

ECONI:

STILL FOR GOD
AND HIS GLORY ALONE



lion & lamb



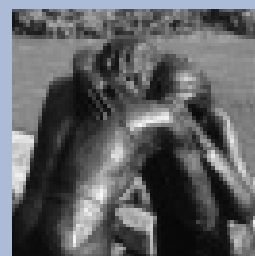
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an interview with David Hewitt CBE on his faith journey and the roots of ECONI.

editorial:**“Know Thyself.”**

“Know thyself,” said Socrates. “The heart is deceitfully wicked,” said Jeremiah. Pretending to know ourselves, we are often self-deceived. And what is true of the individual can also be true of organisations.

So as we celebrate the fifteenth anniversary of ECONI in this issue of Lion & Lamb we asked a diverse group of people to reflect on their encounter with ECONI. For some that encounter has been long, sustained and intimate; for others, more recent or more distant. Taken together, we hope that they provide some sense of ECONI’s work and role over the last fifteen years.

The heart of ECONI is people and one of the most central people throughout those fifteen years has been David Hewitt, whose vision and commitment did so much to make ECONI happen. In our interview this month David sets ECONI in the context of his personal experience of living out Christian faith in Northern Ireland, reminding us again of why we are here.

It is good to look back, to reflect, to learn and to be thankful. As we do so, we continue to look forward. In many ways the last fifteen years have seen dramatic changes in this community. Sadly, in many ways these changes are on the surface only. Dig a little deeper and the same fundamental problems that shaped a generation of conflict have not gone away. And as long as these problems remain unresolved a task remains for ECONI to do.

Alwyn Thomson

Lion & Lamb is a publication of ECONI
(Evangelical Contribution On Northern Ireland)
Editor: Alwyn Thomson
Assistant Editor: Anna Rankin
Printing: Dataplus
Design: Spring Graphics

ECONI Ltd is a registered company NI 37038 and a charity with the Inland Revenue - number XR8080.
A member of Evangelical Alliance.

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No. 35
WINTER
2003

lion&lamb

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comment: Illiberal Democracy

ALWYN THOMSON



Tyrants in Baghdad? Democracy is the answer. Terrorists in Kabul? Democracy is the answer. Troubles in Belfast? Democracy is the answer.

Or is it?

In a fascinating new book Fareed Zakaria has argued that democracy in itself can often cause more problems than it solves. What is needed is liberal democracy; what we often get is illiberal democracy. (Fareed Zakaria, *The Future of Freedom: Illiberal Democracy at Home and Abroad*).

One of the varieties of illiberal democracy Zakaria identifies is that which reflects and embodies ethnic conflict. Does this sound familiar? Democracy in Northern Ireland is ethnic, tribal, illiberal.

The Belfast Agreement, of course, is premised on the recognition that illiberal democracy is a dangerous thing, and attempted to resolve the problem by setting up an Assembly that embodied and empowered all our tribes.

Sadly, the Assembly has only reinforced our tribalism rather than undermining it. And, in aiming for an institution that addressed the problem of ethnic difference, we failed to establish an institution for good governance.

In institutionalising illiberal democracy in Northern Ireland perhaps the Assembly has reinforced the democratic deficit in our community rather than overcoming it.

What should we do? Direct rule until we learn how to be good liberals? Hand over public policy to unelected elites?

Or do we need to renegotiate the Belfast Agreement to create a devolved structure that offers incentives to politicians and electorate alike to move beyond tribalism? Democratic Dialogue has made some creative suggestions along these lines in a recent report. (*A Route to Stability: The Review of the Belfast Agreement*)

The Agreement is a means to an end, nothing more. If the end is not in sight, perhaps it is time to reconsider the means. The end is not simply the creation of local institutions that local people can vote for. The end should be the creation of institutions that enable us to transcend our tribalism and find a way of doing real politics – in other words the end is the shaping of a liberal democracy.

Democracy that is nothing more than a reflection of our conflict is an illiberal democracy and is an unworthy project.

Sadly, the Assembly has only reinforced our tribalism rather than undermining it. And, in aiming for an institution that addressed the problem of ethnic difference, we failed to establish an institution for good governance.

From the Director: Good News People?



THESE TWO PAGES were meant to be a summary of the ECONI story that began in 1987, from someone who has had a privileged view along the journey. It can be said that ECONI has a past but has yet to have a history. My task was to begin turning a past into a history, the official version of course, by shaping and interpreting the story, at least in outline form.

Sixteen years and four strap lines at least point towards symmetry, a gift for the analytical approach if not in the best traditions of storytelling. What began as an Evangelical Contribution became Evangelicals Asking Questions as we moved from a statement of biblical principle to Action Packs provoking thought and involvement across our divided community.

By the time the peace process took root with the paramilitary ceasefires of 1994, the need to change tack was evident and in the fragile rollercoaster of the times, our contribution was now to resource Christians for a biblical response. At this point ECONI took on a more formal face, becoming a trust and employing staff to serve the growing number of requests for materials and support from across the churches. Since then some thirty-five people have worked with ECONI as employees or volunteers and twice that number as members of the Steering Group and Board of Trustees.

With the Belfast Agreement in 1998 we, like many others, faced significant change and sought to address the transition to a post conflict society with our emphasis on Thinking Biblically, Building Peace.

So...ten annual conferences, eleven ECONI Sundays, an established magazine, a variety of training programmes including a summer school (just having completed its eighth year), numerous talks and sermons, several major research projects, regularly published resources for study and reflection, an annual lecture in public theology and various attempts to model our commitment to the search for peace by actively engaging with the political process through the Christian Citizenship Forum and numerous private initiatives later...and have I mentioned the miles travelled, the articles written, the submissions made to government, the thousands of people who have been the focus of, and joyful participants in, all of this activity (well according to our well-enumerated statistics for various funders they have been numerous if not always joyful)...and I find myself still asking – “why?” and “what for?”

You know as well as I do that there are many out there for whom that is easily answered. Waste of time, energy and money are the more kindly comments, which normally focus on being a subversive Northern Ireland Office government plot (I wish the salary were that good), or being betrayers of our Protestant and Unionist heritage (we talk to terrorists and think Catholics might be Christian too – albeit in error, of course).

The question is simply this – in Northern Ireland is the presence of thousands of professed followers of Jesus experienced as good news for the community?

But let us not get distracted by the statistics and the critics, or by giving the official account. All of us, those who applaud our effectiveness, those who dismiss our credibility and even those of us caught up in the finer detail of the ECONI experience, are in danger of missing the point. It was there in the introduction to ‘For God and His Glory Alone’ in 1988. It is still there as we face the future and consider the credibility and relevance of the churches as communities of those who follow Christ in a world of conflict and hopelessness.

The question is simply this – in Northern Ireland is the presence of thousands of professed followers of Jesus experienced as good news for the community? In other words, are we the people who we say we are, people of the *evangel*, the good news of Jesus – gospel people?

Nothing can be more searching for the church to consider. It is what we are for and as far as I am concerned is what I and all of us involved in ECONI have been for – bearing witness to Jesus the prince of peace, the healer of wounds, the one whom we call Lord and who calls us friends. It is in relation to Jesus that every thing else takes it meaning, not least our cultural, political and even theological loyalties.

The good news of Jesus calls people to repentance and faith. The problem is that this radical life affirming and community changing message has been domesticated. Personal piety constantly risks being reduced to Jesus for me and mine. Worship, prayer, the study of the word, fellowship, communion and even personal evangelism are all very well provided they remain within the comfort zones of our inner life as people or congregations.

Yet do you wonder why they can become routine and stale? Without the context of being in the world and even being for the world, being not of the world becomes self-indulgent escapism. This good news is the redemption of the world, all of it and expressed in terms meaningful to the immediate need of our part of it. For us that means the healing of bitter and broken relationships must be to the fore – reconciliation and peacemaking matter if the gospel is to be experienced as good news in our community.

There is however an apathy abroad on this issue. Where there is energy it seems to be driven by a programmatic pragmatism. Yet the frantic activity around being purposeful in church life highlights a more profound felt need that is rooted in anxiety. An anxiety that senses the world around us is changing and that change brings significant threat to the future viability and contribution of the church. This activity is increasingly focussed on securing the boundaries of our faith communities.

Of course it is also our experience to devalue the gospel by our political ideologies: captive to hollow and deceptive philosophy which

depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ. The good news of Jesus requires disciples to be involved in the political sphere as much as any other arena of human community. We are to seek the welfare of the city in which we find ourselves and to fail to do so is to betray the church as much as it is to abandon the community.

However, we do not engage as others. We are held to account to different values - those of the kingdom of God - and this heavenly citizenship puts in context all demands of human citizenship and political affiliation. There is another question that cannot be avoided – is the high number of Christians, particularly Evangelicals, involved in our political system, experienced as good news by their colleagues, opponents and the wider community?

All of us in the church, however we participate in politics - as voter, party member or politician - are called to exhibit gospel requirements that in this community call into question not our doing of politics as such, but how we do politics. That means we must continue to resist being the religious cult of our tribes, to be neither Nationalists nor Unionists at prayer, not even chaplains to the peace process. And we must work relationally at turning our enemies into friends for this is the gospel of Christ.

If disciples of Jesus fail to be good news to our community in how we speak, act and engage then we are right to ask what are we for. Our calling is to live as redeemed people and so demonstrate the redemption of God in Christ. The gospel is about the redemption of broken and hurting people and communities. At this point in Northern Ireland if we cannot be a sign of where redemption lies, who can be? Looking at the priorities of your life, your church's life, and your denomination's life – can anybody tell?

How lovely on the mountains are the feet of those who brings good news, announcing peace, proclaiming news of happiness - Our God Reigns!

ECONI Resource Centre

Open to registered readers
Mondays, Wednesdays
& Fridays

9.00 am - 12.00 noon
2.30 pm - 4.30 pm

To register
or for further details
contact ECONI

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Over 600 volumes covering a wide
range of subject areas relevant to
Christian witness in Ireland.



TONY DAVIDSON

Balancing on the Edge

ECONI has created a space to apply theological principles radically to the realities of ministry in Northern Ireland.

AS A TEENAGER, growing up in the midst of the Troubles in Dungannon in the early 1970s, I longed to know how a Christian should respond to the inter-community strife threatening to engulf my community. During my time as a student in Queen's Christian Union in the late 70s I began to hear some hints at how Christians should think and behave. In the 1980s, as a young Minister in Limerick I was delighted to see those hints become a reality with the publishing of 'For God And His Glory Alone' and the birth of ECONI. Then, as a Minister in Armagh in the 1990s as the troubles merged into the peace process ECONI kept me theologically sane. In my early years in Armagh as the political context lurched from one crisis to another I found myself devouring every sentence published by ECONI, because I knew I needed help and support to apply God's Word to the changing context around me. While at times I have felt disillusioned by sectarianism, even within the church, this has not led automatically to disillusionment with evangelical theology and practice. ECONI has created a space to apply theological principles radically to the realities of ministry in Northern Ireland.

This space has been created not just by the principles ECONI has embraced but also by its methodology. Truth has not been deposited from on high but forged in the heat of growing relationships. ECONI has listened with the ears of God as well as spoken the word of God. It has sought by its engagement in the political and cultural arena to incarnate the truths contained in 'For God And His Glory Alone'. It has chosen to open itself to people from other traditions who can question, probe and sometimes even share our convictions.

As convener of the Inter-Church Relations Board of the Presbyterian Church I find myself in the ecclesiastical marketplace sometimes described disparagingly as ecumenism. I have discovered how many people outside of evangelicalism want to know what ECONI is thinking at any given time. When we as evangelicals are prepared to rigorously challenge our own presuppositions then we find ourselves respected, even when we challenge others' presuppositions.

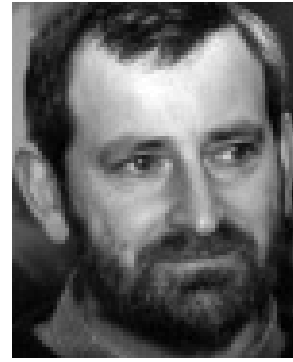
ECONI has been at its best when it has drawn upon an older dissenting tradition within Ulster Protestantism and stood at the margins of its tradition and asked awkward questions. The challenge for all dissenters is maintaining roots within the tradition they want to dissent from. The challenge for ECONI then is to work on its skills on balancing near the edge of evangelicalism. The danger is to fall into the abyss of cynicism or detachment where we become yet one more voice amongst many outside of evangelicalism being critical of churches' faith and practice.

Sectarianism has proved to be a stubbornly persistent virus able to mutate itself to a new context. The challenge for ECONI in its next 15 years will be to find new ways to address a yet more subtle enemy.

TONY DAVIDSON is the Minister of First Presbyterian Church Armagh, a former Chair of the ECONI Board and Convener of the Inter-Church Relations Board of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.

DAVID McMILLAN

Grateful to God



OVER THE PAST decade and a half ECONI has been one of the greatest influences on my thinking as a Christian. Involvement in ECONI has provided me with an opportunity to take a stand publicly in seeking to disassociate the gospel from the yoke of contemporary Protestant political allegiance and the destiny of Northern Ireland. It has also forced me to ask searching questions about myself, my tradition and my theology that I might otherwise never have asked. It led me to ask the question, 'How do others understand me and my community?' and in the process helped me understand more fully the causes and roots of division and conflict that have been our experience for so long.

Discussion and debate within ECONI have forced me to approach my reading and use of scripture in a different way. I have learned to come to scripture with questions and a questioning disposition expecting the Bible to challenge, inform and reshape my thinking and not simply reinforce my views or theology.

My involvement has led me into encounters, and in some cases friendship, with people across political, religious and paramilitary boundaries. In the normal run of things I would have chosen to ignore or avoid many of these people. This encounter with a wide range of people and views has helped me better understand myself and my own boundaries. I am still a conservative evangelical who lives and works within a conservative fellowship of churches and I am content with my vocation. Over the years I have learned that others are often far more gracious towards me and far more understanding of my limitations than I and some of my fellows are of those with whom we differ. In addition, ECONI has been a good environment in which to learn how to make common cause with and respect other evangelicals, while still being able to disagree on a whole range of social and theological issues. For me, involvement has brought the enrichment of new friendships and fellowship forged in the context of discussions and debates about our community, our calling and the desire to approach problems with biblical integrity.

Difficult experiences and public criticism over the years have taught me how to get on with life even if others are disapproving of my stance. I have learned not to take myself too seriously and keep in perspective that it's not the end of the world if people question my integrity and motives or deliberately misrepresent my position and cause trouble.

I am grateful to God for the opportunity to have been involved in ECONI.

