theological stagnation nor social difference; it is prayer paralysis.' (J S Stewart)

Are not these some of the prophetic notes the church should be sounding forth today? Let the church, then, be the church, and be heard to be the church. That is my plea. Let her stick to her own job, for in this there is hope, not just of peace but of change and renewal, change of heart in people on both sides of the religious divide, and renewal of moral fibre and spiritual stature as the Word proclaimed by the church and released by prayer makes its impact on life and society.

Brian Moore is a member of the ECONI Steering Group.



IN RESPONSE TO IRA AND IICD ANNOUNCEMENTS

As a group of Evangelical Christians who have committed ourselves to work across the divisions and contribute to building a better future for all, ECONI welcomes the implementation of a previous agreement between the IRA and the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning.

The announcement that the process to put arms completely and verifiably beyond use has commenced, has come at a critical point in the life of our community. It comes out of a long process, in which the difficult task of rebuilding the damaged relationships that are at the heart of our conflict has involved all sections of our community taking risks – risks with each other, and risks within their own constituencies.

In welcoming these developments, we want to acknowledge the risks taken by many of our political leaders - unionist and nationalist, loyalist and republican – who in different ways have pushed back the boundaries of their own traditions in order to sustain, not only the institutions, but also the hope of the people for a better future.

No single step taken since the emergence of the current process has, in itself, brought peace. It is only as all of us use the opportunity presented to make and build peace that we will move towards the shared future and peaceful society that we long to see.

ECONI has always challenged the legitimacy of political violence in Northern Ireland and, consequently, views decommissioning as a moral imperative. Equally, the process of decommissioning is critical to the building of trust and of new relationships. Yet, while vital and important, decommissioning itself is no guarantor of peace.

The words and actions of recent days are welcome evidence of the commitment to address the ongoing issues in our relationships through dialogue and free from the threat of violence. However, we do not underestimate the challenge that we continue to face.

The political task remains critical in securing support for the actions that now need to take place. We have concerns over the existing proposals for extending the benefits of the early release scheme to those with outstanding prosecutions and those subject to extradition proceedings. We recognise that others too have concerns over various aspects of what is required to address the outstanding issues in the implementation of the Belfast Agreement.

The rise of sectarian tensions, provocation and violence fed by protagonists on both sides of the divide is a constant reminder of the mistrust that feeds both fear and hostility. We are concerned about the culture of violence that has been nurtured by the on-going conflict and which continues to corrupt social development in many localities.

As Christians from the Protestant tradition we believe that decommissioning is a moral imperative for loyalism as much as for republicanism. We recognise that loyalist communities feel a strong sense of alienation from the current political process and would encourage the government to engage community representatives in addressing their concerns. We would make the same call to the Protestant churches. Government, churches and community leaders need to work together to bring to an end the sectarian violence that plagues our streets and to bring about a situation in which loyalist weapons, too, are decommissioned.

Our prayer is that we may all have the commitment to take up the opportunities that have been given to us in God's mercy to move towards the normalisation and healing of our relationships on these islands.

This statement was issued by the members of ECONI on 29 October 2001.

decommissioning how do I feel?

David Clements

Over the long years of the troubles journalists, mostly of the broadcast variety, have been forever asking victims of terrorism – how do you feel? This has often, though not always, been insensitively done in the immediate aftermath of some terrible atrocity when the victim feels nothing but shocked and numb. Sometimes the ‘noble answer’ given in the numbness of the moment has left victims feeling trapped in a whirlpool of angry emotion that does not seem to fit with the words spoken and perhaps even broadcast.

It seems to me that politicians think (or should that be scheme?), church leaders talk, paramilitaries act and victims feel. In the wake of the much-hailed act of decommissioning by the IRA I have already been asked live on-air, “How do you feel?” It is not an easy question to answer with a clever sound bite and so I am glad of the chance to reflect a little on the question in the luxurious space of the print media.

How do I feel? The first thing I feel is a bit numb. It is not the same shocking numbness I felt on that cold, dark December night when my friend came to tell me, “Dave, your Dad’s been shot yes, dead.” Nevertheless, it is hard to take in. The ‘not a bullet and not an ounce’ brigade have given way to ‘a substantial amount of ammunition, weapons and explosives’. Everyone, apart from those saturated in Provo propaganda from their birth could see that decommissioning was the right and proper thing to do. Politically, morally and even pragmatically the argument was over a long time ago. But hey! They have actually done it! It does take time to sink in.

How do I feel? I feel cross. It is not the burning anger that I have felt too often sitting in the presence of a widow and her children while Daddy lies cold in his coffin in the corner of the room. But, what was the point? Why did it take so long? Has it all been some silly game? And then there was the eleventh of September. Is this what it took to shift the balance of opinion in the IRA army council? I suspect it was. I further suspect that it had more to do with pragmatic political consequences than any moral revulsion at what happened in New York and Washington. And so I do feel cross.

How do I feel? I feel sore. The announcement came on the twenty-third of October. On that day eight years ago I was working as a Methodist minister on the Shankill Road. I remember digging in rubble. I remember taking family to hospital and waiting with them and crying with them as they were given the news they least wanted to hear. I remember one funeral after another. I remember visiting the homes of lovely Catholic people caught up in the evil cycle of revenge. I remember the most moving article ever to appear in this or any

how do I feel?

decommissioning

other paper when, on New Years Day 1999, Lindy McDowell wrote about the letter Michelle Williamson tried to give to Sean Kelly, the bomber responsible for her parents' deaths. Michelle wrote, "You are like a disease in my bones and the only cure is justice. To say I hate you doesn't begin to describe how I feel." I understand (at least in part). I remember sitting in Crumlin Road Court beside Michelle and her brother and a number of other families devastated by the bomb. I remember watching in disbelief as Kelly sneered at us as he was being taken down. How can I not feel sore?

How do I feel? I feel a strange sense of relief. I will not hear a single word of criticism against victims who have been sorely afflicted and who may be trapped by their pain. Too much has always been expected from them and too little given to them. However, as one (and only one out of many) who has been given the grace to contribute something (however small) to the process of healing and reconciliation in this divided place, I do feel relieved today. For years I have called for decommissioning. For years I have argued that it would be an invaluable plank in the healing and trust-building process. And now it has happened, I welcome it. I don't think a fanfare of trumpets is appropriate but it is polite to say thank you. And so I do. I hope the process continues. I plead with loyalist paramilitaries and their political friends to respond quickly and positively to the move by the IRA. We need momentum and, who knows, perhaps, in a short space of time the process will be completed by all, and then we can bring out the trumpets! Then we can all feel relieved.

How do I feel? The last thing I feel (at the moment) is apprehensively hopeful. I know it is a clumsy and contradictory phrase. But it is how I feel! This has been a long and slow process and there is still a long way to go. I am not sure that it will work in the end, but I hope that it will, and this week I have more reason for that hope than I had last week. I don't always exhibit it, but I do believe in the principle of perseverance (it was my old school motto!). For people of faith we must persevere in prayer. For all in political life, they must persevere in trying to make the process work. For those who seek to combine the two the Word is: *'Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.'* (Galatians 6 v.9)

David Clements is a Methodist minister working in Dungannon and a member of WAVE's management committee. First printed in the Belfast Telegraph on 29 October 2001.

