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# lion & lamb

**racism**

AND RELIGIOUS LIBERTY



# editorial: Minority Report.



WE RECEIVED MANY COMMENTS about the last issue of *lion&lamb* on “Church and Change,” with many readers expressing particular interest in the feature on multi-cultural churches. This issue on “Racism and Religious Liberty” is offered in response to some of that feedback. With increasing cultural and religious diversity in Northern Ireland and in the face of the escalating number of attacks on minority ethnic groups living here, how are we as Christians to respond?

In the lead article, Stephen Skuce offers an overview on racism and religious liberty in Northern Ireland, its theological underpinning and some of the lessons from history. Ken Newell suggests how Christians might challenge racism in their local communities. Walter Lewis writes from his experience of the Islamic community in South Belfast and invites us to consider ways of building relationships with our neighbours of other faiths. Richard Kerr, chair of Embrace, offers a reflection on the place of the stranger in the Bible and highlights the plight of asylum seekers and refugees in Northern Ireland.

Our main interview is with Rose Ozo, from Nigeria, who tells how she has sought to integrate with the ‘two communities’ in Northern Ireland and what it is like being on the receiving end of racism, a regular feature of her life here, over the last 22 years.

In addition to meeting Rose, this issue has taken me on visits to Dungannon, Portadown and to the Belfast Chinese Christian Church in South Belfast to meet Christians involved with minority ethnic communities and to hear their stories – also told here.

This edition of *lion&lamb* is an attempt to raise the issues and concerns affecting minority communities within our society. The content is both insightful and challenging and creates, for those of us who find ourselves part of the dominant, indigenous communities, an opportunity to see ourselves in a new light.

I believe you will find some of the material in this issue provocative. Whatever your reaction, we would like to hear from you. You can now email me directly at [lionandlamb@econl.org](mailto:lionandlamb@econl.org) or write to the postal address below.

Anna Rankin  
Editor

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# lion&lamb

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**comment:**

# Racism in Ulster: Up-front and ugly.

KEN NEWELL



SOME MONTHS AGO a friend who had just got out of hospital was reading the papers about the upsurge of racist attacks in South Belfast. He felt so angry, "It's only a matter of time, Ken," he said, "before somebody gets killed. Some of the Filipino nurses who looked after me in the Royal were the ones chased down the Donegall Road by a pack of thugs."

It was this kind of incident that led The Guardian to label Belfast "The Race-Hate Capital of Europe". Sadly, there are chilling statistics to back that up. While racial attacks in England and Wales were running at 12.6 per 1000 of the ethnic population, in Northern Ireland the figure for the same period was 16.4.

Belfast is the epicentre for such incidents, but the virus has spread to Coleraine, Ballymena, Dungannon, Cookstown and Portadown. If it hasn't yet reached where you live, it's on its way. Exploring more deeply into our psyche, Dr Monica McWilliams citing University of Ulster research concluded, "People here exhibit as much racism as they do sectarianism."

Recently, Anna Mawah Lo of the Chinese Welfare Association told me her story. "I was walking into Belfast one evening about 5.30pm when suddenly, out of the crowds on the pavement four young men appeared, walking directly towards me. They started taunting me and shouting abuse. I manoevered myself to the other side of the pavement to get past them, but within seconds one of them came up behind me and kicked me ferociously on the back of the legs. I stood there, stunned and shaken. There were lots of people around, but nobody came over to ask me how I was. These men then ran across to the other side of the road and continued to hurl abuse and laugh. Not a soul said anything to them. The general public just walked on by; they didn't even bat an eyelid."

Jamal Iweida, a Muslim from Palestine, came to study at Queen's in 1995. He writes, "When I first came here there were no problems. The majority of people were kind. Muslims have been living in Belfast for 100 years and today we are an integral part of the social, educational and economic life. In recent years we have experienced a nastier side to Northern Irish society. Today the one thing I long for is that my children can walk down the street and not be called names or have people set their dogs on them."

It would be wrong to exaggerate the overt racism in our community (read again Jamal's positive comments), but there is a silent racism just under the surface. Recently some Indian friends phoned me in distress. They had gone to live in one of our neatly-kept villages. They told me that in the previous 18 months nobody had knocked their door to welcome them to the neighbourhood. I had encouraged them to visit the local churches, naively convinced that they would receive a warm welcome. "We tried that, Ken," they said. "We visited the Presbyterian church, the Church of Ireland, the Catholic church and a few others, but nobody said hello or asked us how we were. Even the ministers were disinterested, except for one." Eventually they asked a man in a local shop why

people were distant. "I don't like to say this to your face," he replied, "but you're black and people round here don't like black people." Their final question still haunts me, "Why are church people here so cold towards my wife and me? They're our brothers and sisters, aren't they?"