I have no doubt that ECONI's contribution to the wider religious and political sphere has been significant, not least in its commitment to providing a 'safe space' for people to explore difficult issues and get to know those they could not normally feel safe to meet. I am conscious that for some ECONI has been a disappointment and has not delivered what they would have wanted or expected. On the other hand, its very existence has been a source of annoyance to others.

However, an assessment of ECONI's contribution I am content to leave to others in the knowledge that I believe ECONI has sought to be faithful to its own calling.

I have no doubt that ECONI's contribution to the wider religious and political sphere has been significant.

DAVID McMILLAN is Pastor of Windsor Baptist Church in Belfast and is a Member and former Chair of the ECONI Board.



David Hewitt, a senior partner in a Belfast law firm, was a founding member and is now President of ECONI. Former chairman of City YMCA and former Independent Assessor of Military Complaints Procedures he was appointed to the Parades Commission, set up in 1997. In 1996 David Hewitt was awarded the CBE for services to the community. He is married with four grown children and four grandchildren and is an elder in Bangor Road Presbyterian Church in Holywood.

SPACE & FREEDOM

Tell us something about your background: what were the strongest influences on you growing up?

I come from a large family. My father was one of twelve children, nine of them boys. Seven of them played representative sport: four were Irish rugby internationals, one at soccer and two Ulster rugby players. My father was a leader in the local Brethren Assembly so my background was very much conservative evangelical - the Brethren did not identify comfortably with other denominations and they were not happy with clericalism. But it wasn't a negative evangelical background. I was encouraged to be involved in Scripture Union and Crusaders and other interdenominational evangelical movements.

So the two big influences were conservative evangelical piety and sport. Indeed, those were in conflict at times in an earlier generation. My father and my uncle Frank both retired from international rugby in their early twenties - really at the prime of their playing careers - because of their personal Christian convictions: they did not find it easy to involve their discipleship with their sport.

It was a sort of family tradition that you went to Inst in Belfast and tried to pass exams and play rugby. I played in the Schools' Cup Final and in 1957 while at University, I was chosen to play for Ireland and in 1959 toured Australia and New Zealand with the British and Irish Lions.

Did you experience a conflict between your personal faith and your sporting interests?

Well I think there is always a conflict between one's following of Christ and one's living in the real world, which you would expect. But I don't think that necessitates that we withdraw from the conflict. My father never sought to discourage me from being involved. He encouraged me to be a Christian in the context of the rugby world.

What have been the milestones on your faith journey?

Probably the first significant milestone would have been the Christian Union at Queen's University where I discovered Christians from all of the mainline denominations who had a similar evangelical belief and conviction to my own. Some of those in leadership who came from denominations that the Brethren probably thought least likely to produce evangelicals were the most impressive. Also at that time, Berry Street Presbyterian Church had the benefit of the ministry of the Rev Glynn Owen and I and many, many other students came under the influence of his expository Bible teaching. That had a very significant impact on the lives of many of us.

Another influence was the Portstewart Convention to which, as Crusader leaders, we took groups of young people. Those house parties were very significant times of deep Bible teaching and I can recall their impact. As well as being a Crusader leader I led Scripture Union camps. I enjoyed the fellowship of Christian work and the responsibility of leading young boys into their faith.

I inherited from my father a love of reading and I read a lot of Christian literature and biography. The writings of John Stott, Jim Packer, David Watson and others had a huge impact on my thinking.

The social dimension of the gospel was something that grew on me as well and I became involved with Tearfund, YMCA and the Evangelical

Alliance - gradually coming to grips with that wider dimension of the teaching of Christ. We are real people living in a fallen world - Christian faith is not just pietism in our own hidden, cosy enclave of fellowship - it has to have some impact on the society in which we live.

How did you become drawn into dialogue about politics?

Working in the centre of Belfast, in the middle of the troubles at their worst, was a time of great tension. I was brought up on the protestant and unionist side of the fence. I was comfortable there and like the rest of my colleagues on that side we had our suspicions of the other side. Indeed, there was a sense of unionist superiority. Then a solicitor colleague confronted me gently. I didn't know him very well, all I knew was he was a catholic and quite a strong nationalist and was involved in the early civil rights movement. He confronted me with the question, "What can we do about this situation?" We decided to form a little group made up of lawyers representing both sides, to discuss the issues, with the intention of coming up with an agreed constitutional settlement that both sides could buy into.

When did it start?

That would have been in the early 1980s and went on for some years - prompted originally by the hunger strikes when tension was at its height. The group became known as the Northern Consensus Group, we issued pamphlets and lobbied political leaders. The thinking of that group was basically along the lines of what eventually came out in the Anglo-Irish Agreement and in the Good Friday Agreement because the same basic principles of power-sharing and the principle of consent become apparent when you begin to debate these issues.

How did that impact on your personal faith?

The significant point of all of that for me was that it introduced my thinking to Irish Nationalism. I was listening for the first time at a fairly deep level to Roman Catholics, green nationalists expressing their views and their concerns. I came to respect them and it probably brought out in me a much greater sense of my own Irishness. However, there was still the evangelical protestant concern about Roman Catholicism and some aspects of the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, the influence it had in society and so on. I still held the suspicions I had grown up with.

And again it was a personal encounter, this time with a friend who had been brought up, like myself, evangelical which led to a change in my thinking. He was meeting with Catholics in fellowship and that disturbed me. He invited me to meet with

them, which I eventually did, with a certain amount of fear and suspicion. In those encounters I discovered Roman Catholics who clearly loved the Lord. It was a very liberating experience. I would have had profound suspicions about these people and the error in which they thought and lived, yet I discovered that they were actually more devoted to Christ than I was. When I got to know the character that the Spirit of God had produced within them, I realised that there was something profound that we had in common. I didn't agree with all that they understood from their church teaching, but we had central things in common, particularly a faith in Jesus Christ. For the first time in my life I was able to enjoy that freedom of fellowship while at the same time acknowledging and living with the differences on the secondary issues of doctrine and church government. I remember reading someone who said that "sectarianism is to say that my formulation of the truth is the truth and until you agree with my formulation of the truth I can have no fellowship with you. Biblical teaching says if you are in Christ you are my brother and in that relationship we can begin to handle the differences of doctrine and tradition that we have grown up with."

You were one of the founders of ECONI. How did that come about? Why at that particular moment in time?

Living through the troubles, particularly in the 1980s, any Christian was bound to have asked him or herself, "What is the role of an evangelical Christian in this situation?" Most people were praying for peace but peace didn't seem to come - things seemed to be getting worse. I think that prompted some evangelical Christians to come together and to ask, "Is there something else we can do other than just pray? Is there something we can do to promote peace? We have to acknowledge that the religious element is a significant one in the Irish problem and we can't say it is purely political, it is not."

I think a growing number of people were feeling that the gospel and the glory of God were not being enhanced by a close identification on the evangelical protestant side with the cause of unionism. A few of us got together, we held a couple of conferences under the title, "Word of God to Northern Ireland." We had some significant speakers come and address quite large audiences in Queen's University and then we published the papers. ECONI came about really as a follow-on from that. We were asking, "What should we be doing to raise the voice of evangelical Christianity?" in a situation where perhaps the perception of evangelical Christianity was that it was fairly narrow, pro-Ulster, anti-Irish. We wanted primarily to raise the discussion and hopefully change what seemed to be an unfortunate trend which was leading evangelicalism in a particular direction

“Living through the troubles, particularly in the 1980s, any Christian was bound to have asked him or herself, ‘What is the role of an evangelical Christian in this situation?’ Most people were praying for peace but peace didn’t seem to come - things seemed to be getting worse.”

politically. ECONI came into being in the publication of ‘For God And His Glory Alone’.

Why publish ‘An Evangelical Contribution on Northern Ireland’? What were you hoping to achieve?

I suppose it was really to try and provide a platform for the many people who were expressing these concerns but who weren’t quite sure how to go about doing something. Clergy, church leaders can often be very vulnerable in a situation like that. If they were to take a risky path they could split a congregation, they could lose their livelihood and therefore there was some safety in a movement that was a mixture of denominations, and a mixture of leaders, but primarily lay led. The ‘For God And His Glory Alone’ booklet was published to address the situation on biblical principles subscribed to by the names of some 200 recognised leaders in evangelical circles.

Was it hard to convince people to become involved?

When we set out to publish the booklet, knowing that we wanted to get the target number of 200 names, we obviously were going to go to people that we suspected would be sympathetic. I don’t recall detail, but I know that there were a number who declined for one reason or another, but the vast bulk we went to were sympathetic and, in fact, very positive indeed.

Was there much negative reaction at the time?

There was some negative reaction and I think it was entirely predictable. It didn’t surprise me because that’s where I came from originally. Had I been presented with this booklet ten or fifteen years earlier in my life I probably would have reacted very negatively myself and I would have reacted probably on what I would have thought were sound biblical principles. But the booklet presented biblical principles applied to a real situation and the little footnote questions on each page of the booklet were designed to draw out the practical implications of these things and to ask some searching questions.

Was it costly for you personally to be involved in this movement?

Well, it took a lot of time, but costly? Not really. After I was publicly identified with it, there were some within family and church fellowship who didn’t agree but there was nothing very significant - a certain coolness in relations from some directions - but again, that shouldn’t have surprised me. It was a little disappointing at times, there were places that I might have been asked previously to go and speak from time to time and invitations dried up, but I just thought, “So be it.”

ECONI has now been around in one form or another for fifteen years – is that a surprise to you?

Yes! Because we set out to do one thing and that was it - the booklet. It was to give people a platform to identify together - it wasn’t to start a movement that would be ongoing. So yes, it has surprised me that it has been going for this long and the size to which it has grown. On the other hand, as things moved along I realised that the ability and commitment of those who became part of the full time staff of ECONI – which did not include me, of course – indicated that there was a real future for the movement.

You have watched ECONI grow and change over the years. What is your sense of what ECONI has achieved?

ECONI has given Christians a freedom and space to cross bridges that previously were difficult to cross. ECONI has helped to validate the evangelical position in Northern Ireland, to give evangelicals a credible voice - not only in the Christian world, but in the wider community in Northern Ireland - without forfeiting their basic evangelical position. That, for me, has been an exciting tension.

Another achievement is the body of written material that ECONI has produced. The research material and the books are helpful resources. Many church leaders have acknowledged that the publications, and the thinking that has come from ECONI, have been helpful to them in their leadership roles.

ECONI has had input to political and civic leadership thinking through friendships that have been made with people who are significant in our community as well as providing input for those in Christian leadership.

There is also the impact in the community of individual people who have been directly involved in ECONI, on its steering groups or committees or whatever. They themselves have played significant roles in the peacemaking in our community, whether in policing or parades or education or in other areas. There are many significant Christian individuals impacting on the community and its problems who have taken strength from ECONI.

I also think there is a lot that it has stimulated and caused to happen, both in Christian fellowships and in individual lives that we will never ever know about.

Are there areas where you think it has struggled to achieve what you would like to see?

I don’t think ECONI has had a major impact with the groupings from which I came - the pietistic, conservative circles - because they don’t really see faith issues as being particularly relevant to the real world. They are not opposed to ECONI, but they

don't see it as terribly relevant. I think ECONI struggles also to bring the biblical theory to where the rubber hits the road - but I think that is a problem for Christians everywhere. It is comparatively easy to grasp the teaching of Christ. It's a harder thing, I have found anyway, to actually practise it in the real world. ECONI, I think, will always struggle to see its impact in the most troubled situations in our community. Yet increasingly its members are playing significant peacebuilding roles at interface areas in Belfast and elsewhere.

Looking ahead, do you still see the need for ECONI? What are the challenges and opportunities facing evangelical people in Northern Ireland in 2003? How do you see ECONI's role in helping evangelicalism face those challenges?

Well, I certainly see a need for ECONI or something like it to continue, because the problems of our community from which ECONI emerged are still there. The serious violence of 15 years ago, thankfully, has greatly reduced, but the tensions between people, the suspicion and divisions have not gone away. I think Christian leaders who want to be involved in peacemaking, and the risks that that involves, are very happy to rely on an independent body like ECONI - to use the resource material and allow ECONI to come in to work with their groups, their church or clergy fellowships. But really, I think the challenges to the church in Northern Ireland are no different now than they were 15 years ago or 50 years ago.

To some extent the need for ECONI will be assessed by outside funders and I think that is a healthy thing. ECONI has benefited to a large extent from community funding and the criteria on which they grant funding are quite stringent. The bottom line is they will not pay out public funds to groups that aren't making an impact. Therefore it seems to me that if outside observers assess that ECONI is making a relevant contribution to peacebuilding in Northern Ireland they will continue to fund it. I think that is a good indicator as to whether ECONI is necessary.

What are your hopes for Northern Ireland and, in particular, for the church in Northern Ireland?

On a personal level, I hope that my grandchildren don't have to grow up in the same context my children have all grown up in, through the troubles.

I hope that the churches will feel more freedom in Christ to explore together the truths held in common. In so doing they can be an effective counter-culture to those aspects of society that they acknowledge to be the real enemy - which includes sectarianism, both in its bitter, stone-throwing variety

and in its more polite cynicism. I hope that the church in Northern Ireland will identify the real issues that are counter to the kingdom of God and not waste its resources on the infighting that has been too much part of us in past years. At the end of the day, God's people are those who have most freedom and space to take risks - much more so than politicians. We are part of a kingdom that is not of this world and therefore we need not hold tightly to a constitutional tradition.

We can give others who are in political leadership the space to be progressive to reach out and to try and find the necessary compromises for peacebuilding here. Compromise is not a bad word. Compromise in a political context is necessary and good and I think we who are Christians, and who adhere to truths which cannot be compromised, have to somehow help those in political leadership to find ways forward that are for the better good of most people.

It can be difficult for church leaders too. I believe the laity in churches have a very significant role to play in giving their minister the space, freedom and encouragement to teach truths - even if they are counter to an ethos or a tradition of a particular fellowship - and I believe ECONI has opened the way for a lot to do that, because it has totally focused on the teaching of the word of God and has sought to apply it in relevant ways.

The changes in my thinking have been prompted by personal encounter with people - people of faith. I have gone to the scriptures and discovered the truths that validate my changed thinking. Scriptures that I have read many times before and not properly understood or seen the significance of, following the personal encounter, have led me to see, 'Ah yes, it's okay to do this, it's okay to think this. In fact not only is it okay, it is imperative!' Even the most far-reaching teaching of Christ - like loving your neighbour and loving your enemy - when you begin to think those through... People you didn't regard as your neighbour - you regarded as from the other side - by meeting them and discovering their common humanity and how much you like about them, realising that what they are saying is exactly what I believe because Christ is central and love of God and neighbour is central to it. Even though they may have a different political aspiration, a different church tradition, and use different phraseology. Biblically too, it seemed that many things happened first in personal encounter. For example, for Peter and Cornelius it was a personal encounter with someone from the other tradition - they suddenly discover that this is what the teaching of Christ is about.