Response to Gregory Jones

Embodying Forgiveness

Patrick Mitchel

First I want to thank Dr. Jones for his thoughtful, biblical and inspiring exploration of an issue of profound importance for Christians and the wider society within Northern Ireland. He has reminded us of how desperately forgiveness needs to be embodied in this divided community.

Greg spoke of the 'burden of memories'. One tongue-in-cheek definition of Irishness (which is just as applicable for 'Northern Irishness' as well) is of 'a people walking backwards into the future.' In other words, even as we 'advance' in this technological postmodern age, the memories of the past, real and imagined, continue to have the power to shape both our present and our future.

In Northern Ireland some use memories as a weapon against their enemy. For others the past is something to be repressed, it is too painful to bear. In either case an unresolved and unredeemed past continues to intrude its malignant presence into the present.

It seems to me that this is a society awash with recent memories of violence and on-going fear of violence.

- Levels of suspicion and perceptions of injustice remain high.
- Amongst the Protestant community especially, there is a deep unease and perhaps even widespread despair about the future.
- Out of political necessity, each participant in the conflict appears to be advancing with its own version of history unchallenged and even endorsed - and by participants I mean everyone: individuals, churches, governments, political parties and especially paramilitaries. Joe Liechty and Cecelia Clegg's recent book on **Moving Beyond Sectarianism** (Columba, 2001) powerfully demonstrates how all of us, in different ways and to different degrees, have been actively involved in the dynamics of sectarianism.
- The sinful actions and attitudes of others remain clearly in focus despite specks and even planks in our own eyes.
- There is little felt need to repent of past actions and to ask one's enemies' forgiveness for past wrongs. After all, if I am 'not to blame' I don't need to be 'forgiven'.

- Many traumatised by violence have yet to have their suffering legitimised and their stories heard. Victims' experiences seem to 'matter less' as they appear to be sacrificed at the altar of political progress.

This is a society, therefore, where memories of both victims and perpetrators remain largely unredeemed. Such memories are like slow-burning fuses that may yet explode to threaten hopes of a stable political future.

In this context, Greg demonstrated the inadequacy of just trying to 'forgive and forget'. He has reminded us that forgiveness is not easy, or cheap, or automatic. He also showed us the inevitable failure of just trying to 'forget without forgiving'. The past thirty years in Northern Ireland cannot and should not be forgotten.

However, Greg reminded us in his first session of the rich and deep resources within Scripture, and woven into the fabric of the Christian faith, of the transforming and redeeming power of forgiveness. He pointed us to the wonder of God's grace where reconciliation is made possible only as a result of God's loving initiative '*through the death of his son*' to those not only alienated from him but '*when we were God's enemies*'. No wonder Paul rejoices in God as he reflects on these deep truths (Rom. 5:10-11).

Surely this has profound implications for God's people, called to reflect his character and mercy in Northern Ireland, a place riven by competing ideologies and long legacies of hatred. Forgiving is different from simply removing responsibility or excusing the sin. It is looking one's enemy square in the face and taking the risk of offering forgiveness with no guarantee of acceptance.

Perhaps what has struck me most today is the remarkable power of forgiveness to confront and transform evil. In Romans 5 Paul describes Christ as the second Adam. But he writes that '*the gift is not like the trespass*' and emphasises '*how much more*' powerful and wonderful is the work of Christ in contrast to Adam's original sin.

Christian forgiveness has a similar power to transform destructive relationships. It does not ignore evil but has the capacity to redeem the past into something more powerful and wonderful. Forgiveness forms an integral part of the Christian hope of healed past and a redeemed future. Both being forgiven by God and learning to forgive are essential experiences at the heart of the Christian faith.

A powerful example of the transforming power of forgiveness was evident in the experiences of Christians belonging to St. James' Church, Capetown, South Africa. In July 1993, three Pan African Congress (PAC) terrorists burst into the church and launched a brutal gun and grenade attack on the congregation. Eleven people were killed and many seriously wounded. Many reactions followed; confusion, pain, anger, interpretations of the attack as demonic and some statements of forgiveness. In 1995, under the subsequent Truth and Reconciliation Forum the attackers applied for an amnesty available to those who demonstrated 'sincere repentance' for past wrongs. Church members faced the reality of the new emotional upheaval of facing the killers and reliving the traumatic event. As part of this process, church leaders eventually met with the PAC men who expressed contrition and asked for forgiveness. Questions remained. Was the repentance genuine or just a necessary strategy to obtain amnesty? Talking of this meeting afterwards, church leader Bishop Frank Retief said the meeting allowed him to move 'from an attitude of forgiveness to an actual act of forgiveness'. He took the risky step of embracing the killers as a visible sign of reconciliation. Arriving at that stage had been a long and difficult journey, which neither had overlooked the sin nor minimised the suffering of the victims. Nor was the pain of the past suddenly resolved at this meeting. The killers' subsequent amnesty in 1998 left many struggling with a sense of injustice and wondering if it is harder to forgive when the safety net of legal punishment by the State has been removed.

One of the attackers later spoke to a Xhosa member of the church and explained his motivation for the attack. He had grown up convinced that Christianity was inextricably linked to white Apartheid power and had hated it with a passion. The church was simply a focus for that hate, its members dehumanised targets in a 'war' for 'liberation'. Now, after meeting his victims who did not hate in return but offered forgiveness, he said, "I want you to know that we were amazed and we understand now that that was not Christianity. This is Christianity."

What implications this story has for evangelicals in Ulster! Many see evangelicals here as being, if not the main part of the problem, no different to anyone else. Historically, evangelicalism has been so deeply involved in offering political and spiritual support for Unionist power that the Gospel has become inextricably linked to one political ideology. Evangelical faith has all too often been absorbed into the political competition between Unionism and Irish Nationalism.

Today, Dr. Jones has focused our minds on what it means to be followers of Christ faced with the challenge of sharing this small space of Northern Ireland with (former?) enemies responsible for awful and unjustified violence against 'our' community. Perhaps it is this issue more than any other that has split Unionism into pro- and anti-Agreement factions. The latter reject the Agreement as morally flawed and refuse to accept unrepentant enemies. This is perfectly understandable on a political level but not, I would suggest, an attitude consistent for Christians called to be '*Christ's ambassadors*' who have been given a '*ministry of reconciliation*' (2 Cor. 5:18-20). Instead, in these post Good Friday Agreement days, a vital challenge for evangelicals is to demonstrate a radical forgiveness that is truly counter-cultural because it is only forgiveness that has the power to transform the 'burdens of memories' that continue to weigh this society down. We should be grateful to Greg for provoking us afresh to think how this can be done on the ground.

Patrick Mitchel is Director of Studies at Irish Bible Institute, Dublin. He is author of 'Evangelicalism and National Identity in Ulster' 1922-1998 (to be published in 2002 by Oxford University Press).