Sustainability - can you help us rise to the challenge?

In a divided society that space for personal encounter can be quite limited or even non-existent; how do we create those opportunities?

In Northern Ireland the liberal wing of the church was into this before evangelicals - before ECONI. And because they were, we were suspicious of them and thought "If they are doing it, then it can't be right, so we'll not do it." 'Dialogue' and 'ecumenism' were uncomfortable terms for us. But ECONI has highlighted biblical themes that demand encounter like love, reconciliation, forgiveness, peace and justice.

So all the time you are coming back to those original biblical principles for engagement...

Yes, the ones that were picked out for the booklet.

I collected the very first copies of 'For God And His Glory Alone' from the printers and brought them round to my office. I was loading them out of the boot of the car when this guy came round the corner on a bike. It was Fr Gerry Reynolds of Clonard. He says, "David where's the book? Where's the book?" I said, "What book?" He says, "I hear the evangelicals are writing a book and I want it, I need two copies." I gave him two and off he went. So Clonard Monastery had the very first copies of a booklet written for evangelicals!

THIS YEAR ECONI celebrates fifteen years since the original publication of *For God and His Glory Alone* when the signatories challenged the evangelical community to "join us in looking afresh at the Bible in order to identify some principles which we hope will help us become part of the cure."

Many things have changed since 1988, both politically and within the church. Many evangelicals have risen to the challenge of Christian peace-building and are actively involved in their own locality. Yet many things remain the same. For this reason a recent strategic review concluded that the need for the particular ministry offered by ECONI still remains.

Over the past 15 years ECONI has been financed by a combination of donations from members and supporters, grants from philanthropic trusts and European funding. However, the priorities of the EU and many of the philanthropic trusts are changing as other issues arise throughout the world.

The fundraising challenge for ECONI, in common with most voluntary organisations in Northern Ireland, is to replace the revenue that will be lost as a result of that change of emphasis among major funders.

Can you help us to rise to that challenge? We greatly appreciate the donations of many of our members and supporters over the years, but is there more that you could do? A regular donation by Banker's Order helps us exercise better stewardship by planning for the year ahead. Signing a Gift Aid form increases the value of your donation by 28%. A new initiative by the Inland Revenue means that you can elect to have any tax rebate which is due to you to be paid directly to ECONI. If you are a minister or a church leader ECONI Sunday could provide an opportunity for a collection on behalf of ECONI.

A Banker's Order mandate and Gift Aid declaration are included on the reverse of the address carrier of this issue of Lion & Lamb. To contribute to the ministry of ECONI simply complete the forms and return to:

ECONI,
Freepost BEL3569
Belfast, BT2 7BR.

For further information about any of the above please contact Bill Ellison on 028 9032 5258 or email bill@econi.org

KEITH GETTY

imaginative engagement

GROWING UP AS A CHRISTIAN in Ireland can be an extraordinarily enriching experience. It is a country where we are taught to be aware of our heritage, to study our faith and to articulate it with all the energy God can give us.

That is all well and good, but as a Christian teenager I went through two major bumps on my march down the sure and anchored road of Ulster Protestant Evangelicalism. The first was leaving Northern Ireland - initially for university and then to build a business largely based outside of Northern Ireland. The second was pursuing a career in the area of arts and entertainment.

As I developed in these new and occasionally uncharted environments, I found new questions which threatened and challenged me to the core - serious questions about the traditions we had inherited, frustration at how our faith was expressed and frankly a harsh post-Christian reality for which my faith, with all its contradictions, had few answers.

It is one thing to struggle as an individual, but another thing completely to be able to really wrestle with the Bible, take stock of its radical truths for your generation and then ask the hard questions of both the church and society in a way where you risk losing the support of both. It is precisely this that ECONI has made its challenge, forging a way for others to follow. To this many of us owe a great deal.

As the 'New Irish Arts' has developed ECONI has been supportive, wise and has asked serious questions of our intention. ECONI has also given us key support and we have enjoyed working together on events, most especially "I Witness," a production based on the Gospel of Luke, at the Waterfront Hall in September 2003.

In my own work as a modern hymnwriter a number of my greatest influences have been from within the leadership of ECONI as we have attempted to create a modern hymn which could engage the minds in a more challenging and edifying way.

Moreover, the general thinking has made me ask questions both about the history and future of this island in fresh ways, developing my vision, and has given us a resource that is much needed as we enter the next period.

My hope would be that ECONI can forge closer relationships with the churches, influencing ever-increasing circles of church leaders and provide material and forums through which more pew-based people can discuss the issues that are really going on. I would love to see ECONI work more with people involved in other disciplines such as those in the creative and performing arts and in fine art to find ways of stimulating the imagination towards authentic Christianity. I also pray that ECONI's voice in the media and in politics will have increasing effect - one which is salt and light in a truly blind and hungry world.

KEITH GETTY is a songwriter and musician who also produces, arranges and conducts.

no longer at ease with this dispensation?

It has been my experience that Northern Ireland exists in its own orbit where “living with difference” becomes “coping with difference” and any attempt to open up discussion on diversity is dealt with through skilfully crafted methods of avoidance and denial. Here, to be “different” can so often be viewed as a threat or challenge and we have often avoided discussing our uniqueness through the creation of a “culture of silence” which denies any meaningful opportunity to explore difference.

Given this personal critique, the call to me to become involved in ECONI, very close to its commencement, was directly due to the fact that I was looking for a way to reflect on how Christians relate to such a society. I had been involved in reconciliation initiatives for over 15 years of my life at that point and I guess I “joined up” (if that is what one does in ECONI-speak) in the hope that this was not just another peace group. It has been my experience that this is the last thing ECONI is or wants to be.

Over the years of my involvement, which has included a spell on the Board and a few years as Chair, things have not always been easy but the view was they were always possible. Whether this was making a public statement in the early days or debating whether or not to call a Christian Forum in difficult times, such decisions were not taken lightly and certainly never out of a selfish ambition to be “cool” politically.

In such a social context, where the default is “same-ness”, it is all too easy to accept that discussing difference must be avoided, particularly if it has to do with religion, politics or cultural aspiration. Many people find such a situation hard to accept - but difficult if not impossible to change.

People, however, can and do make a difference. “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed it's the only thing that ever has.”¹ How do you read this? Idealism? Optimism? Or perhaps within the realms of possibility? ECONI's view has always been that it is possible.

To put it another way, “Change comes from small initiatives which work, initiatives which imitated become the fashion.”² Imitation is the best form of praise and those pioneers who formed ECONI in the 1980s still cast a long shadow in the new millennium and many of their ideas have been taken up beyond these shores.

All this is not easy - it takes courage. “Yes, we love peace, but we are not willing to take wounds for it, as we are for war.”³ By being willing to challenge sectarianism wherever it is found, ECONI continues to take risks for peace.

It is all too easy to support the status quo by remaining a spectator on the sidelines of history - to be content to be a consumer without experiencing the liberation that becoming a creator brings! We need to be reminded that true reconciliation is a journey and not a destination. In ECONI, above all else, we are fellow travellers. To commit oneself to the

journey beyond sectarianism is to find oneself along with the Magi in T S Eliot's poem ‘Journey of the Magi,’ “No longer at ease with this dispensation.”⁴

It is my view that ECONI can be judged against this criterion and be justifiably proud of its achievements.

I will finish with a challenge which I hope you will consider. “None of us is born intolerant of those who differ from us. Intolerance is taught and can be untaught — though often with great difficulty. But in this area, as in others, prevention is far preferable to cure.”⁵

1 Margaret Mead in “The Search for Common Ground” by Howard Thurman, 1971.

2 Anon.

3 John Andrew Holmes, “Wisdom in Small Doses,” 1927

4 Joseph Liechty and Cecelia Clegg, “Moving Beyond Sectarianism,” The Columba Press, Dublin, 2001.

5 Kofi Annan, November 2001.

Diversity should be
a gift enjoyed not
a punishment
endured.

“The world today all over is wrestling with how we live with our deepest differences.”

LIVING WITH OUR DEEPEST DIFFERENCES

The Burning Question

We are living in a world that is both globalising and shrinking and the challenges of diversity are truly worldwide. Again and again the question is raised: How do we live with our deepest differences so that diversity becomes a matter of strength and richness, not of weakness and division?

The first time I went to Washington, I visited George Washington's home, Mount Vernon. The guides there tell you about everything in the house from the furniture and the china to the wallpaper and all sorts of things. But I was intrigued by the one item that was completely overlooked - a huge, massive, rather misshapen, rusty old key in a glass case. I asked the guide about it and she said, "That's the key to the Bastille." I later read that the Marquis de Lafayette, after the storming of the Bastille, had believed so passionately that the American Revolution was the key to many of the events in France that he sent Washington the key to the Bastille.

Now, ironically, it had been totally overlooked in my guide's tour of Mount Vernon. And in many ways, on this issue of liberty and diversity some of the deepest lessons of the American experiment are overlooked today, even in America.

The end of the twentieth century presents us with a witches' brew of ancient hatreds and humanitarian nightmares from Rwanda to Bosnia; Kosovo, to East Timor and to many other parts of the world. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn described the last century as the caveman's century. A hundred million were killed in war, a hundred million in political repression and nearly another hundred million in sectarian and ethnic violence, which at the end of the century was as strong as at the beginning.

Clearly, one of the burning questions for our earth is, 'How do we live with our deepest differences?' I've wrestled with this question with activists and extremists in the United States and with Chinese scholars who are also wrestling with the issues of nation building, in an extraordinarily large country, after the collapse of Maoism. With some of the stands I've taken I've actually had death threats, even in America. So, clearly, some of the issues we're facing here in Ireland are global issues that many countries with different backgrounds are all wrestling with together.

Let me set out a number of propositions that give some of the broad considerations, taking it much further and wider than things like forgiveness, although that's a very key part of what we're looking at.

Proposition one:

Three cataclysmic forces that shape our modern world: revolution, war and migration.

War and migration, of course, are ancient while the word revolution had never been applied to nations until the eighteenth century. The Glorious Revolution, the American Revolution and the French Revolution were the three revolutions out of Western Europe that have truly, since then, changed the world. But many would say that the age of the impact of revolutions is probably over.

The last century, we hope, was the age dominated by war. The First World War, Second World War, the Cold War and hundreds of local wars - all represent immense human destructiveness. We have certainly shifted from total war to a very new situation in war. Hopefully, total war will not be the story of the twenty first century.

From a talk given by Dr Os Guinness at a reception marking the completion of ECONI's research project, 'Embodying Forgiveness,' in the Wellington Park Hotel, 26th March 2003.

But the third cataclysmic force clearly is the challenge of the twenty first century - migration. Just take the simple fact, in more recent modern history, that five hundred years ago the white peoples of the world were only in Europe and that over the last five hundred years millions and millions exploring, trading, conquering, colonising, have changed the face of the world by migrating all over the world.

In the last hundred years - apart from Canada, United States, Australia and New Zealand - increasingly, the white peoples are coming back to Europe. It is reverse migration and the explosion of pluralism all over the world has begun.

It is often said by social scientists today that everyone is now everywhere and we live in a world that would be unrecognisable to our great grandparents. The changes, for example, in the United States in fifty years alone are said to be the greatest changes in ethnic composition that any nation in history has ever faced. So, take California today. One third of the entire world's immigration is in that state with, say, ninety religions in one public high school, throwing into the balance questions about whose prayer, in terms of school prayer? And so on, and so on and so on.

Clearly, asylum, migration, guest workers and many other forces have changed the face of our European homogeneous societies beyond all recognition. So what you face in Ireland today is not just between two communities in tension and conflict, but a world tomorrow with a diversity that Ireland has never seen in its history. We need to look forward to that challenge as well as back.

Proposition two:

Three tasks of establishing free societies: winning, ordering and sustaining freedom.

If you look at the discussion from the Ancient Greeks right down to the present you can see there was always an awareness that these three things had to be done. The first, and most obvious, is winning freedom. For some nations winning freedom was instantaneous in their revolutions e.g. the American Revolution and the French Revolution. For others it was a much more incremental, tortuous approach, with an unwritten constitution, for example the English approach - and there are many mixtures in between. But in many ways winning freedom is the easiest task.

The second task is ordering freedom: giving the freedom won a political and legal framework which could be enduring. For the Americans, the Constitution tempered liberty. Again, other nations have done that in different ways.

The third task, always the hardest, is not just winning, not just ordering but also sustaining freedom. It is truly the hardest because freedom doesn't come free. It is always harder to be free than not to be free. Freedom never lasts forever - that is genuinely the challenge of freedom, to know how to sustain it.



Proposition Three:

The understanding of three classical menaces to sustaining freedom: external threat, corruption of customs and the passing of time.

The great thinkers in history went back to use history to defy history. Freedom never lasted. What was absolutely universal and unanimous in all the great classical thinkers was that one had to understand why freedom always eventually declined and collapsed.

One reason for its decline is external. Suddenly, a nation finds itself with a greater power outside itself and there is little one can do except be vigilant and be prepared. That obviously comes close to the Americans at the moment because it has been an article of faith that America never had an external challenge. Being a continent-sized nation with two ocean buffers, that wasn't their principal challenge until September 11th 2001. What Belfast and Beirut and many other cities have known for a long time, New York at least now knows, with a savage closeness.

The second, though much subtler, menace is the corruption of customs, to use the old Greek word. In other words, in a nation, which is strong because of its fundamental laws and constitutions - however good - if there is a corruption of customs (the bedding in which the laws stand) eventually, freedom itself will be subverted and will decline. For the ancients, that was the principal reason why no freedom ever lasted. ☛

LIVING WITH OUR DEEPEST DIFFERENCES

The third menace in one word is the passing of time. When Edward Gibbon wrote his famous book on the decline and fall of Rome he got the idea from being in Rome and seeing grass growing and cattle grazing where the senators and emperors deliberated. In his last chapter of the great series he asks why Rome fell. His first answer is the injuries of time. Nothing in a world that is human lasts forever.

Proposition Four:

The three assumptions that are necessary to keep freedom enduring – freedom requires virtue, virtue requires faith and faith requires freedom.

Many people think that just laws alone will do it or technology alone will do it through surveillance. But the end result of that approach is to have even more laws and regulations, even more surveillance and then, less freedom. To see freedom endure you need to have three things that feed on each other.

The first is the deep assumption that freedom requires virtue. As the great American framer, John Adams said, “Only a virtuous people are capable of freedom, because the highest freedom is freedom that is obedience to the unenforceable.” It is not just a respect for the law but obedience to the unenforceable that requires virtue and character.

The second point of the triangle is faith. Freedom requires virtue and virtue requires faith of some sort. The inspiration, the content and the sanction for the virtues that give freedom come from faith. They do not exist in a vacuum.

The third point of the triangle is freedom. Faith requires freedom. If it is voluntary and not coerced, if it's freely chosen and not established and imposed, then faith can provide the freedom and the virtue, and the triangle goes on in a self-perpetuating way.

Proposition Five:

There are three reasons for the perpetual open-endedness of free societies: nature of freedom, the democratic wager, migration and the development of character.

The task of freedom is never over; every generation has to enter into it in its own way. The first reason for this open-endedness is the nature of freedom. Freedom is never just freedom from, that's the sort of teenager's view of freedom, a negative freedom – freedom from parents, freedom from teachers, freedom from the police. That is a very adolescent view. The higher freedom is not just freedom from, but freedom for, freedom to be, the obedience to the unenforceable and that's much more challenging. And that is, simply, why it never lasts.

The second reason why freedom is always open-ended is the open-endedness of a democratic wager. When societies achieve freedom it's often built on a tension. Constitutionally and legally there is no limit to what anyone can believe. But culturally and

practically there is a limit, because some beliefs would contradict the whole system of democracy.

How does one bridge the challenge that legally there is no limit but practically there is? Through a robust, democratic debate in which the best, most just, most human, most free beliefs prevail in an open argument. If they don't there is an undermining of a system and freedom doesn't last.

The third reason for the perpetual open-endedness of freedom is migration and the constant openness of the crystallisation of character. Many historians would argue that, at the end of the day, the greatness of nations doesn't depend on geography or even laws but rather, as Alexis de Tocqueville put it about America, on the habits of the heart, on the nature of the character of the people who keep freedom alive.

But, if there is the constant inflow of new people and they are not educated according to the virtues and the beliefs and the standards of the nation, then there is a perpetual openness to crystallisation of character and a generation arises that no longer understands what made the nation what it is - in other words, where our ancestors are actually less important than our descendants. This means a constant challenge to education in a very profound civic sense.

Proposition Six:

The three options for the vision of the public square: sacred, naked and civic.

In many countries in Europe, in the past, the vision of the public square is what is called a sacred public square. In other words, one religion or another was established - Catholicism in some countries, Protestantism in others. Clearly, in an age of extreme pluralism and diversity that is both unjust and unworkable because people of all the faiths apart from the established faith don't have the freedom to enter an engaged public life, as democratic opportunity should offer.

The other extreme, though, is what has been called the naked public square, where all faiths are rigorously excluded so the public square is secular and all faiths are private. Intriguingly, that is equally unjust and unworkable because it is just a matter of fact in our world today that most human beings are people of some faith or other. Those who have a secular philosophy of life are actually only a tiny minority and the irony is, when you create a naked public square you exclude most people while many secular people smuggle their faith through the back door, just as many religious believers used to do in the past.

The alternative is the very hard, third way, what is called a civil public square. In other words, a public square where people of all faiths have the equal opportunity, based on religious liberty, to enter an engaged public life on the basis of their faith. To bring their perspective but within a consensus - an agreed, carefully built consensus - of what is just and what is

“In many ways, when it comes to religious liberty and diversity and living with our deepest differences, the torch of justice and freedom has not burnt very brightly in Europe.”

free for people of all faiths.

This means that a right for one is automatically a right for another and the responsibility of both, but more specifically, where a right for a Protestant is a right for a Catholic, is a right for a Jew, is a right for a Muslim, is a right for an Atheist, is a right for a Mormon and a believer of any faith under the sun. A right for one is a right for another and the responsibility of both in a civil public square. Part of which, of course, is a carefully built understanding of how we live with our deep differences. For instance, we persuade rather than coerce public dialogue.

Now this is not a civil religion. A civil religion, Jean Jacques Rousseau pointed out, is where what binds a nation, its patriotic cement as it were, is itself considered religious. All of us who are Christians would have objections to that. It's not a civil religion; it is what's called a public philosophy.

Neither is it a lowest common denominator, a melting down, where we'll just get together about the few things left that we can all believe in. No, we have got to say that with modern diversity what divides us goes deeper than what unites us. But in a democratic society we work at building the important things that allow us a robust but civil public debate that doesn't blow us out of the water. So that diversity becomes a matter of richness and strength and not a source of division and conflict.

Proposition Seven:

The three requirements for building such a civil public square: legal rights, public philosophy and personal attitudes.

The first requirement is clear: legal and constitutional rights that can be appealed to in the courts. Here's where the American experiment has been so clear and so strong.

But that in itself is not enough. We need to build the public philosophy because without the public philosophy, with only legal rights, we'll be in the hands of the extremists and the lawyers. That has been exactly the problem in the last thirty years in America, with its bitter culture wars. The public philosophy, the consensus, the understanding of a common vision for the common good has broken down and there is deep and growing bitterness in the United States.

The third thing is exactly what ECONI has been addressing through its Embodying Forgiveness project, the personal attitudes. There is no use speaking of clear legal rights or even in some way, abstractly, of a common vision for the common good, unless good-hearted citizens really have attitudes towards their neighbours and other citizens that truly respect human dignity and they know how to enter into the various things, like forgiveness, in their relationships.

A Brighter Torch

So I would just urge you to see that this issue runs much wider

than Protestants and Catholics. In the Ireland of tomorrow, Ireland will be looking at a diversity that Ireland has never in its history known before, as many other parts of the world are today.

I would urge you also to look back in history. History is not, in Henry Ford's disastrous term, "bunk," history is the secret of a seasoned wisdom of the human race. Much of it is a legacy of the treasury of our terrible human mistakes.

But equally, look around. From the United States - which once considered itself to have the true remedy on this issue but which, in the last thirty years, has slipped seriously itself - to farsighted thinkers in China, who are looking to their future. The world today all over is wrestling with how we live with our deepest differences.

One of the last things de Tocqueville ever wrote, long after he had written his famous book, *Democracy in America*, was this: "In nation building and revolutions, as in a novel, the hardest part to invent is the end." Now, fortunately, we are not looking at the ending of our society, for we have the privilege today of writing our generation's chapter.

In many ways, when it comes to religious liberty and diversity and living with our deepest differences in Europe, the torch of justice and freedom has not burnt very brightly. We have a chance to examine the deepest issues of history and the challenges of our world and, by God's grace, hand on a torch to our children that is burning far brighter than the one that was handed to us.

JOHNSTON McMASTER

deep questions

MY OWN PERSONAL CONTACT with ECONI is largely through its literature and various collaborative encounters with staff members. Northern Ireland is a small community and in the churches' sector many of us wear a variety of hats! I have always appreciated the encounters and contacts and have been enriched by them. The Christian witness in the public square is essentially collaborative because, whoever we are and whatever part of the Christian spectrum we represent, none of us as persons or organisations has the total perspective. From my own ecumenical perspective I have welcomed the contribution of ECONI and staff members towards the wider witness to faith, peace and reconciliation in the public place. The contributions have been important.

I was fortunate to have a more in-depth contact with ECONI some years ago when, on behalf of the Community Relations Council, I conducted an independent and external evaluation of ECONI's work. This provided first hand experience of a variety of projects and emphases, and meetings with a wider group of ECONI personnel. I was impressed not only by the quality of programmes, but also by the organisational systems in place and the evidence of a committed team at work. I wrote what I believe was a fair analysis and positive report on the organisation. At any rate, the funding was renewed!

I will reflect more on some of the literature shortly. I am personally grateful to have received much of what ECONI has published. Since the evaluation some years ago I have regularly been sent a copy of *Lion and Lamb* which may indicate gratitude for the report or concern for my spiritual development! Seriously, I am grateful for each copy and have found the various reflections on themes and issues helpful in my own work of teaching and facilitation.

Fifteen years of existence is getting on towards a generational perspective. Much has changed in Northern Ireland during that time. However frustrated we may sometimes feel about progress, we do well to reflect, recall and bank the significant changes that have taken place. We are not where we were in 1987. Given that change comes from a generational vision and imaging and building the future is a generational task, the contribution of ECONI has got to be seen in such a context. The contribution has been significant. Within the rich diversity of initiatives, projects and programmes for change, ECONI has its place and stands with integrity.

Arising from the concerned reflection of committed evangelical Christians that the evangelical expression of Christian faith had been historically overlaid with sectarianism and forms of nationalistic ideology, ECONI was birthed to address the evangelical constituency within the Protestant churches and to challenge and critique the civil

religion that much evangelicalism had become. This was no small challenge in the context of at least two centuries of evangelical history, which was largely a politicised history. This was also true of Protestant churches in general. Much anti-Home Rule theology equated the 'crown rights of Christ' with the 'crown rights of Empire'. God was the patron of Unionism and prayer was the 'vital breath' of the Unionist cause. Irish Catholicism was a mirror-image in relation to Irish nationalism. Not only was this civil religion, it was classic idolatry as defined by scripture. Even scripture was read from a partisan, sectarian perspective.

ECONI has not flinched from addressing this crucial issue which is about liberating God from sectarian political control. There has been much opposition and criticism for doing so, not least because it is subversive of a dominant Protestant politico-religious worldview. If some feel uncomfortable with describing this as the liberation of God, it, at least, has helped liberate considerable numbers of evangelical Christians from the chains of sectarianised and politicised faith.

ECONI's publications have played no small part in this. 'For God and His Glory Alone' was ground-breaking work within the evangelical constituency in Northern Ireland. It was a critique of evangelical Christianity and its identification with a particular political outlook, and an invitation to look afresh at the Bible to identify some principles leading to a resolution of deep community problems. Here was a call to relate the Bible to a confused and confusing situation. The ten selected biblical principles offered a manifesto or framework for active Christian involvement in the community.

Another significant publication was 'A Future with Hope: Biblical Frameworks for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland'. Not only did this publication helpfully address the significance and four key characteristics of evangelicalism, but from a biblical perspective, through evangelical lenses, addressed the key issues of culture and identity, land and nationality, rights and responsibilities, equality and social justice, to name a few. Evangelical withdrawal into a comfortable religious world was challenged and evangelical Christians were given a stirring call:

The commitment to serve this community in the struggle for peace, justice and reconciliation, can no longer be an optional extra for Christian people. (p 25)

Not a few evangelical Christians have been empowered for a new vision and engagement with society. Careful research on human rights and the collection of papers on forgiveness continue to enlarge the evangelical vision and commitment to a more just and peaceful society.

'For God and His Glory Alone' was ground-breaking work within the evangelical constituency in Northern Ireland.



ECONI has, therefore, been one of the change agents, particularly within its evangelical constituency, and within parts of the wider spectrum of Northern Irish Protestantism over the last fifteen years. Local church history will note its contribution.

As with every initiative and organisation there are some shadow sides. I intend no begrudgery (a Northern Ireland disease) in these more critical comments, but an outsider's perspective. (As a Methodist I cherish my evangelical and ecumenical Wesleyan tradition. At its best it is both, though not as a confessional model).

In addressing the evangelical Christian community ECONI has alienated not a few, especially fundamentalist Christians. Indeed, there has been a failure to sustain dialogue with this sector, a failure which those of us committed to ecumenical relations also share. Dialogue with fundamentalist Christians, and for that matter, fundamentalists from other religious traditions, remains more than ever a key challenge of our time, locally and globally.

ECONI has placed a heavy emphasis on being biblical and textual references abound in the literature as well as describing frameworks as "unashamedly biblical" ('A Future with Hope', p 9). The constant appeal to biblical authority sometimes has the effect of putting the claim made beyond question, if not even at times suggesting an infallibility of interpretation. What is offered is always an interpretation of the text which does not close the text to other readings. The authority of scripture and the authority of our interpretations of scripture are never the same. That more critical perspective is not always evident in the ECONI approach.

The impression is also sometimes given that evangelicals are the only people who take the Bible seriously. This is not the reality. Very few Christians from any tradition would have difficulty with ECONI's emphasis on biblical perspectives. The reality is that on the Christian spectrum there are diverse reading and interpretative strategies. To acknowledge this is not to sink into abandoned relativism, but to recognise that we all read out of a tradition and that includes an evangelical tradition(s). We read and interpret from a variety of standpoints and with diverse presuppositions including biases. There is no total perspective from any one point on the theological or confessional spectrum. There is wisdom in Archbishop Rowan Williams' insight that 'religious and theological integrity is possible as and when discourse about God declines the attempt to take God's point of view' ('On Christian Theology' p 6). Few of us have resisted the temptation to equate our perspective, including our biblical perspective, with the divine point of view.

In its fifteen years ECONI has not engaged adequately with the ecumenical perspective. This may have been a constraint imposed by the Northern Ireland Protestant and evangelical context, which in turn may have more to do with the politicisation of religion than with any spiritual integrity. I have heard and read ECONI comments on ecumenism

which perpetuate a distorted stereotype and which are uninformed. Evangelicals have suffered the same fate from illiberal ecumenists. One of the basic fundamentals of ecumenism is the search for roots and truth across the denominational fragmentation, antagonism and culturally diverse religious traditions. The search for truth includes the truth about the 'other', being informed of the 'other's' truth. The integrity of truth is not served by ignorance, prejudice or distorted, stereotypical images. There is need for mutual healing through evangelical-ecumenical engagement and dialogue.

Given evangelical history in Ireland and elsewhere, the reluctance to engage too overtly with those from the Catholic tradition is understandable, if not ultimately justifiable. ECONI seems to have had a selective involvement with Catholics. Yet the peace and reconciliation at the heart of the Christian faith is not selective. It is indivisible. Calling for peace and reconciliation in society while remaining ambivalent about peace and reconciliation between and within churches undermines the credibility of our peace witness.

I am happy to have been invited to write this reflection which is offered in a positive and affirming spirit for fifteen years of committed and faithful witness.

As Northern Ireland continues to change there are deep questions for all of us who claim to follow Jesus. A society in transition and in the process of generational change challenges the faith community to new models of engagement. ECONI has its own particular challenges, some of which are presented by its shadow side. Other questions are: Has ECONI gone as far as it can with the evangelical constituency? Are there new models of Christian engagement required? Does the future require greater collaboration and partnership? In the light of gospel values are there elements of ECONI that need to die? Does ECONI now need to radically reinvent itself holding the inevitable tensions between continuity and discontinuity?

Responses to these questions are beyond the scope and competency of this reflection.