Forgiveness in the New Testament

Bill Addley

In Northern Ireland the New Testament teaching about forgiveness and repentance is of interest to more than biblical exegetes and preachers. On the 8th November 1987 Gordon Wilson's daughter was killed and he was injured by the Enniskillen bomb. That night he told a reporter that he bore neither ill will nor grudge against those who had committed such an atrocity. These words shone like a beacon of hope and reconciliation around the world, but not for everyone. Some felt that he was too hasty in extending forgiveness to the bombers. Not only had they committed such a horrible act but they showed no sign of repentance or remorse. How can you have forgiveness without repentance? Bonhoeffer spoke of cheap grace can we not also speak of cheap forgiveness?

What then does the New Testament teach on the matter? First, God forgives us our sins as a result of what Jesus did on the cross. John the Baptist pointed to Jesus and exclaimed, *'Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.'* At the Last Supper Jesus said, *'This is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for the remission of sins.'* (Matt 26: 28) Paul wrote, *'In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins.'* (Eph 1: 7)

Second, there is a very close relationship between being forgiven and forgiving others. Jesus taught his disciples to pray, *'Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.'* He went on: *'... if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.'* (Matt 6: 12, 14) And he later taught them the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant (Matt 18: 23-35) to the same effect. So those who are forgiven are to forgive or, to put it another way, if we do not forgive others then we have not been forgiven ourselves. It is difficult to think of forgiving others as a necessary condition to being forgiven by God. God's forgiveness is an act of his free grace, which we can neither earn nor merit. So perhaps it is better to say that forgiving others is the necessary result of and indication of being forgiven by the Father. And those who refuse to forgive are so closed that they are unable to receive the forgiveness offered by God. Those who experience God's forgiveness must forgive one another *'just as in Christ God forgave you.'* Christ is the origin, the stimulus and the example of Christian forgiveness.

Third, to receive forgiveness we must repent. Repentance plays a prominent place in the teaching of Jesus in the first three gospels. His preaching ministry opens with a call to repentance. *'The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the gospel'* (Mark 1: 15). Throughout his ministry, by word and deed, Jesus showed that *'there is more joy in heaven over one*

sinner who repents than over ninety nine righteous people who do not need to repent'. And when he was taken to glory the young church that was left continued with the same message - *'Repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations'* (Luke 24: 47). It is a little curious that though Paul is recorded by Luke as preaching that *'God commands all men everywhere to repent'* (Acts 17: 30). Yet specific references to repentance are infrequent in his letters and completely absent from the writings of John (except the Revelation). Both Paul and John use other terms and concepts to express the same truth. It is fair to say, however, that repentance is inextricably linked to forgiveness. God's offer of forgiveness is of his pure grace, free and without conditions. Repentance is required on our side if we are to receive it. That is, the offer of forgiveness is without condition, but to receive it we must repent. Only those who let go of their sin can take God's gift with empty hands. Only those who realise their need will reach out to receive it.

Fourth, the church in the New Testament was concerned about forgiveness within its fellowship. Peter's well-known question about how often he should forgive, concerned 'my brother'. His question and our Lord's answer are recorded in Matthew 18, a chapter that deals with relationships within the church, the care of immature members and even procedures for the excommunication of the unrepentant. This focus on internal church relationships is found throughout the epistles. To quote but one example from Paul, *'Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another'*. The overall emphasis was on *'love which binds all together in unity'* (Col 3: 13f; cf Eph 4: 32).

Fifth, the New Testament has little to say directly or specifically about human forgiveness to those outside the Christian community. The concordance shows few references to forgiving those outside the church. Yet related teaching is relevant. Jesus taught his disciples to love their enemies and pray for those who persecuted them (Matt 5: 44). His whole ministry was one of reaching out to the outcast, to those cut off by human barriers of race, class, custom, creed or morality. This same ministry was carried on by his disciples both while he was still on earth and after he had been taken up to glory. The gospel to be shared by his followers was one of reconciliation between creator and creature and between person and person. And most powerfully of all, on the cross Jesus cried, *'Father forgive them, they do not know what they are doing'* (Luke 23: 34; cf Acts 7: 60). There is much here upon which to build a theology and practice of forgiveness beyond the church in the wider community, but available space means that discussion of it must await another time.

Bill Addley is Professor of Practical Theology at Union Theological College, Belfast.

Better than Bitterness

David Clements

It is self evident that bitterness is a bad thing. Even the most ill informed commentator from another planet who glances at Northern Ireland could make the valid observation that we are plagued by bitterness. Scripture underlines the potential dangers. *'See to it that no-one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.'* (Heb 12:15) Paul exhorts the Ephesians to *'get rid of all bitterness'*. (Eph 4:31) In Galatians Paul risks being thought of as insulting in his effort to prove that the gospel of grace is about faith in Christ and not works of the law. Nonetheless, he is equally eager to point out that we cannot abuse our freedom in Christ without serious consequences. The example he gives is chilling – especially for those of us in the evangelical fold. *'If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.'* (Gal 5:15)

Bitterness does not normally come out of nothing. Some real or imagined insult or injury has been the cause. There can be a great variety of human responses to insult and injury but we could broadly categorise them into three.

One response is to retaliate, to be vindictive and take revenge, to strike out and return evil for evil, blow for blow, bullet for bullet and bomb for bomb. This leads to a continuation or often an escalation of the conflict.

A second response is to resort to a self-destructive retreat into self-pity. Powerlessness or fear may make this seem to be the only option, but it leads in the end so often to discouragement, despair and depression.

A third response is to deny or suppress real feelings of anger and hurt. Over time, sometimes a very long time,

these feelings smoulder and poison our whole system and lead in the end to a bitter spirit.

Instinctively, we feel that there must be a better way than this. What would Jesus do? His response towards the soldiers who crucified him was to pray for them: *'Father forgive them, they don't know what they are doing'*. His teaching to his disciples was: *'Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you and pray for those who ill-treat you'*.

You probably saw it coming, and yes, of course, it leads us to the vexed question of forgiveness. I say 'vexed' because in the context of Northern Ireland this important and complicated issue has too often been treated in a superficial and cavalier manner. What sense does it make in the face of an evil atrocity to say to the widow and orphan, "You should forgive"? The issue of repentance is often raised. Of course, if forgiveness is to be 'transacted' there must be apology, repentance and if possible restitution. Sadly, in Northern Ireland there is little chance that many victims will ever receive even an apology. Their beloved husband or son, father or brother was seen in the eyes of others as a 'legitimate target', hence no crime was committed and talk of apology inappropriate. The best we can hope for, it seems, is an expression of regret for the hurt caused on all sides. There is a great danger here for the victims. With no prospect of meaningful repentance, the danger is that the victim will be trapped in a bitter spirit. But it need not be so. The victim may take the initiative. Whether or not the perpetrator acknowledges his guilt, the victim may choose to develop, by the grace of God, a forgiving spirit. In the dim and distant past I came across these five features of a 'forgiving spirit'. I am not able to

acknowledge the source, all I can say is they have for at least ten years been a help in my preaching and my personal struggles.