REV DR JOHNSTON McMASTER is Lecturer and Programme Co-ordinator of 'Learning Together: Education for Reconciliation' - The Continuing Education Programme in Northern Ireland at the Irish School of Ecumenics.



CECELIA CLEGG

steady presence

I find it by turns
ironic and by turns
sad that I recognise in
their evangelical world
the same passion for
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I FIRST ENCOUNTERED ECONI in 1995 in a discussion about theologies of salvation with David Porter at a party hosted by Lady Jean Mayhew. Being a British Catholic, who had virtually no contact with Evangelicals, I found his vocabulary and framework of thought foreign, rather too direct, and somewhat off-putting. Little did I know, at that moment, how important David and the ECONI team were to become in the work I was just beginning with Joe Liechty on the Moving Beyond Sectarianism Project. ECONI provided not only critical advice about how to shape our work so that it would be possible for Evangelicals to engage with it, but also practical help, professional support, and friendship in the days when sectarianism was not a popular topic, and life was tough.

My relationship with ECONI, however, was and is much more than just a professional necessity. In my early days in Northern Ireland I spent quite a lot of time trying to understand how Evangelicals view life, how they organise themselves ecclesologically, and what they mean when they use certain phrases, like 'being saved,' and 'Christian.' For me, it was a journey into a new language and new mindset and my colleagues in ECONI helped me, directly and indirectly, to grasp some of the nuances. I find it by turns ironic and by turns sad that I recognise in their evangelical world the same passion for God, firmness of belief and clarity about doctrine that I associate with my own church - yet our religious worlds remain miles apart.

In the churches sector, ECONI has succeeded in bringing an evangelical voice into the wider churches dialogue and refusing to be sidelined. It seems to me that they (and the smaller evangelical churches) are still treated as peripheral in the sector, when in fact their influence is surprisingly wide-ranging. I sense that this marginalisation can be frustrating and yet ECONI lives it with grace and openness. Their steady presence in conversations with the larger churches has been a richness and has offered the opportunity for everyone to understand the 'other' better and where appropriate to co-ordinate action in the pursuit of peace.

The persevering work that ECONI is doing in bringing an evangelical Christian perspective to political conversations, and in helping their constituency to think through the biblical rationale for socio-political engagement, has been and is, I believe, of inestimable value in moving forward the cause of peace in this society. Being a para-church organisation, and not bound by the same constraints as the more formal churches, they have found a significant role in convening and holding safe space for conversations between church people, and between church people and politicians/civil servants.

CECELIA CLEGG is a staff member of the Irish School of Ecumenics, Belfast. She is Co-Director of the 'Partners in Transformation Project', which aims to enhance, nurture and support the capacities of churches and faith communities in their calling to be peacebuilders and agents of transformation.



JOSEPH LIECHTY

no longer lonely

VISITING NORTHERN IRELAND in the early 1980s, I concluded that in terms of peacebuilding, evangelicalism was the most self-satisfied, complacent, do-nothing sector of the Christian churches. Generally respectable, evangelicals could shunt any potentially embarrassing charges off in the direction of fundamentalism, giving them a comfortable scheme of plausible deniability. They had won few laurels to rest on, but rest they did.

In fact individual evangelicals were doing some of the bravest, most creative peace work I encountered. But these people often found themselves suspect in their own communities; what they regarded as biblically-derived Christian witness was treated by others as letting down the side. Consequently, they could easily be lonely, self-doubting, and even despairing. Encouraging them became a modest ministry: No, you're not crazy, the society around you is crazy, maybe even your church is crazy. Yes, if you really start thinking biblically, you're likely to end up building peace.

The arrival of ECONI changed all that. One of the first effects, tangentially and happily, was to deprive me of my Ministry of Reassurance: evangelical peacemakers were no longer lonely. Now they had an organisation whose members shared their convictions and which framed peace in terms of the idiom and beliefs of Northern Ireland evangelicalism.

It was the first of many contributions. In fact ECONI models good peacebuilding practice in several areas, including the following:

(1) In the midst of conflict, we see more clearly what we have suffered than what we have inflicted or allowed. Combine this tendency with the scourge of what-about-ery, and most of us do more blaming than taking responsibility. But explicitly and implicitly, repentance has always been on the ECONI agenda. Not a supine, kick-me-again, guilt fetish, just a theologically and existentially sound awareness that we are all sinners, and the business of sinners is repenting.

(2) Peacemakers often see peace as involving compromise, everybody moving to the middle of the road for the sake of peace. And this is true, at least in part. Everyone should know how to compromise, and those who don't betray an egocentric immaturity. But compromise cannot solve every problem. In fact all people are likely to discover, when pressed in certain ways, convictions or commitments that they cannot compromise without fundamentally damaging themselves—if peace is to come, it cannot be by compromise

alone. In aspects of their work, ECONI have modelled this essential skill of seeking peace without compromising core convictions.

In any conflict situation, every religious or political grouping requires an ECONI-equivalent, both to call it to repentance and to name the things that make for peace in the authentic voice of that grouping.

But all of the above, while my true convictions, is also a bit distant and structural. As much as anything, I have valued ECONI as a place where I have found many Christian brothers and sisters who have been my friends, colleagues, teachers, and sometimes even heroes. I wish them every blessing as they continue to walk in the paths God has set before them.

Yes, if you really start thinking biblically, you're likely to end up building peace.

JOSEPH LIECHTY is the co-author, with Cecelia Clegg, of *Moving Beyond Sectarianism: Religion, Conflict, and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland*. Joe, an American Mennonite, lived and worked in Ireland for 20 years and has recently moved to Goshen College, Goshen, Indiana, to serve as Professor of Peace Studies.

INGRI SAKARIA

something to give



ONE SUMMER, a few years back, I climbed the stairs looking for the ECONI office and a person called Alwyn Thomson. I found a neat office and a positive response and a contact was established that has lasted ever since.

The *Folkhögskola* where I teach provides pre-university adult education. The second year of the international course is specialised in conflict understanding, so of course we were interested in the situation in Northern Ireland and wanted to hear from both sides in the conflict. We were keen to have an e-mail exchange between our students and somebody from ECONI and later on have them visit our school. Alwyn gave us this contact and also came over to Sweden where he, with utmost patience, answered a lot of questions. This was the first phase of our contact.

The second phase was established during this first visit when Alwyn and ECONI agreed to become one of the partners in an EU project concerning 'The Role of Religion for European Identity and Integration' (see www.sundsgarden.nu/eri). The other partners included another *Folkhögskola* further north in Sweden and a Christian Academy in Latvia. We produced case studies and met once every six months. In so doing we saw each of the participants' organisations and experienced something of the countries and the situations which were the subject of the case studies. Our meetings created an atmosphere of intercultural understanding besides the fact that we had a great time together. One fruitful aspect of the discussions was that in the course of trying to describe the social structure in your own country, which for you is a familiar situation, to somebody to whom this is totally new and hard to understand you discover new aspects to your own problems. For example: 'Could the type of cross-community work being done in Northern Ireland meet the problems of lack of integration which we face in Sweden?'

When we visited Belfast we met with the Board of ECONI. This meeting has stayed in our memories - naturally because of the nice setting - but most of all because we were impressed by what we heard from the Members of the Board. We met a group of people who seemed so devoted to the aim of the organisation and who were willing to share their personal convictions with us. This was a revitalising experience for us, both personally and for our organisation. When we came back we tried to challenge our Board but unfortunately only a few members responded. Our school is run by an Evangelical Lutheran movement within the Swedish Church and for us, 'How can we express our faith in what we do?' is an ongoing discussion. It is not easy to engage all the staff and it is also a challenge to meet rootless students in a secular country. ECONI works in a different area but we feel we share the same values and our contact has brought inspiration and a reminder of our Christ-centred focus.

International contacts become like a vitamin injection for the quality of your work and for your own personal growth.

Phase three of our contact arose out of a disappointment - a second stage of our EU project was rejected. International contacts with people whose contribution you appreciate becomes like a vitamin injection for the quality of your work and for your own personal growth. We found that we had become dependant on injections from Northern Ireland - that is ECONI - and the way you work, so we found a way to get Lynda Gould over to Sweden to run courses with us. She has now been here twice and the response from our students has been very positive. Our experience is that practical peace work created out of acute situations in Northern Ireland has something to give our country. In Sweden the problems that we face stem from the lack of integration between large immigrant groups and more traditionally Swedish Swedes. We believe that the group work facilitated by Lynda helps people in a practical way to recognise the destructive powers that exist in our society. There is a feeling of relief when people can get not only the theory but also the practical tools with which to deal with attitudes we find hard to accept, such as scapegoating and racism.

Connected to phase three, a very interesting new development took place this summer as a volunteer from our school in Sweden spent two months in Northern Ireland with ECONI to follow the summer activities. We are very grateful for this opportunity and sincerely hope that our contact continues. We remain excited to see how the links will develop in the future.

INGRI SAKARIA is a teacher of Psychology and Religion and a counsellor at Sundsgardens Folkhögskola in the south of Sweden. She has a degree in Psychology and Drama and is the mother of five children.

poetry

A poem written following a field trip to Nendrum,
ruins of a 7th Century Celtic Monastery,
12th July 2003.

This is the time of Pilgrimage.
In an age of soft feet
and fossil hardness.

In the time of Big Brother 4,
we turned off
the power of television
and followed our guide
tenderly
onto a blue tour bus.

In the time of ten thousand taps
of black shoes shining
on the Queen's Highway.
In the time of morning embers
from outdoor night-fires.
In the time of flawed heroes and gentle villains.
In the time of tired eyes and breakfasted bellies.
In the time of empty note-books
waiting to be filled.
(oh the fear and excitement
of a blank page and a hope)

This the time of Pilgrimage.
In an age of soft feet
and fossil hardness.

In the time of sun-nuzzled necks
(a pleasure later to punish
with the pulse of a glowing red-skin).
In the time of plastic-wrapped lunches
(I haven't had a Wotsit Crisp in years,
and now I know the reason why).

In the time of stories splashing
out in shoals, gently received,
refreshing the soul.

This is the time of Pilgrimage.
In an age of soft feet
And fossil hardness.
In the time of Big Brother 4,
we turned off
the modern road
and tuned into ancient whispers
that didn't mention TAIG or PROD,
but did mention God.
Odd.

Sacred moments,
Listening to a victory
in the stillness of broken walls
and battered ruins.

In the time of scribbled inspirations.
And back in time
To the time of Columba and Patrick
And Vikings and Fiords,
of fierce love cloaked
in gentle boldness.
Gazing at strong water,
receiving Nature's baptism.

In the time of mouthing down
myths in reshaped morsels,
tasting new delights from history,
hearsay and the Holy.

In the time of kissing darkness
and finding light.

This is the time of Pilgrimage.
In an age of soft feet
and fossil hardness.

In the time of Big Brother 4,
we turned off
the power of television
and followed our guide
tenderly
onto a blue tour bus...

PAUL HUTCHINSON

faith in the future

The last in the series of reflections on the future of faith, taking a fresh look at the ministry of Jesus as recorded in Luke's gospel. In these studies we have seen how Jesus finds faith where it is least expected - a persistent, obedient, loving, risk-taking, grateful and expectant faith that works because its priorities are right. Faith binds us to Christ on whom we depend in order that our meagre faith may grow through testing times.

The final three direct references to faith in the ministry of Jesus recorded by Luke occur in two passages where he speaks directly and personally to the disciples: Luke 17:1-10 and Luke 22:31-34.

Keeping Faith...

Jesus says to his disciples, "occasions for stumbling are bound to come..." Peter's response is, "Lord, I'm ready to go with you to prison and to death." Jesus replies, "I tell you, Peter, the cock will not crow this day until you have denied three times that you know me."

These are hard words for Peter to hear from Jesus - direct, personal, challenging words. Having put our trust in God, how do we keep our faith in testing times? Keeping faith is the test of Jesus' ministry. If we have really grasped it, and taken hold of faith, then it is something that we will keep. I want to suggest that this faith is kept in three ways: in relationships, through potent resources and with repentance.

In Relationships

Faith is kept in relationship with one another. Jesus talked to his disciples very frankly about relationships in the community of faith and about the responsibilities that we have to one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. He talks about the awful possibility that we might be responsible for causing someone else to sin. "It would be better for you if a millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea, than for you to cause one of these little ones to stumble. Be on your guard."

If you have ever seen a millstone you will know that it is no small kitchen gadget. A millstone as tall as me has been erected beside the road leading to the church at the top of Mount Nebo in Jordan. It would be a frightful prospect to have such a stone hung around your neck and to be thrown into the depths because you had caused someone else in the community of faith to sin. A prospect so frightful, who would want the responsibility of being part of such a community? The heart cry of the disciples is, "increase our faith! In the light of this frightful prospect, "increase our faith!"

Not only have we the potential to be the cause of sin in the community, we too can be sinned against. In the situation where we have been wronged there is an equally demanding response required of us: even if we have been sinned against seven times a day, and seven times the person comes back and says, "I repent," Jesus says, "You must forgive."

Can you imagine the challenge of living in a community with such a demand? Jesus demands that we must forgive when our brothers and sisters repent. This rule for community life is so demanding, who



would want to be part of it? Who is up to it? Despite repeated offence, who has the capacity to forgive? The disciples cry out, “Increase our faith!” Keeping faith in relationships in the community is demanding, and it consistently brings the disciples and us back to cry out to Christ, “Increase our faith.”

We are also challenged to keep faith in our relationship with Christ. At a time of mounting crisis in the ministry of Jesus it is Luke who records these sombre words of Jesus to Peter about Satan demanding to sift all of them like wheat. Satan has already made his move by entering Judas who has gone off to betray Jesus to the authorities. The authorities are conspiring now to arrest him, and Satan has demanded to test the relationship of all the disciples to Christ. He wants to put them to the test, to sift them like wheat. The heart of their faith is going to be tested - not just in their relationships with one another - but also in their relationships with the Lord himself. Will they keep faith?

With Potent Resources

However, in the challenge of keeping faith we do have a potent resource – we are not left on our own to flounder. The resource is not only our faith in Christ, but also the fact that Christ has really grasped us through his ministry. And it is because Christ has hold of us that our faith, even though the size of the smallest of seeds, is so potent. When challenged by the daunting prospect of relating to one another in a spirit of true forgiveness and repentance, Jesus says, “If you had faith the size of a mustard seed you could say to this mulberry tree “be uprooted and planted in the sea,” and it would obey you.”