In response to insult or injury I may seek to develop a 'forgiving spirit'. This can only be done prayerfully and progressively. It will have the following features:

- A forgiving spirit is one that rejects the right to retaliate. It will not consider returning evil for evil.
- A forgiving spirit is one that takes the deliberate decision not to harbour hostility. The evils of the past are not forgotten but they are not allowed to dominate the present.
- A forgiving spirit is one that takes the deliberate decision to return good for evil.
- A forgiving spirit is one that wants the best for those who have injured us. For the unbeliever this may seem absurd, but for the Christian it is profound. The best we could wish for anyone is for them to come into a living relationship with Jesus, which then opens up the real possibility of not just forgiveness but reconciliation.
- A forgiving spirit is one that grows out of the knowledge of having been forgiven by God in Christ. (Eph 4:32)

This may not be a full description of a forgiving spirit, but it is a good start. In conclusion, two further things should be said. We should remember that God is still a God of justice. There is still a day coming when Christ will judge the living and the dead. In that court there will be no need of witness testimony or forensic evidence. In that court there will be no miscarriage of justice, with the innocent being condemned or with the guilty being acquitted.

And the final thing: developing a forgiving spirit may be to the benefit of the guilty; it will surely be of benefit to society, but most of all it is for the well being of the victim. A forgiving spirit is better than a bitter spirit.

David Clements is a Methodist minister working in Dungannon and a member of WAVE's management committee.

Necessary miracles: thoughts on forgiveness and politics

Duncan Morrow


Max Weber famously defined the state as that body which holds the monopoly of all legitimate violence in a given territory. The usual English translation is more euphemistic than the original German, speaking of 'force' rather than 'legitimate violence'. But Weber was deliberately trying to unveil something important in politics: the state is founded in violence. As both Hobbes and Locke knew, the control and use of violence is what makes a state necessary in the first place. Only anarchists have believed that human beings can live together in large numbers without a larger authority with the ability to arbitrate disputes, enforce decisions and control those who continue to prosecute their own interests with violence. And all of them confirm what Paul already knew in the first century: that conformity to the law is both our only way to live together AND it is death.

Politics is about using power to win and exercise power. Even at its best, it has never been about the abolition of violence, but about its reduction by control. Of course this carries with it enormous dangers. If the power of the state falls into the hands of unrestrained violence, then the state itself becomes the embodiment of terror. While we are traumatised by the terrorism of small groups over whole nations, we must not forget that 'the reign of terror' was perpetrated by a state in crisis – the French Revolution. Furthermore by far the larger part of the deliberate deaths attributable to terror in more recent history was committed by states: Nazi Germany, Stalin's Russia, Mao's China and Pol Pot's Cambodia.

Politics is ultimately not about best and worst but about worst and better. Utopias, which hold out the possibility of escaping this terrible double bind through politics, are ultimately confronted with a terrible dilemma: if people will not do what is good for them, will we force them, or lose our dream? But it is also not to say that all systems are equally tyrannical or unchangeable. Churchill was certainly right: 'Democracy is a bloody awful system of government, but it is the best bloody awful system of government we have.'

In the New Testament, the theme of earthly power is the core of the third temptation: if you bow down and worship me, the principle of violence and death in the world, you can be master of everything. And Jesus refuses - refuses to the point of death. Another aspect is graphically conveyed in John's account of the passion. "It is expedient," says Caiaphas, "that one should die for the people."

As a result of this moment of frankness, Caiaphas has been vilified by much Christian writing and in one sense, rightly so. But in another sense, his only sin was candour, articulating the principle on which the rest of us, Christian or otherwise, continue to live. Many political leaders have been prepared to kill more than one to ensure the survival of their political project. It was no less true of World War Two than it was of Stalin's terrors, so we have probably all understood the impulse. And the same underlying choice has been made in Afghanistan. It is uncomfortable to have to acknowledge that a decision not to go to war is ultimately also to take risks with other lives. To govern is to choose.



Jesus always speaks of and from a reality beyond politics and violence, within which the apparently impregnable order of power is rendered meaningless by grace and love. Entrance to this reality is founded on forgiveness, because only through being forgiven could we possibly enter. Only injustices can be forgiven. Forgiveness, the limitless decision to count as nothing the injury and guilt that lies between us and God, is the possibility which speaks of a wider reality to which human life must return. It is the antithesis of law and enforcement, having always to do with granting more than can be asked for and given without asking for payment. As Dostoevsky and one of the thieves crucified alongside Jesus knew, forgiveness in relationships can also go along with a capacity to accept punishment.

So what has forgiveness to do with politics? For as long as we think of it as a tool, as a trick of power or as a strategy we remain firmly rooted within the language and possibilities of power relations. The strategies and tools may be useful political or personal possibilities but they are not the same as the genuine decision to embrace an enemy or a decision to ask to be returned to full humanity following real violations. Legislating forgiveness always remains impossible. Asking forgiveness on behalf of others in an age when nobody grants that kind of authority to anyone else is probably a lost possibility. Grand statements without real personal penance, always seem vacuous and politically motivated. Underlying all the rationalisations, this alone explains the well-founded resistance of secular politicians to even countenancing forgiveness as a political category.

Like little else, forgiveness and the cry for healing underlines the limit to politics faced with broken relationships. But to say, as many do, that politics has nothing to do with forgiveness is, for me, too simple and too cheap. Our possibilities lie not in the capacity of politics to enlist forgiveness as a strategy, but in the opportunities which political leadership and power find to speak from the truth of their human weakness, bowing before the deep human truth which violence teaches us: that without forgiveness all human life is impossible. But it is only those politicians who recognise the limits of their power and return to the reality of their human weakness who can bridge the gap. They do so, not in formulas or in speeches, but in simple acts and words that say little but convey everything. And when we meet to talk about forgiveness and its meaning, we need to witness to it by telling stories rather than seek for foolproof formulas. So when we meet, let us tell our stories of those who shine as lights from the hilltops. In one quick glance I see Anwar Sadat in the Knesset, Willi Brandt at Auschwitz, Vaclav Havel and the Sudeten Germans and Martin Luther King and the whites of Alabama.

Duncan Morrow lectures at the University of Ulster's School of History, Philosophy and Politics in Jordanstown.



faith and practice

Moyna Bill is the seventh person to be interviewed in our **Faith and Practice** series. Moyna is a consultant anaesthetist with the Cardiac Surgery Team in the Royal Group of Hospitals.

Early Years

I have been a Christian over 30 years now. My father's partner enabled us to go to a beach mission at Portballintrae and that was where I made a commitment to follow Christ. I wanted to serve God by going into a caring profession. There has always been the sense that maybe God would call me to another part of the world in order to use my skills there. So I went into medicine. Partly it was expected because I was a girl, was good at sciences and had a father who was a doctor. I prayed as a teenager that God would guide me into wherever he wanted me. Despite myself I believe that God did the right thing, though I have sometimes found it quite difficult to be a doctor.

As a student in Edinburgh University I did anaesthetics and enjoyed it. It's very much hands-on, talking patients through what's going to happen in their operation, trying to set them at their ease, trying to make sure they have confidence in the teams looking after them. When I first decided on anaesthesia I didn't intend to go into heart surgery. I thought I might end up as a missionary doctor in the developing world. But it became clear that I was to stay in this country for the time being anyway. I enjoyed the theatre atmosphere. It's very much a team thing. Everybody is reliant on the team; they can't do the job without others. But part of me didn't want to be a surgeon. In those days it was slightly more difficult for girls to get on in surgery, and also the training was going to impede my involvement in church and church activities.

Vocation

I learnt in youth fellowship and through Christian unions at university that God calls his people into the place he wants them to be. A vocation wasn't just being a missionary or a minister, but it was a vocation to be where God was actually placing us to be an influence

for him. That sense of vocation is still with me. Sometimes being willing to follow is hard. It's very easy for us to want to control our own lives, but I hope that I would always be open to God saying, "Come on, Moyna, get on your bike; we're going somewhere else." I hope I will never be so settled that I will not be willing to be obedient to what God asks me to do. We're supposed to be in the world and involved in it in all sorts of ways, but we must still hold lightly to things that keep us in one place, so that God can use us for his purposes.

Does faith continue to support her sense of vocation?

My faith has developed through strong biblical teaching. If we love God we should be doing everything to His glory recognising that he, and not just our earthly masters, knows what we do. I try to do things as I would for God and that has become a stronger influence in my Christian life. I want to make sure I do everything to the best of my ability, not looking for praise from others, although obviously that helps in terms of affirmation for what we are doing. But God is the one whom I want to please. That will involve not just how I do my physical work by looking after patients, but interactions with the other staff. I know I still fail at times.

One of the things that I think is important is praying for both patients and the team. The surgeon does his job, I do my job, others do their jobs, but I am a firm believer that God is the one who does the healing. I try to be a support to the other staff whether they're Christians or not, because in a small team there are a lot of different relationships. Sometimes things need to be smoothed out and sometimes people need to be encouraged.

I have also sought to think through a lot of the medical ethical issues. I have tried to apply the principles we find in Scripture because obviously particular issues are not mentioned specifically. There have been immense technological developments in medicine, in what is possible as regards treatment for patients. But just because something is possible does not mean that it is right. Working out what is right in God's eyes is something we are called to do.

Faith and Values

We wondered if bringing a specific set of values to the workplace had presented problems. Did those values collide with the shift of values in society or in the Health Service?

Yes. We've become very much a 'rights' culture and a society focused on 'me' – 'my right to be treated and to be treated now' is one of the attitudes that come across to us on occasions. It doesn't seem to take into account others and our limited resources. For example, we are treating more and more sick patients who often spend longer in intensive care and, as a result, an operation may need to be cancelled because there aren't any physical spaces or enough trained nurses. People can, understandably, get quite upset about that. We are frustrated by this situation but we have to manage as best we can with what we have and do the best for our patients. It is quite hard when we feel that they blame us for the situation.

The other aspect that I find quite difficult is when I feel that some people do not take some responsibility for their own health. Their attitude comes across to me as, "Fix me, no matter what I do, no matter how I live my life, whether I smoke or drink or eat too much." If, because of their lifestyle, patients spend longer in intensive care, then that will prevent some others having their operations. But there is a lot of antagonism if we suggest that their operation is postponed until they do something about smoking or weight. It ties in with our limited resources and how we decide how to spend those resources.

We asked Moyna to comment on the apparent sense of crisis in the Health Service. Were resources sufficient to meet the expectation of needs and rights?

One of the constraints is the lack of money to do what we need to do and what we'd like to do. If I'm not mistaken, the fact that finance for health, social services, and public safety in Northern Ireland is all in one pot is restricting. If we're spending money on policing areas that need to be policed, like Ardoyne and Drumcree, then there is less for healthcare. I'm not

sure people realise that. And expectations among the public are high. Sometimes we feel that we are expected to be able to cure everybody and do everything when that patently is not possible. But we still have a lot to be thankful for. As I have seen for myself in Africa, in some areas they haven't got even the basic drugs or equipment.

Defining Moments

I haven't really defining moments but defining periods of time. One was my involvement as a student with Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship and later as a staff worker. It gave me great grounding in helping me to handle Scripture properly and in interacting with all sorts of people. That was important and will stand with me the rest of my life no matter what I do. Secondly, it broadened my horizons so that no longer was I focused only on Northern Ireland or the UK. It showed me that God works throughout the whole world and that's exciting. Another big influence on me has been my trips to mission hospitals in Africa. It was a real privilege to have that experience, and I was excited and challenged by what God was doing.

When working as a staff worker with UCCF I came to realise some of the gifts God has been given me. That's one of the reasons why I didn't end up as a missionary doctor. I realised I wasn't a pioneer but a consolidator; therefore to go out into a mission situation, was not going to be my forte. Through UCCF and Christian Medical Fellowship, God has given me lots of contacts throughout the world that I take great joy in and still use today.

Parochialism

Moyna's experiences outside the Northern Ireland community had proved beneficial. Did she feel others would benefit from such experiences? Would it be fair to say that growing up in this community of sectarianism and parochialism is simply the result of being locked in to a limited cultural experience, and to travel and see how God is at work in the rest of the world is a liberating experience?

faith and practice

*I think so. You begin to have your horizons broadened a little bit and your eyes opened to what God is doing elsewhere and the different ways he works. Our problems here are more easily put into perspective. As one interacts with other cultures and different ways of worship one realises the breadth that there is in the body of Christ. God's family comes in various colours, races, ages and experiences and is not just respectable and middle class. It is difficult to be a Christian in so many countries. I remember meeting medical students from Poland at an international Christian conference and being challenged by their love and joyful faith. They had experienced real hardship in order to be able to attend the conference. They were so keen for fellowship and to learn with others. Meeting with people like these helped me realise that there are the **essentials** of the faith that cannot be compromised and that other things are secondary.*

The Role of Church

We asked Moyna to tell us a bit about her understanding of church and the role it plays in her life. Is it important? Does it nurture in any way her personal faith development?

*I've been in the same church for twenty years now. It's very important to me as I think that it's very difficult to live on your own as a Christian. You need interaction with others, encouragement, people to challenge you to work out what you're hearing and reading in scripture and to put it into practice. And so I've been involved in a house group and in helping young people study scripture, encouraging them to look at it and apply it to their own lives. In terms of being an influence within society, the church is God's expression of his body and we need to see his body 'doing' and 'being', being **'real'**.*

The Local Church and the wider Community

Moyna then spoke about her understanding of the local church's relationship to the society of which it is part. Has the church's influence in Northern Ireland's sectarian conflict been positive or negative?