Tiny and insignificant, yet potent. A seed, Jesus tells us elsewhere, that goes into the ground and produces one of the largest bushes around. So large that Jesus uses it as an image for the kingdom, where all the birds of the air may come and sit. If Christ has really grasped us through his ministry we have a resource for keeping our faith potent despite its small size.

A second resource for keeping faith is prayer - not, surprisingly, our prayer, but the prayer of Jesus. Satan has asked to test all the disciples, but Jesus says, “I have prayed for you, Peter, that your faith may not fail.” Note the difference here - Jesus does not say, “That you may not fail, Peter,” because Peter did fail. Despite his proud boast, he failed Jesus at a time when being identified with Christ would have cost most. Rather, the test of Jesus’ ministry is that his faith would not fail. The intercession of Jesus held Peter fast. In the same way, faith that is so small is sufficient because Jesus is its object and its fulfilment. That is why little faith works. That is why all we’re asked to keep is that little faith, because its object and fulfilment is Christ himself, who prays

for us, that our faith may not fail. A faith that is the gift of God, so that no one can boast.

Later in Luke 17:7-10, having said about the little faith that they should have, Jesus goes on to give the disciples an example of slaves who, at the end of all their work, can only say, “We have done what we’ve been given to do and what was expected of us.” They look for no credit; they have just done their duty and carried out their orders. For those of us who are people of faith and disciples in this world, the very faith that we have is not a cause for boasting. Faith is the gift of God, and keeping it is part of God’s ministry to us as much as our service to him.

Repentance Restores Relationship

Thirdly, keeping faith requires repentance. There was a confrontation implied in the Christian community when Jesus talked with the disciples in Luke 17:3 and 4. Those who had sinned were rebuked in order to bring them to repentance. “Be on your guard! If another disciple sins you must rebuke the offender and if there is repentance you must forgive.” This confrontation brings about repentance and requires forgiveness. Nowhere do I see Jesus talk about repentance without - in the same breath - bringing us to forgiveness. He does not demand without offering. He does not draw us to the requirements of the justice of God without offering us the mercy of God and his forgiveness.

The confrontation, repentance and forgiveness result in the restoration of relationship. Jesus says to Peter, “This is what’s going to happen to you. You are going to fail, but I have prayed that your faith will not fail. When you have turned back, strengthen your brothers. When your relationship with me is restored you will be restored to leadership”.

Jesus plays an active part in that restoration of Peter. He doesn’t leave him. His prayer that his faith will not fail is lived out in what happens over the coming days. Later in Luke 22:60 at that very moment when Peter denies him for the third time and the cock crows, we read that Jesus turns and looks at Peter. And Peter remembers the words of the Lord, how he had said to him, “before the cock crows today you will deny me three times.” He goes out and weeps bitterly. Jesus lived out his prayer in keeping Peter’s faith and bringing him to that point of repentance.

Even after the resurrection in Luke 24:12 we read that Peter gets up and runs to the tomb, looking for Jesus. If Jesus confronts him with his failure, then it was in looking for Jesus that Peter showed he had begun the journey of being restored.

Finally, Luke makes note in verse 34 that when the people on

faith in the future

Are we unduly anxious
about the future
not of the faith but of the
traditions and institutions
of the faith?

the road to Emmaus returned to Jerusalem saying they had met Jesus, the disciples say to them, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon." Jesus takes time to be with Peter after his resurrection, to restore him, having confronted him with his failure. This is keeping faith: in relationships, with the resources freely given maintaining the ongoing repentance that is called of all of us, no matter how long we have been on the Christian journey.

Finding Faith...Where it Grows

We are to be people who are keeping faith where it grows: where the small mustard seed grows into the large bush.

In the face of sin

Faith grows, paradoxically, in the face of sin. When we are hurt, when we are sinned against, faith grows - not out of our ability to rebuke the sinner - but by our capacity to forgive. That is the test. That is what some find too hard: forgiving seventy times seven. That's where we keep faith in the face of sin.

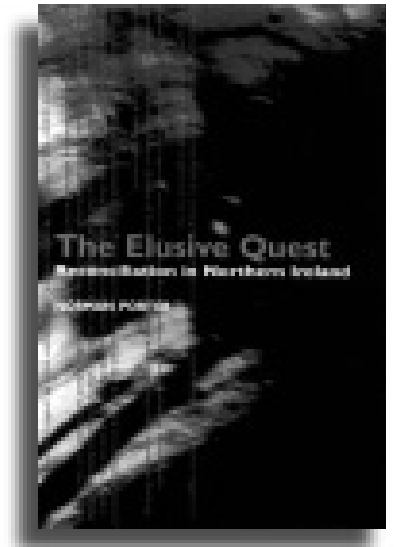
In the midst of crisis

We keep faith in the midst of crisis. When we fail to live up to our commitments, to the covenant we have made with God, when we deny the lover of our souls, faith grows - not out of our capacity to be true - but his ability to save. That is always the test. It is Christ's ability to save that keeps our faith in the midst of crisis.

Conclusion

So, are we concerned, as Jesus is, for the future of faith? Finding faith where it was least expected was at the heart of his ministry. Showing faith where it mattered was the touchstone - proof that his ministry was effective, and keeping faith where it could grow was the test that the faith of the community was real.

If these were Jesus' concerns, are they ours? Are we unduly anxious about the future not of the faith but of the traditions and institutions of the faith? Or is it truly our calling and concern to nurture people of such faith as Jesus desires? That is always the challenge for the effective future of the faithful.



*THE ELUSIVE QUEST,
Reconciliation in Northern Ireland*
by Norman Porter.

Published by
Blackstaff Press, Belfast.

review:

The Elusive Quest, Reconciliation in Northern Ireland by Norman Porter

REVIEWED BY BILL BROWN

When the manuscript of this book was passed to the publisher its proposed title was a rhetorical question, *The Elusive Quest*? That question mark, lost or removed in the publishing process, epitomised the book's interrogative and investigative thrust. In one sense its loss doesn't matter, for on every page that questioning thrust is obvious. But, in another sense, the point is of interest in that Norman Porter is interrogating his own title, in effect asking: Is reconciliation really elusive and, if so, why and to what extent? Although he reckons in his introduction that "the reality of Northern Ireland's circumstances is such that reconciliation is likely to prove elusive for some time," his central thesis is that this need not be the case. The very first lines of the book confront us with the audacious assertion that: "Reconciliation matters. And if it mattered enough to enough of us in Northern Ireland then we would have it." This is such a bold and challenging opener, and reconciliation such a prize, that if the author has established his assertion to any degree a reviewer would be justified in calling upon every pastor, politician, teacher, student and public-spirited citizen to study this book. And, as my own opener, without hesitation, I do.

I say "study" because the book bristles with questions and issues. One major question: Is reconciliation a good thing? might seem rather strange, but Porter suspects that "peace without reconciliation" is an idea that resonates for many of us. He asks whether our politicians have sufficiently placed the interests of all our citizens above party, or really tried to find common ground. He touches on the fear and bitterness that stem from division. This leads him to consider counter-responses described as assimilation and prioritisation of difference, neither of which does anything for reconciliation and tend rather to exacerbate our sectarianism. But our differences - never absolute, often concocted and certainly exaggerated - shouldn't be used to screen out possibilities for common ground. The commonality of a reconciled citizenship would far transcend anything envisaged by "single identity" activities or by the parity of esteem principle, which are good only as far as they go. Porter describes these as "a balancing act" - as "weak reconciliation" that juggles with two sets of competing entitlement claims but which leaves the divisions between our "two communities" relatively undisturbed.

"What does reconciliation require?" Porter argues that we must all answer its moral challenge. This can be evaded or ignored if we qualify our responses to it in favour of partisan interests. It can be met if we give priority to reconciliation. But to

"prioritise difference," as is typical of our traditional politics, is to perpetuate a divided society and the sectarianism that flows from it. A good society is possible only through good citizens - citizens who take a moral, rather than a self-seeking or instrumental view of politics by exercising civic virtues like forgiveness, magnanimity and reasonableness. Forgiveness is a strong political virtue with healing power. Magnanimity's generosity of spirit creates and builds upon trust. Reasonableness can persuade, yet leave itself open to persuasion. These things therefore must not be privatised. Civic virtue needs a public focus. It can emerge through "fair interactions" at all levels between citizens leading to the discovery that they have more in common than they thought. Rational human beings engaging dialogically with their differences can uncover a commonality that debunks their prejudiced and historically created "misrecognitions" of each other.

Citizen belonging can create "citizen dignity" and become a moral check on the excesses of difference. It can snap us out of sectarian ways of thinking and point us to a common political life based on strong reconciliation - the objective encouraged by the Agreement. Porter analyses the clashing interpretations of the Agreement that still hinder its implementation. "Competing understandings of legitimacy" cause unionists and republicans to contest constitutional and institutional priorities and to overplay their fundamentalist principles. This stirs up the distrust that is central to the current disagreements on decommissioning, disbandment and reform. Porter has much to say to both sides on these things. The issue is not why the politics of the Union or Unity should matter, but "why they should matter most." To give primacy to constitutional principles at every turn results in stalemate, whereas "the genius of the Agreement was to make possible political movement beyond such an impasse". In effect, the old train of exclusive sovereignty politics needs to be shunted into the sidings to let the new train of inclusive citizen belonging through on the main line to a better future.

One reviewer, a politician, is dismissive of the book because, allegedly, its language is "submerged in that of religion". He contends that its moralistic approach "makes high, not to say impossible, demands" upon citizens emerging from thirty years of violence - "qualities of character often conspicuous by their absence: forgiveness, magnanimity and reasonableness". It says a lot about the state of reconciliation here that a top politician should be so anxious to privatise moral/religious and civic virtues

and excuse the lack of public reasonableness! Porter in fact deals at length with alienation and bitterness (as he does with all the principles mentioned here), and he recognises that reconciliation is "a hard taskmaster". But this is no reason to dismiss his message, defend partisan positions, or to do the politics of "war by other means." Another reviewer is more constructive, observing that Porter's last book, *Rethinking Unionism*, "attempted to redefine unionism for the 21st century in a way in which its current leaders had singularly failed to do. The present study, based firmly on moral values, may be thought to occupy the place the churches might have filled".

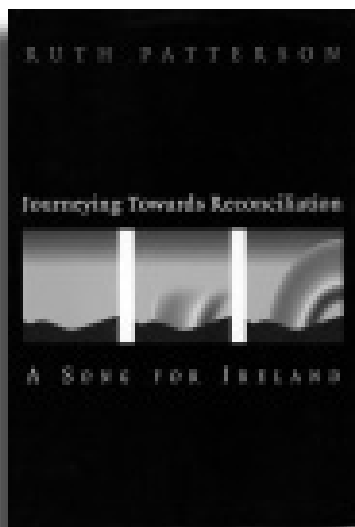
This is not to say that *The Elusive Quest* is a religious book. Porter says that religious faith provides no guarantee of sympathy for reconciliation and that "many who boast the purest Christian motives are among those most threatened by the possibility of political reconciliation". Although summarily dismissing fundamentalist claims that reconciliation between man and man is irrelevant or impossible, he doesn't endeavour to develop a theology of reconciliation. His book is set firmly in the political context, but it the moral and civic virtues adduced are entirely compatible with that universal Christian ethic by which ultimately, we must all be judged. No privatisation here! Thus, there is a certain synergy flowing from Norman Porter's belief that conventional political language can be inadequate to meet citizens' deeper needs when dealing with culture-related divisions, and that "borrowing from the language of religion" can enhance this. In deploying that language to such good effect in *The Elusive Quest* he has given us an enriched political treatise. This should give us cause to wonder what potential impact our politics might have if this were fortified, not just by religious language, but also by publicly practised religious /moral and reconciliatory principles like those contained in the great royal law to love our neighbour as ourselves.

BILL BROWN is from Loughbrickland.

reviews:

Journeying Towards Reconciliation, A Song for Ireland by Ruth Patterson

REVIEWED BY LYNDA GOULD



'THIS IS NOT a theoretical account of why Christians should engage in reconciliation, but a guide as to how to go about it. Ruth Patterson blends Scripture with life, life with prayer, insight with inspiration and reflection with a call for action.'

Archbishop Desmond Tutu

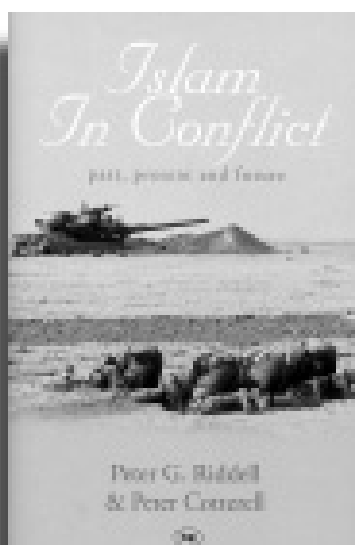
This book holds together the wisdom, inspiration, vision, biblical reflection and prayer that emanate from that special sanctuary that is Restoration Ministries. Ruth illustrates new ways to understand the complexity of reconciliation by telling the story of their journey as community, weaving together scripture and experience. The words written in this book have been lived out in the lives of the many people who have turned to Restoration Ministries in search of hope, justice and reconciliation. But it is not simply a diary recording their unique journey. Ruth argues that the wounds of division and prejudice can be healed and that trust and respect can be part of the new song of reconciliation we might sing.

Music is the metaphor for the journey of reconciliation. It begins with a reflection on Psalm 137 and the challenge to the Children of Israel to 'sing a song to the Lord in a strange land'. At this special point in our history Ruth asks, 'How can we sing in and from a situation like ours?' From here there is time to hear the songs of sorrow and suffering that come from those who have experienced personal loss because of the 'Troubles'. The journey then takes another turn causing the reader to think about an inner, more personal journey of reconciliation and at this point the 'road' felt a little steeper when I considered my own comfort with the way things are and my fear of learning a new 'song'. As the chapters increase in number the book expands into the area that characterises Restoration Ministries and is the heart of reconciliation as presented in this book. It is the gift of welcome, of generosity, of hospitality and of the restoration of relationships. These seem to be the melody of the new song of hope that Ireland might sing. Finally Ruth throws out a challenge to the church, 'What song have we to sing from Ireland for the rest of the world because of the way we ourselves have travelled?'

There is a deep vein of truth and wisdom embedded in what Ruth has offered us in this book. It is written as Ruth might say it and I could almost hear her pause to make sure that I had grasped all before moving on. Indeed, the 'song' echoed long after I turned over the last page as I found myself re-reading the Scriptures and using the prayers at the end of each chapter for personal reflection.

This is a book of possibilities, written with the sceptics and weary in mind. These are not hollow words nor is the idea of a new song simply an aspiration. These words are rooted in real lives and experiences. We are invited to embrace a hope that is to be lived out through ordinary people taking small steps to change our world – this is what makes it inspirational, believable and doable!