*First of all I would say that I have not been as involved in the local community as I should have been. It is very easy to feel that you want to be comfortable where people understand you and you understand them. You don't want to be stretched and taken out of your comfort zone. That is a natural reaction for everyone. As individuals we are all involved to some extent in the areas we live and work in as we interact with people. Society and our community have changed in many ways over the past thirty years. Families seem to be more self-contained and maybe the wider family is further away. We are much more mobile using cars rather than public transport. Entertainment is often very individually orientated, even within the family, rather than community based. So there is probably less community involvement. Yet there is a lot of need in the community. I think that the church **has** to be involved in the community. How else are we going to show Christ's compassion? How are we going to know the needs of the community and the people in it? And how else can we speak the gospel to people and take God's word into the community except through involvement? Lots of people are not inclined to come to church very often because it's alien to them. They may feel they're self-sufficient and have no need of God. The church is the body of Christ and should actually be in tune with their needs. So I think there is a vital role to play.*

About a positive or negative influence on sectarian conflict, I don't know. It's a mixture of both as far as I can see. My experience is mostly in the protestant and evangelical denominations. Certainly when I observe people brought up in the church here, their base of scripture has great foundations. When I compare them to the equivalent age range or students across the water (Scotland/England/Wales), their grounding in their faith is far beyond anything there. This is why so many of them are involved in leadership in the Christian Unions in Scotland, England and Wales. They have a deeper maturity. And yet actually we haven't yet put this into practice in our own community. Maybe a lot of it has been head knowledge without application into real life and the wider scene of Northern Ireland.



Maybe we're scared to take parts of it on board because it's going to 'cost' us if we step outside our comfort zones. More and more we need a greater understanding of the grace of God.

Changing Times and Current Issues

I think it's hard for churches to move forward and change. September 11th made me think a bit, as I'm sure it did for many. The church in the west has had it very easy for quite a while and maybe in the future we're going to have to be prepared for more difficult times and for opposition. I think this will challenge churches to decide on their priorities, and where their primary allegiance is to be placed. Are we going to be prepared to stand firm for Christ no matter what? If our primary allegiance is to Him, then political issues and the flag under which we stand will take their proper place. If our primary allegiance is to God, we're going to be called to speak for Him, to speak the truth without losing our love for others. Changes in western society of materialism, secularisation, and post-modern thought process have altered how people understand truth. The Church is going to have to have answers and something to speak into these situations. We have to be prepared to say what we believe and why we believe it, but always with love and graciousness.

On human rights issues, the church must decide where it stands. As Christians, do we stand up for our own rights? Do we stand up for the rights of others? Christ did not stand up for his own rights. He was willing to give everything up on the cross for us. Our example for how we deal with others is Christ.

Regarding social action and religion, James says that true religion is caring for disadvantaged people like widows and the orphans, while keeping ourselves unstained by the world. If our Christianity is only head faith and does not come down to actual care and compassion for others, then it's not really worth much. My sense of worth comes from what God has done for me through Christ's death and who I am in Him, not

what I have as regards wealth, popularity or power. I think that the church needs to have something to say about of the value of people, no matter who they are.

Finally

God is still in control, no matter what happens. It's very easy as Christians when we see what is happening in the world, for instance natural disasters, or terrorism or opposition to the Christian faith, to feel that God is no longer the sovereign God. But I have come more and more to the conclusion that He has to be, and that is important for how I live and why I pray.

Once again ECON1 is grateful for the willing co-operation of another interviewee and wishes Moyna continued success in her chosen career.

Ruth Hutchinson
Assistant Editor

Moyna Bill is a consultant anaesthetist in the Royal Group of Hospitals, specialising in anaesthesia and intensive care for cardiac surgery. She is an elder in Lowe Memorial Presbyterian Church, Finaghy.

Embodying Forgiveness

Stephen Graham

Embodying Forgiveness is a project by the Centre for Contemporary Christianity in Ireland that will run until around May 2003. The backdrop to this project is fitting for such a topic. Community tensions and struggles are as fierce as ever. Victims of violence are created on a daily basis and criminal activity is ongoing. Furthermore our political future is quite uncertain and relationships in the political arena are as sour as they ever have been. In response to this the Christian message of forgiveness is extremely important but at great risk of being ignored. The Christian church must be able to bring its message to bear on many issues and situations. Experiencing a sense of forgiveness is core to the encounter with God's grace and the joy of new life in Christ. However, forgiveness is often one of the greatest sources of pain and struggle in our lives as we endeavour to follow Christ's example of forgiving others.

This project will hopefully provide a challenge to us to reflect on the understanding of forgiveness in our spiritual life and help us face up to the challenge of living toward forgiveness in our daily life. We hope people can be led to go beyond enjoying the blessing of being forgiven by God and feel torn by the pain of struggling to forgive others. We hope they will be empowered to reflect and grow in the journey toward embodying forgiveness in their spiritual life, relations, church and community.

Why Forgiveness?

Forgiveness is central to the Christian faith. There are many important issues surrounding the concept of forgiveness. It touches on many important areas of life and raises many questions.

Psychology

A lot of recent research has been done by academics on the idea of forgiveness and the results have filtered down to a more popular level, as has been shown by the coverage in both Christian and secular magazines - **Christianity Today** and **Time** have carried major articles in relation to it.

This work has focused on showing how the act of forgiving can actually help to bring psychological and emotional healing for people who forgive those who have wronged them. Some academics have even suggested that it could help bring physical healing.

Repentance

The relationship between repentance and forgiveness has been extremely important for Christians. The big question is which should come first. Should we be willing to extend forgiveness or should we always refuse to do so until there is genuine repentance? A classic text used in this discussion is Luke 17:3-4 ... *'If your brother sins. . . if he repents, forgive him...'*. Strictly speaking if we use this text to say we cannot forgive those who do not repent, we commit a logical fallacy.¹ However, the main question then becomes: how far is it clear that the text **implies** this?

Justice

In relation to justice we must ask whether or not forgiveness must override the concerns of justice. This was a big issue in the South African situation and had to be addressed. Can forgiveness be held together with a commitment to justice? A big question that could be asked here is, "Is it possible for the relatives of victims of the Oklahoma bomber to both demand justice in the way it was finally done (i.e. the death penalty) while at the same time forgiving him for his crimes?" Various definitions of justice such as restorative justice and retributive justice would need to be explored in order to hold a commitment to both.

Truth

The relationship between truth and forgiveness has proved to be vital. In many cases undertaken by South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, victims and relatives of victims found it easier to forgive the perpetrators once they knew the truth – or once the truth they already knew was acknowledged publicly by the perpetrators.

Memory and Forgetting

Is it a reasonable request to ask people to forgive and forget? On this issue it is important to see a difference between the act of forgiving and the act of forgetting. Crimes committed can be forgotten yet never have been forgiven. Likewise, forgiveness can be offered and yet the crime never forgotten. A mother who has lost a child through violence can surely never forget - it would be unreasonable to expect her to - although she can forgive and find the healing that this brings. It is important to note the words of George Santayana, *'Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.'* Another issue rises out of this in relation to the past. Is it possible to ask forgiveness for something that happened centuries ago? What would it mean for me to ask a family for forgiveness for trouble my great-great grandfather brought over a century ago?

Criminals & Victims

Sometimes Christian voices imply that the victim should always forgive, in other words that there is some sort of moral obligation. This has caused stress to many victims and yet can be seen to have some biblical foundation, for example in the Lord's Prayer *'as we forgive those who trespass/sin against us'*. Christians need to be empowered to play a very pragmatic role in helping victims achieve this while at the same time not forcing it on the victim and causing more hurt along the way – a delicate and difficult task.

Community

We have seen many cases where one person has given a public apology and made a request for forgiveness on behalf of an entire community. The question needs to be asked whether or not this is even valid. It involves the idea of communal sin and the idea of one person representing all when all might not be in agreement with the actions and words of the spokesperson. Despite these difficult questions it still needs to be addressed as to whether or not such an action has any sort of healing virtue in terms of community relations. If it does, then we must ask whether we should live with the problems for the sake of communal relations.

The Story So Far

As part of the project there is a series of papers on forgiveness being produced. Drawing on a broad range of contributors, the papers aim to explore the meaning of forgiveness in the Bible and in different Christian traditions, and to ask about the implications of the practice of forgiveness for our society. Our hope is that through this series of papers we will come to a fuller and more authentic understanding of forgiveness which may alternatively challenge and affirm our existing convictions. The papers that have already been produced are as follows:

Paper 1 *Forgiveness and Psychology*, written by Alwyn Thomson (ECONI Research Officer) and Gill McChesney (psychology student at UU), looks at the appropriation of the idea of forgiveness within psychology and offers a Christian critique of this development.

Paper 2 *Forgiveness in the Old Testament*, written by David Montgomery (associate minister at Knock Presbyterian), looks at the theme of forgiveness in the Old Testament and asks what relation such a theme has to the New Testament and Christian view of forgiveness.

Paper 5 *Forgiveness in the Catholic Tradition*, written by Eoin De Bhaldráithe (Roman Catholic priest and Cistercian working in Bolton Abbey), is an original look at forgiveness in the catholic tradition, analysing past and present acts of repentance and forgiveness on the part of the Roman Catholic Church.

Paper 6 *Forgiveness in the Anabaptist Tradition*, written by Megan Haltemann (Philosophy PhD candidate at Notre Dame University), looks firstly at forgiveness in the context of church relations and discipline and then has a brief look at how such ideas relate to relationships outside of the community of believers.

Two papers are ready to go to print.

Paper 3 *Forgiveness in the New Testament*, written by Janet Unsworth (Superintendent Minister of the Newry Circuit of the Methodist Church). This paper is extremely important in terms of Christian understanding of forgive-

ness and we hope it serves to complete the picture that was started with Paper 2.

Paper 7 *Forgiveness in the Orthodox Tradition*, written by Geoffrey Ready (A Reverend Deacon of the Greek Orthodox Church based in Bangor). The paper looks at forgiveness under the concept of love and especially of love being an attribute and property of God alone from which we as humans receive a vocation to love others. Such a calling is not without difficulties and the paper goes on to discuss the struggle to love and forgive.

Conference

The venue for this year's conference, which took place on 20th October, was Grosvenor House Conference and Training Centre where the 120 people who attended wrestled with issues surrounding the concept of forgiveness in a divided society and of what it means to speak of and enact forgiveness in our relationships at all levels.

The Keynote Speaker was Professor L. Gregory Jones, Professor of Theology at Duke Divinity School in Durham, North Carolina and author of the book **Embodying Forgiveness**. His keynote address topics were **Practising Forgiveness** and **Can the Past be Forgiven?** A number of other speakers supplemented the keynote addresses by leading seminars to explore the outworking of forgiveness in different contexts and on a range of themes: politics, justice, truth, victims and repentance.

Still To Come

A number of papers will be produced over the next one and a half years.

Paper 4 *Forgiveness in the Protestant Tradition*
Looking at how forgiveness has been conceived in the thinking of a number of influential Protestant thinkers.

Paper 8 *Forgiveness, Truth and Memory* Looking at the role of remembering and truth telling in relation to forgiveness. Is forgiveness more or less likely in the light of truthfulness and remembering? Is the phrase 'forgive and forget' defensible or not?

Paper 9 *Forgiveness, Reconciliation and Justice* Looks at the difference between and the relationship between

forgiveness and reconciliation and asks how we hold together a commitment to both with a commitment to justice.

Paper 10 *Forgiveness, Guilt and Repentance* Looks at the debate within the conservative Protestant tradition over the relationship between the granting of forgiveness, the acknowledgement of guilt and the act of repentance.

Paper 11 *Forgiveness and the Individual* will address the possibilities and limits of forgiveness that can happen between individuals.

Paper 12 *Forgiveness and the Church* is a look at the church's practice of forgiveness in its own life and in its relationship with society.

Paper 13 *Forgiveness and Social Groups* will look at the nature and possibility of forgiveness among social groups

Paper 14 *Forgiveness and Politics* takes a look at the possibility of forgiveness in a political context (e.g. forgiveness between political enemies or political manifestations of forgiveness in law or ceremony)

Paper 15 *Forgiveness in Literature and Popular Culture* is an analysis of how forgiveness is presented and dealt with in popular culture by looking at literature, films, etc.

Paper 16 *Concluding reflections* will draw together some of the issues raised and some of the conclusions drawn from the series of papers. It will also point to areas where further work would be profitable.

If you have any questions regarding the Embodying Forgiveness project, or the work of CCCI in general, or want to receive the series of papers on forgiveness, then you can contact me at stephen@econ.org

¹ The logical fallacy in this instance is called the Fallacy of Denying the Antecedent. Its formal structure is as follows:

- (1) If P (Repent) → Q (forgive)
- (2) Not P (not repent)
- (3) Therefore not Q (not forgive)

Stephen Graham is Research Assistant with ECONI's Centre for Contemporary Christianity in Ireland.

tutu

Book Review Stephen Graham

NO FUTURE WITHOUT FORGIVENESS

by Desmond Tutu

No Future Without Forgiveness is the memoir of Desmond Tutu about the South African experience of dealing with apartheid. Desmond Tutu provides many examples from his experience of working within the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The book also gives many personal insights into Tutu himself, and is not simply an objective and detached analysis.

I intend to comment on those parts that deal with Tutu's thinking on forgiveness and justice. I do not think a summary of the many examples he presents of various cases dealt with by the TRC would be fair or even possible – the cases are very much unique.

Understandably for Tutu a big issue is that of justice. He quite rightly observes that we should be careful to avoid what he calls 'victor's justice' in which harsh punishment is meted out to the losers and the victors are generally treated as complete innocents even though this is far from the truth.

Regarding justice, Tutu also warns against two extremes of justice and forgiveness. One of these extremes is a liberal, lax attitude that ignores justice and calls for people to 'forget it and move on'. He rightly points out how unrealistic such a position is and how untenable it would be in terms of victims with gross hurts. The past cannot disappear, it is persistent and cannot be forgotten. It needs to be confronted and dealt with. George Santayana wisely said:

'Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it'.

The other extreme is that of punitive justice. This punitive justice is the sort that deals out harsh punishment to criminals but has no concern to correct or change the offender and the situation/society that lead to the crime. It also shows little concern for the victim. Tutu believes that this could not have worked because the perpetrators of violence, whose support was needed in any settlement, still had great power to sabotage peace and would never have agreed to such a method.