LYNDA GOULD is Director of the Transforming Communities Team with ECONI.



ISLAM IN CONFLICT joins the flood of recent books on Islam, and particularly Islam's encounter with the West. Riddell and Cotterell's book does focus on a number of aspects of Islam that have been overlooked or misunderstood in other works. First, they explain the beliefs and practices of Islam, taking it seriously as a religious phenomenon, not merely an ideology or culture. Second, they discuss the relationship between the Quran and Christianity. Third, they address the conflict between Christianity and Islam through the missionary activities of both. That said, this is not a book about the relationship between Islam and Christianity since that is only one aspect of Islam's encounter with the West.

In assessing contemporary Islam in the light of the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, the authors describe two traditions within Islam – the one radical, the other moderate. We hear much about the former, but rarely hear about the latter. While there are some things the West can do to undermine radical Islam, ultimately the key challenge is the challenge facing Islam itself. In the twenty first century Islam stands at a crossroads, but only Muslims can decide which path to take.

At a time when it is all too easy to caricature Islam and demonise Muslims, Riddell and Cotterell's book provides an honest, reliable and readable overview of Islam and the challenges facing it in the twenty first century.

ALWYN THOMSON is ECONI's Research Officer.

JOURNEY TOWARDS RECONCILIATION,
A Song For Ireland

Ruth Patterson

Published by
Veritas, 2003

ISLAM IN CONFLICT:
Past, Present and Future
Peter G Riddell & Peter Cotterell

Published by
IVP Leicester, 2003
Price £9.99

The R Option - Building Relationships as a Better Way of Life by Michael Schluter & David John Lee

REVIEWED BY ANNA RANKIN



WE ALL EXIST IN a network of relationships the quality of which determines how happy and effective we are. It sounds so obvious, doesn't it? Relationships are key to our self-understanding, happiness, reputation, self-esteem, balance in our personal lives and social support. Yet few of us give much thought to making them work.

The authors of this book suggest that "if we maintained our cars the way we maintain our relationships, most of us would be in the ditch." But the fact is, most of us still manage to keep going. Our relationships are often in poor shape, and on some level we are aware of this, but we choose not to do anything about it. Most of the time we are able to work around the discomfort these untended relationships cause in our lives rather than actually addressing them head on.

In their previous collaboration, *The R Factor*, Schluter and Lee showed the far-reaching effects of poor relationships on a societal level. If relationships don't work, the quality of life goes down and organisational performance suffers. Thus *The R Factor* puts forward a relational approach to policy-making and management.

In a shift to the personal level, *The R Option* calls itself 'a lifestyle book' and suggests that we need to get serious about prioritising relationships in order to lead happier and more effective lives together.

Good relationships don't happen by accident - they require work. The premise of the book is simple: What happens if we take seriously the idea of prioritising relationships, not just in certain contexts, but systematically across the whole of life? Intentionality is the key strategy: conscious planning and review is required as we are often handicapped by sheer habit. This book is a good starting point for the process of discovering what it might mean to put relationships first and making relational choices.

The pursuit of right-relationships lies at the heart of the Bible. Relationships underlie not only Christian ethics, but our whole understanding about the nature of God. In seeking to place the way we relate at the forefront of all our activities, the book has strong Christian basis, but by illustrating the universal benefit of building good relationships, it is designed to be read by anyone. The aim of the book is discussion not prescription and this is borne out in its tone.

The 19 short chapters make it an easy read with personal stories and anecdotes illustrating the main points. Addressing a whole range of issues such as time, communications, money, lunch, leisure, friendship, soul mates, sex, loss, forgiveness, roots,

health, schooling, cities, security and strangers, the authors outline the challenge each issue presents. Numbered points give guidance on how to 'take the R option' in each area. These serve as good departure points for discussion and study, though some may prefer a book with more structured questions to work through.

The value of this book is in its application. The issues raised are probably best aired in the context of a group of people committed to developing better relationships with each other, their community and the world. Putting 'the R option' into practice is the challenge, finding ways to do it together may help. The Relationships Foundation's own website www.relationshipsfoundation.org offers some suggestions for action. One is to invite a group of people to get together to discuss a chapter/topic over dessert and coffee with the aim of getting to know each other better and explore issues which few of us take time out to specifically address.

In a world full of house, garden and wardrobe makeovers, maybe it is time more of us gave our relationships some purposeful attention and regular maintenance in order to improve our collective quality of life. This is one book which you may find helpful.

ANNA RANKIN is Resource Co-ordinator with ECONI.

THE R OPTION –
Building Relationships as a Better Way of Life
by Michael Schluter & David John Lee

Published by
The Relationships Foundation
Price £7.99

READER OFFER

Lion & Lamb readers can claim a 20% discount off the cover price of £7.99

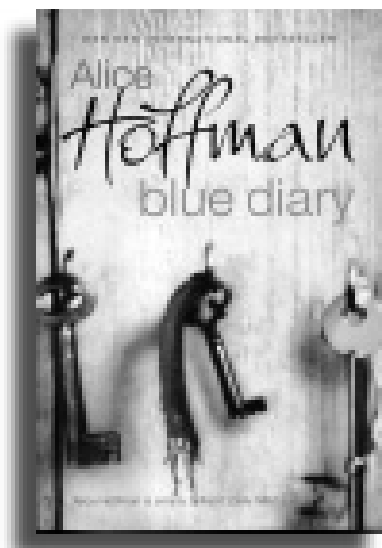
Just mention ECONI when ordering via www.relationshipsfoundation.org, or by phone on 01223 566333.

The R Option is only available from The Relationships Foundation.

review:

Blue Diary
by Alice Hoffman

REVIEWED BY GLENN JORDAN



IMAGINE A MAN guilty of the most heinous crime. Imagine also this man walking away naked from his crime, remorseful over the depths to which he had sunk, leaving his blood-soaked clothing behind, and changing his name and his life. Changing it so completely that when we meet him in the opening chapter of the book he is almost the perfect man. So perfect, in fact, that female friends who have read the book thought it unlikely and were suspicious from the outset. The men were more willing to give the benefit of the doubt.

Ethan Ford is a craftsman, working patiently with care and attention; a local hero in the volunteer fire department; adored by his young son, loved by his wife and faithful to her. Loyal to his friends and receiving that same loyalty in return.

But he has a dark secret hidden for 13 years, one that author Alice Hoffman reveals in a brutal, violent way, in severe contrast to the opening chapter. After it Ford, or Byron Bell, his given name, is described as “the sort of man who could compartmentalise the different sections of his mind.” That same night he seeks to walk away from the compartment which held all that was selfish and cruel and evil. Would that it were so easy.

The world of small town Monroe is turned upside down when his crime is uncovered.

As the story unfolds we observe the reactions of those around him as they come to terms with the secret life of Ethan Ford and the man they have known for 13 years. Who is my Father? Who is my husband? Who is my friend, and consequently, for many of the characters, who am I?

Obviously it is his wife Jorie who struggles most deeply. We are left with the intriguing possibility that there may be circumstances in which remorse for past crimes leads to a transformation of behaviour so dramatic that when confession is made, reconciliation is actually impossible. Or maybe for Jorie it is the fact that to extend him forgiveness for withholding the awful truth of violence in his past, she must also come to terms with something unpalatable in her own character.

In the end, Hoffman doesn't quite draw the characters sufficiently to accurately ascribe motive for their eventual actions. This is particularly true for the men in the story, notably Collie Ford, the son of Ethan and Jorie, and Ethan's best friend Mark Derry. Nevertheless, the dilemma is a real one and quite fascinating and one which led to differing conclusions between male and female friends who have also read the book.

Just how easy is it to walk away from the past?

What is the role of the criminal justice system in dealing with crimes of another era, particularly if behaviour has changed in the interim? Is confession always good for reconciliation? Is changed behaviour sufficient evidence of a change in character? Is reconciliation possible without justice?

Blue Diary is certainly not the best book ever written but its subject is intriguing even if the conclusions are quite bleak. As one friend pointed out, the title page of the book quotes Psalm 115:16 and the last sentence speaks of a heaven that is “so far above us we can never hope to reach such heights.” We could conclude that all relationships function best with a sprinkling of untruth, the revelation of which would be sufficient to bring them all crashing down. But should we be content with that situation? Are honest, truthful relationships really beyond our grasp?

GLENN JORDAN is Director of Care and Training Services at East Belfast Mission and is a member of the ECONI Board.

BLUE DIARY,
Alice Hoffman

Published by
Vintage, 2002.

Price £6.99

poetry

As part of the Summer School programme we were keen to include opportunities for more reflective moments and the introduction of a number of arts workshops 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.

Here is a sample:

Stuck in a Lift

Stuck in a lift
With the dead and the living;
As an icebreaker
Whom would I choose?

I love Thomas Russell
Who walked 70 miles for a woman;
And ranged over our mountains
Like a wild Red Indian.

America's War of Independence
And France's Revolution
Set him on fire.

The Phoenix became ashes at Downpatrick Jail
In eighteen hundred and three.

Gerry breaks into my lift
And proclaims the Republic;

The Irish Church marches
To the Orange tune;
The rosary is said at the graves of his heroes,
And we have fought each other to a stand still.

"We are extending the hand of friendship," says Gerry
and the lift doors open 'midst the swoosh of wings.

MARY HAMILTON

Note: Thomas Russell wrote in his diary for Tuesday 7th May, 1793, "Set out on foot by the way of Tempo. Over the mountains. The way lonely and wild which I like. When in these sort of places I feel so tranquil that I almost doubt whether man was formed for society. If I was confined in it for any time I should soon alter my opinion. Yet I think the woods of America with a family would afford me the most pleasure."

The Twelfth, 2003.

Men.

Later, as the sun set,
A caged peacock,
In impotent rage,
Shook his fanned tail
In the gravel.

ANON

In Praise of Dancing

I praise the dance, for it frees people
from the heaviness of matter and binds
the isolated to community.
I praise the dance, which demands everything:
health and a clear spirit and a buoyant soul.
Dance is a transformation of space, of time, of people,
who are in constant danger of becoming all brain,
will, or feeling.
Dancing demands a whole person, one who is
firmly anchored in the centre of his life, who is
not obsessed by lust for people and things
and the demon of isolation in his own ego.
Dancing demands a freed person, one who vibrates
with the balance of all his powers.
I praise the dance.
O man, learn to dance, or else the angels in heaven
will not know what to do with you.

St. Augustine

PAUL HUTCHINSON

For God & His Glory Alone

biblical principles

Study 6 TRUTH

“Jesus answered, ‘I am... the Truth...’”

Ps 25:4f; 26:3;
43:3; 51:6; 119
Pr 23:23
Zc 8:16
Mt 22:16
Jn 1:14, 17;
4:23; 8:32;
14:6, 16f;
16:13; 17:17
Eph 4:15, 25; 6:14
Phil 4:8
2 Tim 2:15
1 Jn 3:18-20

COMMITTED TO BIBLICAL FAITH, we must constantly discern and apply the truth of Scripture to our lives and our community. This involves commitment to biblical truth not only in word, but also in action and attitude. Biblical truth manifests itself in the fruits of the Spirit in character and not in doctrine alone. Jesus, in all his being, is Truth.

There is no place for bigotry, prejudice or hatred: we must recognise good and truth where they exist in other traditions. Sectarianism arises when we make an absolute identification between our formulations of the truth and the Truth, and then only accept others as Christians if they accept our formulations. Often it is those of us who claim to be evangelicals who have displayed such un-Christlike attitudes.

We must have the humility to see that the Truth of the Gospel is far greater than any of our formulations, because at present we see through a glass darkly, not yet face to face. This does not mean that we consider creeds and confessions unimportant, nor that we condone any doctrines that we regard as false. As those who are zealous for Truth, we consider such formulations not as ends in themselves but as means of perceiving ‘The Truth’ in Christ.

In the light of John 4:9 it is significant that Jesus takes time with the woman of Samaria, uses Samaritans to illustrate correct moral attitudes (Lk 10:25-37; 17:11-19) and strongly rebukes James and John in Luke 9:51-56. If Jesus will not accept the popular stereotypes of his day, surely evangelicals must challenge the stereotyped image, myths and half-truths of our own day.

Try to identify the types of images that Protestants have of Catholics and vice versa. How would Jesus deal with such ideas? (This kind of exercise is best accomplished by people of different traditions coming together and explaining sensitively how they think about each other, rather than as an exercise in speculating out of ignorance.)





Study 7

SERVANTHOOD

“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:
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...”

Is 42:1-4;
52:13-53:12
Zc 3:8-10
Mt 20:25-28
Mk 10:45
Lk 9:51-55
Jn 13:1-17
Rom 15:17f;
16:17f
1 Cor 9:19-23
2 Cor 4:5; 8:9
Phil 2:5 - 11

AT THE HEART of our understanding of Jesus is the concept and attitude of the servant. The community of His followers consists of those who serve, instead of rule, who suffer instead of inflict suffering; those whose fellowship crosses boundaries, instead of reinforcing them.

Living like this involves the setting aside of status and power, and the giving of ourselves in sacrificial love. The towel (which Jesus used in washing His disciples' feet) and not the sword, is our symbol of service. By loving in this way we take up our cross and follow Him.

To serve others is to desire to understand, with compassion, their anxieties and to place their needs before our own. We confess that often we have celebrated our cultural and political traditions, such as the anniversary of events both recent and ancient, in a triumphalistic manner. This is inconsistent with the mind of Christ, the Servant-King.

Our commitment to a particular political ideology may be for self-centred reasons, such as economic or social advantage; without consideration of the hurts, anxieties and needs of the rest of this divided society. Such a commitment would be a denial of the way of Christ.

Read John 13:1-17. Notice the basis for Jesus' confidence which enables Him to carry out a menial and demanding task in front of His disciples (v3 & 4). Is it true that we celebrate anniversaries in a “triumphalistic manner”? Is the inability to humble ourselves before others a sign that we lack the strength and security of Jesus? How can we learn to live like Him?

Was Paul misguided in becoming “all things to all men”, “a slave to everyone” for the sake of the gospel (1 Cor 9:19-23)? If not, how ought we to follow his example (Phil 3:17)?

transformation 2003

ECONI Summer School at Greenmount

A CENTRAL EVENT in ECONI's overall programme, Summer School offers a four day experience providing opportunities for learning, reflection and personal growth and continues to be a significant event in people's lives. This year we returned to the beautiful surroundings of Greenmount College in Antrim. Peter Martin from Youth For Christ joined us to co-facilitate the 'Back to the Future' strand with Lynda Gould. We are also grateful to John Dickinson, minister of Carnmoney Presbyterian Church, for leading us in Bible study on three mornings.