Many perpetrators were not brought to justice in the sense that many of us might consider justice. However, Tutu seems to indicate that the fact they were not was a price worth paying for a new era. The idea that peace and stability are more important seems to be a running thread in Tutu's work, yet it would be unfair to charge him with belittling justice. He simply has a different view of justice, or at least realises that justice is a much bigger concept than mere retribution. Tutu sums it up,

'We have had to balance the requirements of justice, accountability, stability, peace and reconciliation. We could very well have had a retributive justice, and had a South Africa lying in ashes.'

Tutu re-echoes the descriptions of South Africa taking a 'Third Way' between the two extremes of laxity and harshness. This 'Third Way' was amnesty in return for full

disclosure of facts - possible freedom in exchange for truth.

Some people at the time criticised the process and argued that amnesty would encourage crime. This shows a lack of understanding of the process and Tutu points out that there were many restrictions on what cases qualified for consideration of amnesty. Furthermore, it was a temporary aid in a difficult situation and was never going to be the norm of justice.

From the testimonies given by Tutu it seems that many victims were in the end grateful for such a process, were willing to forgive. Many applicants expressed remorse and asked for forgiveness. This seems very strange to many Westerners. However, Tutu explains why it was possible in South Africa using the concept of 'Ubuntu'. It means that a person's humanity is bound with others. We all belong to each other and together form a greater whole – humanity. This whole is diminished when others are afflicted. Social harmony is the greatest good. Things contrary to this must be avoided. Tutu writes:

'To forgive is not just to be altruistic. It is the best form of self-interest. What dehumanises you inexorably dehumanises me. Forgiveness gives people resilience, enabling them to survive and emerge still human despite all efforts to dehumanise them.'

'Ubuntu' means that even apartheid supporters were victims of the system because of this intertwining of humanity. Perpetrators were dehumanised in the act of dehumanising others.

Tutu goes on from this to discuss justice again and argues that there must be more to justice than retribution. There is restorative justice - a theme from traditional African jurisprudence. The main concern here is not retribution or punishment. Restorative justice is grounded in 'Ubuntu' and

involves healing divisions, realigning imbalances and restoring the severed relationships. The rehabilitation of victim, perpetrator and society is paramount. So it can be said that while there is indeed little justice in terms of retribution there is certainly justice in terms of restoration.

The South African situation appears to be freedom and peace at a high price but it yielded a high level of stability in return. Victims helped negotiate the settlement and it should be acknowledged that it was massively endorsed in the election. It was truth in exchange for freedom. This might not seem perfect or ideal but realistically speaking it was the best that could happen, so argues Tutu.

Tutu believes that forgiveness was the way South Africa overcame its problems. This forgiveness was not forced as such. Tutu and many others who were involved recognised that victims had a right to be angry, although a vindictive mindset would ultimately lead to the creation of further victims. However, for their own good, to avoid becoming enslaved to the past, to ensure a better quality of life in the present and to give hope for future generations, forgiveness is the only way.

Stephen Graham is Research Assistant with ECONI's Centre for Contemporary Christianity in Ireland.

Jones

Book review Alice Swann

EMBODYING FORGIVENESS ... A Theological Analysis

L. Gregory Jones (Eerdmans 1995)

This is not a book to lift from the shelf for holiday reading. It is not even a book for counsellors or professionals wanting a framework to help others address the issue of forgiveness. It is, as the subtitle states, a theological analysis of the central issue of Christianity, that is, forgiveness. Gregory Jones seeks to give concrete form to this idea, as the main title suggests. Time and time again he emphasises that forgiveness needs to be situated within the Christian doctrine of the triune God. The author, a theologian with strong Wesleyan tradition, is an authority on the life and work of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. He has spent years studying forgiveness and seeking to inform, instruct and challenge the modern world's concept of forgiveness.

As a non-theologian I found it a difficult book to read, not necessarily because of the author's style, but because many of the concepts are difficult. It is a big book (300 pages) sectioned in a logical manner, which means one section, or even a chapter, by and large, stands alone. It would have been helpful to have a summary at the end of each chapter and a definition of forgiveness, which encompasses psychological, moral and theological aspects.

The first part considers the contrasting views of, what Gregory Jones says are, the tendencies of modernity, that is, of trivialising forgiveness or, secondly, viewing forgiveness as impossible or ineffective in extreme violence or abuse. As a clinician who deals with this issue in a therapeutic setting, it was challenging and upsetting to read:

'It seems as though Christian forgiveness is too costly for many people; consequently, they seek a cheap, therapeutic forgiveness in its place.'
(page 36)

It is only on closer reading that it becomes clear that the

author has an appreciation of the difficult psychological and moral issues. There is an acknowledgement that forgiveness may take a long time but the stages in the process of forgiveness are dealt with implicitly rather than explicitly.

The second part deals with the crucial issue of the Trinitarian identity of God, inviting a response to Christ's costly forgiveness.

The third part develops this further with the implications for the church and the world. Such issues as loving enemies, the disparate power of offenders, accountability, punishment and unforgivable people are considered.

There is an incongruous yet fascinating analysis of Toni Morrison's book **Beloved**, and the Clint Eastwood film **Unforgiven**, making me want to reread the book and watch the film, hopefully with fuller understanding.

It is in the last chapter that the author deals in depth with what to me is the most important feature of forgiveness - that of the victim reaching the stage when his/her life is no longer dominated by the past. He then introduces a new concept: that to continue to be dominated by the past is to worship Christ 'uncrucified'. To worship the crucified and risen Christ is to know that the past can be borne in hope. Gregory Jones acknowledges it may well take a lifetime to do so well. At that point I began to feel I had some understanding of embodying forgiveness.

I would suggest a title for the sequel: **'Embodying Forgiveness – A Practical Guide'**.

Alice Swann is an Independent Medical Specialist in the area of Child Abuse and Neglect with a particular interest in the investigation and treatment of child sexual abuse.

and finally

TRANSFORMATION 2002

When asked to reflect on their experience of the ECONI Summer School in July 2001, this is what some people had to say:

"I got so much more than I thought I would. I learned so much on a personal spiritual level that has impacted me. It was a pleasant and needed surprise. Great program, excellent seminars, and good sense of community. More than I expected from a week-long summer school."

"I got a more diligent and conscious thought process through which to enact my faith."

"I got far more than I expected; a well rounded spiritual, emotional and cultural experience."

"I came here with the mind of trying to understand the political/historical situation in NI, but really I found my heart and mind more engaged with matters of church and culture. I reflected a lot on my home church and really resonated with the topics. If anything this has prepared me even more to be a missionary from my home, whatever that may be. This conference re-emphasised the need for a more mission minded church."

"I got space to think and was challenged to think about things I had grown too comfortable with."

TRANSFORMATION 2002 promises more of the same. The Summer School is a unique opportunity to reflect and critique issues of spirituality, identity, faith and politics in a safe but challenging environment. Think seriously about joining us this year.

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