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 and beyond. Workshops in art, poetry and batik-making gave creative expression to the many experiences absorbed during the course of the weekend. Artist Gillian Cooke and poet Paul Hutchinson each accompanied a strand field trip on the 12th July and gave their own expression to their experiences and reflections on the day. (See Paul's poem on the trip to Nendrum on page 25.)

TRANSFORMATION truly is an experience that can alter your life. Plan to join us in 2004.

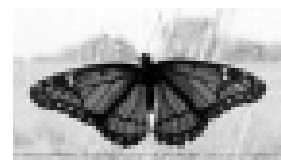


"I came to the Summer School as a southern Irish evangelical who has lived for several years in Northern Ireland, though only recently in an almost totally Protestant context. I have long given up ever trying to do more than 'mind understand' this culture, my gut will always be different. At times I am profoundly uncomfortable with what are often valid expressions of community. How can I best live with this tension? What are the issues which I as an 'outsider' can validly question and challenge? I find it hard to 'leave well alone'. I came hoping that this would be a place where I could ask and discuss.

Over the Summer School, there has been a host of experiences, from meeting other participants to the 'bonfire' and the Twelfth parade, from discussions to quiet prayer. Different parts have touched different people in unexpected ways. Perhaps the most important experience for me is that I haven't had to hide my own cultural identity and could voice some of my deepest frustrations with the intertwining of faith and particular cultural identities in this province. I can understand how they have come about, but it can be difficult when your cultural/faith mix is unusual! We were a very mixed bunch and I learned a lot from other participants about where they were coming from as well.

One of the images reflecting the theme of transformation in the Summer School was that of the butterfly. There are several stages in becoming a butterfly – first the egg hatches and the caterpillar eats all around. Then it becomes a cocoon, a safe place of change. When it emerges, it sits in the sun to dry out its wings and then it flies off. For me Summer School has probably been a time of sitting in the sun, a chance to reflect on the eating and the changing, hopefully a precursor to being more effective in what I am called to be. Only time will tell."

Strand 1 participant.





STRAND 1:

BACK TO THE FUTURE

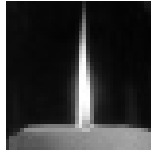
Lynda Gould & Peter Martin

THE TIMING of the Summer School is geared towards creating a focus for this strand, using the annual 'Demonstration' of 12th July as a window on Orangeism and Protestantism. 'Back to the Future' offers participants a unique opportunity to engage with Protestant identity as it is being defined in Northern Ireland in 2003.

The journey is largely experiential with some inputs from guest speakers. A visit to Fernhill House in Glencairn tells the story of the Shankill Road and its people, reflecting on industry, sport, the Royal family and the way of life experienced in the 20th Century. The museum's extensive galleries explore the signing of the Ulster Covenant in 1912, the Orange Order and the involvement of people from the Shankill in the Armed Forces, past and present.

The museum holds the key components of a Protestantism that is being defined outside of a religious identity. It is interesting that there are only 2 or 3 references to the role of church shaping life on the 'Road' in all the exhibits - surprising given how many churches there actually are on the Shankill Road. Viewing the wall murals on the lower Shankill, we again saw how these have been used to tell the story of a community. There were fewer murals this year as some have been removed because of the feuding between paramilitaries. This set the scene for the bonfire, the Parade and the 'Field' which have to be experienced to be understood. Something different happens as you walk beside those who own this day as the highlight of their year.

For many participants it was a valued opportunity to re-engage with aspects of their own identity that they had suppressed and to some degree denied. What does it mean to be Protestant in 2003? The emerging identity, devoid of a religious core, challenges evangelicals to consider what this means for the faith community as it tries to reconnect with a community no longer interested in religion.



STRAND 2:

A SPIRITUALITY FOR SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

Derek Poole & Glenn Jordan

A NEED to cultivate a deeper spiritual life to sustain a long-term commitment to their work is expressed time and again in our conversations with people involved in peace and reconciliation work. This year thirteen participants took time out of their busy lives to look at what kind of spiritual vision and practice is needed if Christians are to prophetically engage with the problems of a divided community. Through a series of interactive workshops, reflective studies and group discussions we sought to define the nature of biblical spirituality and how the disciplines and practices of our faith tradition inform our commitment to peace, justice and reconciliation. During our four days together we considered many pertinent questions, including:

What responsibilities do Christians have for the transformation of society? What is a biblical spirituality and how does this influence our social concerns? What kind of spirituality is needed for meaningful social engagement? What kind of vision and practice will sustain a long-term commitment to social change? How do the spiritual practices of prayer, meditation and biblical reflection nurture social compassion?

A day field trip to Nendrum and Saul in Co Down created an opportunity for participants to discuss the legacy of the Celtic Church. The challenge was to consider the spirituality and mission of this tradition to see if there are insights and experiences that might inform a contemporary spirituality for social engagement.

Comments from participants in Strand 2:

"The spiritual disciplines taught were life changing; I got out of this strand far more than I ever would have expected."

"The week was outstanding; I was grateful to get a chance to spend time in a community where there were no rigid expectations; it was encouraging and challenging to have been gently pushed into trying new things."

"I knew in theory that my personal relationship with God needs to be connected to a wider commitment to Christian mission. I have been greatly helped to see the connection between spirituality and concern for reconciliation, evangelism and social justice."



STRAND 3:

KILLING FOR GOD

Alwyn Thomson & Helen Smith

ELEVEN PEOPLE opted to participate in the new strand 'Killing for God'. They spoke with a variety of accents, belonged to different age groups - and hailed from the outer regions of this country and others. We were going to look at different areas of conflict in the world where killing and religious fervour were both present - the task ahead of us was huge: to try to deal with Northern Ireland, North America and the Middle East in four days is some undertaking.

The content of this strand meant that most of its subject matter was provided in the form of a series of comprehensive talks by Alwyn, supported through handouts and followed by group discussion. Quotations and pictures accompanying each talk were posted around the room to stimulate questions and issues for participants to consider at the beginning of each session. Given the volume of new information there was to absorb people were perhaps still a little shell-shocked as we moved into discussion.

However, participants came away stimulated to read more and become better informed, some even changed their thinking about some of the issues raised.

On the twelfth we went to see a parade typical of a more rural setting at Rasharkin where the intermingling of religious imagery with cultural heritage is still strongly evident.

Comments from participants in Strand 3:

"This challenged my perceptions and was very informative."

"Informative, challenging, disturbing."

“Dreams & Visions”

Fifteen years on from the first publication of *For God and His Glory Alone*, those ten biblical principles for living for God's glory in a divided society are being revisited in a new ECONI resource to be launched this autumn. *Dreams & Visions* takes a fresh look at the ten themes: love, forgiveness, reconciliation, peace, citizenship, truth, servanthood, justice & righteousness, hope and repentance. Each theme is explored through reflection and Bible study, with additional material for leaders in the form of prayers and talk outlines.

This new resource is suitable for use with a wide variety of groups, large and small, and will not only challenge communities in their thinking, but also in putting their faith into action.

Dreams & Visions will be available in October 2003.

ECONI Sunday

“Living for God's Glory in a Divided World” is the theme of ECONI Sunday for 2003, which this year falls on Sunday 2nd November. ECONI Sunday is an opportunity for churches to devote time in prayer and reflection on issues of peace and reconciliation supported by materials produced by ECONI. These resources can of course be used on other occasions and contexts other than the Sunday service. This year's theme will draw from the biblical material in *Dreams and Visions*, ECONI's latest resource publication which covers a range of 10 biblical themes and includes Bible study questions, talk outlines, prayers and suggestions for worship. The resource will be provided to all those registering for ECONI Sunday along with prayer cards for the congregation. The cost of registration is £15.

Several ECONI staff team and members are available to speak at ECONI Sunday services. Please contact Claire Martin on 028 9032 5258 or email claire@econiconi.org for further details.

ECONI Conference 2003

Reconciliation, Illusion or Elusive?
Saturday 25th October, Stranmillis College, Belfast.

The theme for the tenth annual ECONI Conference is Reconciliation. Despite its common currency in international relations, local politics and church initiatives, reconciliation remains the elusive and frequently illusory dream of human relationships. Rooted in biblical reflection, the conference will explore the challenges, opportunities and resources that reconciliation brings to a church seeking to be faithful in a world of change and conflict.

Reconciliation is an essential part of the church's vocation, as the Apostle Paul proclaims, God was in Christ reconciling the world and has in turn given us the ministry of reconciliation.

Keynote speakers are Richard Baukham, Professor of New Testament at St. Andrew's University and Paul Arthur, Professor of Politics at the University of Ulster and Course Director of the Master's Programme in Peace and Conflict Studies.

Seminars will be led by David Stevens, Cecelia Clegg, Alwyn Thomson, David Porter, Derek Poole & Lynda Gould, Maria Garvey.

The cost of the conference is £28. This includes conference fees, materials, lunch and coffee. Please return the enclosed booking form by 20th October. Recordings of the keynote addresses will be made available.

Christian Peace Building

ECONI's Programme for Christian Peace Building headed up by Derek Poole offers a comprehensive series of events designed to help local churches, community groups and both lay and ordained leaders engage with the issues of peace, justice and reconciliation.

Based on a biblical analysis of human conflict our work is primarily concerned with the task of Christian peacebuilding. This involves helping churches and local groups understand the nature of sectarianism, the historical causes of conflict and the cultural and political hostility that keeps us a divided society. It also means building a new vision for the future: our workshops and training days offer a range of life-affirming studies, skills and interactive experiences to help congregations creatively work for a just and peaceful society.

Recent examples of our practical engagement with local situations include: Journey in Understanding series with Lurgan Inter-church Group; a comprehensive programme exploring the nature of Christian vocation and peacebuilding in the Restoration Inter-church series (Dunmurry); a Protestant/Catholic Encounter series with Ballygilbert Presbyterian Church (Bangor) and St. Agnes' Roman Catholic Church (Andersonstown); and a fulfilling Lenten series on the gospel imperative of peace and reconciliation with three South Belfast Churches: St. Nicholas' Church of Ireland, Windsor Presbyterian Church and Lisburn Road Methodist Church.

The team has been involved in over 70 similar events this year including: church services, community groups, church-based peace and reconciliation groups, universities, colleges and schools, women's groups, youth events, church conferences and weekends, facilitation and consultation work.

New ECONI Resource: Dreams & Visions/ ECONI Sunday / Conference 2003: Reconciliation: Illusion or Elusive?/ Derek Poole.



Clergy and Lay Events

We continue to be actively involved with local clergy and lay leaders. In the past few months we have facilitated a variety of training programmes in Kilkeel, Carrickfergus, North Belfast, Comber, Londonderry, Ballymena, Ballymoney and Omagh. In addition to practical workshops and training we provide leadership with relevant, high quality resources including Bible study material, sermon notes, action packs and *Lion & Lamb* magazine.

We aim to cover a wide range of issues pertinent to Northern Ireland. Recent courses have included:

A Christian Vision for Social Transformation:

a one day training event.

Christian Ministry in a Divided Society:

a series of three all-day clergy seminars.

Pastoring People Through Times of Change:

a workshop for leaders.

Embodying Forgiveness:

workshop based on ECONI's Forgiveness Papers.

Loyalism: The Shadow Side of Protestantism?

interactive workshop.

Understanding the Dynamics of Change:

a series of three training days.

Managing Conflict for Creative Outcomes:

a module of three workshops.

If you would like to know more about the Programme for Christian Peace Building and how the team might work with you, please contact Derek Poole on 028 9032 5258 or via email: derek@econiconi.org

Transforming Communities

Transforming Communities, the programme of ECONI's Learning Team, is committed to helping Christians provide places of reconciliation, healing and vision through biblical reflection and learning. Enclosed in this edition of *Lion & Lamb* is a brochure outlining the range of courses currently on offer, including: Difficult Paths; Women in Church and Community; Long Night's Journey Into Day; Journey in Understanding; and Bridge Builders. All *Transforming Communities* programmes, events and modules can be tailored for your group, congregation or organisation.

Further information is available from Lynda Gould or Helen Smith on 028 9032 5258.

Catherwood Lecture

The annual Catherwood Lecture is moving from its autumn slot. The lecture will take place on 8th March 2004 and will be given by Dr Os Guinness. Full details will be available closer to the time.

Amy Ornée

Amy left ECONI this month to return to America after two years as a volunteer. Amy has become such a part of the 'ECONI experience' that we cannot really imagine the coming year without her.

She has given us as much, if not more than we have been able to provide her as a volunteer. Her attention to detail, the questions she formulates in the recesses of a deeply imaginative mind, her time for people and her unique presence in our lives will be sorely missed.

Amy originally came to work with Alwyn in the Centre developing the library and resources. During her second year she became part of the Learning Team, administering and facilitating some of our courses. She was instrumental in the planning and organising of 'Through a Glass Darkly' – the conference we held in March which developed themes from Fran Porter's research and book 'Changing Women Changing Worlds'. During Summer School, Amy's touch was evident in the detail of the programme and in the relationships she developed with participants. If you were able to attend the Advent and Lenten series of reflections and Bible studies, you will have encountered her creativity and spirituality for yourself. She found ways to put 'flesh' on words and bring life to liturgies.

With Amy gone, we will be less in touch with what is going on in our city, for she found the most interesting and quirky events to attend. We will miss her and the smell of beans cooking at lunchtime, the bottles lined up at her desk for recycling, the bottomless backpack and the chopsticks. We wish her God's every blessing as she maps out a new path in the States.

Transforming Communities Programme: Lynda Gould and Helen Smith/ **Farewell to Mennonite Mission Network volunteer** Amy Ornée.



hot off the press

DREAMS & VISIONS:
LIVING FOR GOD'S GLORY IN A DIVIDED WORLD
An ECONI Resource

Price: £9.99

When ECONI first published **For God and His Glory Alone**, it was billed as “an invitation to ask God what kind of people we should be and how we should live as Christians in Northern Ireland.”

Fifteen years on, with all that has happened since and all that the future now seems to hold, our latest publication, **Dreams & Visions**, has the same aim.

It returns with freshness and insight to those original ten principles of love, forgiveness, reconciliation, peace, citizenship, truth, servanthood, justice & righteousness, hope and repentance.

These study materials, which include Bible study outlines and personal essays seasoned with perceptive reflection and prayerful response, seek to inspire Christians to live for God's glory in a divided world.

Clergy, group leaders and anyone concerned with encouraging biblical peacebuilding will find this an envisioning and practical resource.