How should we respond to the emerging racism around us? How should we react when a family near us is intimidated and attacked? Here are some suggestions I've been trying to work through in South Belfast.

**Refocus on the life God calls you to live in your community**

Paul pinpoints it clearly in Ephesians 5:1-2, "As God's dearly loved children, live a life of love. Christ's love was not cautious but extravagant. He didn't love in order to get something out of us, but to give everything to us – himself! Love like that." Christian faith is not rocket science. Those three L's enshrine its essence.

**Assess your emotional involvement with the issue**

Before Haleleni Karanda from Zimbabwe described the hell of racist abuse she had been put through in an estate in East Belfast, I felt emotionally detached from the problem of racism. After hearing her story of windows smashed, doors kicked in and dog's dirt shovelled in piles onto her doorstep, I changed. If 1 represents 'emotional detachment' and 10 represents 'active involvement' against racism, how would you assess yourself on a scale from 1 to 10?

**Change your lifestyle**

Become more socially inclusive. If you rarely have people from different ethnic, religious or cultural backgrounds to your home for a meal, why not adopt a different approach? Open your heart and your home. Open yourself to the suffering they have encountered here. There is nothing more powerful than your neighbours seeing you enjoy the friendship of people from different ethnic and racial backgrounds.

**Open up the issue in your church**

Compile a dossier of racial attacks in your area. Share this material with your friends in church. Present it to your minister and church leaders. Ask them to discuss it and initiate a positive response in your area. After all, racism is a serious sin. Would Jesus be passive towards racism if he lived in your neighbourhood? He does!

Racism in Ulster presents an ugly face. Do Anna Mawah Lo's observations of the people around her the day she was kicked apply to us? "They didn't even bat an eyelid."

RT REV DR KEN NEWELL is minister of Fitzroy Presbyterian Church in South Belfast and is currently the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.

# From the Director: Naming our sin.



OCCASIONALLY we experience a moment of insight, triggered by an action or comment, that stays with us for a long time. Before going to theological college, I had spent a year in Lahore, Pakistan, living as a visible minority – a white westerner – in this post-coup and increasingly militant Islamic country. On returning to the UK, my time as a student in London was bracketed by two of the defining events of the period, the Southall and Brixton riots. The confrontations between Asian protestors and National Front marchers, and between disaffected Black youths and the police brought into sharp focus the underlying race conflict in our multicultural cities.

It was during a visit home between finals and graduation that the moment occurred. Commenting on my sojourn in the capital, a former Sunday School teacher stated, “Well I suppose it’s better living in Belfast with the Catholics than in London with the Blacks and Pakis!” I regret not responding at the time, but that remark has never left me.

We deceive only ourselves if we do not recognise the profound link between our local besetting sin of sectarianism and the global injustice of racism. Anyone who knows the Northern Irish character, of whatever tradition, knows we have an immense capacity to hate those who are different and a perceived threat. And, lest we collude with the media impression that it is only Loyalists in Belfast who have this link hot-wired, the violence against ethnic minorities in the greater Dublin area shows that when our space is contested we Irish, whatever our football code, can hate like everyone else.

The church, in seeking to address society on these issues, can too easily focus merely on what takes place ‘out there’. Indeed, the perpetrators we most readily have in mind when thinking of the recent racist attacks are not usually members or regular attendees of our congregations. They probably don’t care what the church has to say.

But in raising our concerns within the church it is not enough simply to draw analytically legitimate connections between the vicious act of the attacker and the more subtle prejudices harboured in private by all in society, including Christians. This can, and does, blunt the message we all need to hear.

Creating false guilt by overstating the case, in ways that are clearly removed from the actual experience of the average Christian, soon leads to a disassociation from the problem. It certainly works this way with sectarianism. Not many people I meet in the church think they are sectarian. After all, when were they last arrested for

verbal or physical abuse at an interface? Maybe we need to learn from this and find the courage to face what is true in the pew when it comes to racism. Indeed, this is exactly what the Church of Ireland is doing in broadening the work of their sectarianism committee to focus on the Hard Gospel process of dealing with difference.

None of us can be complacent – not even the Anglicans! Naming our sin with the honesty that comes from the searching insight of the Holy Spirit and scripture doesn’t come easy in any area of life. And sin is most corrosive where we don’t even see it. The patronising, if warm, welcome for the national church leader on world mission night, where polite remarks of “Didn’t they do well?” cover our surprise that a ‘coloured’ or non-western person could be so effective a speaker. And what about a theology of ministry that, in practice, says it is all right for a woman to teach foreign men in the mission field but not men at home? Well, how else do you account for the overwhelming majority of women in overseas mission?

Never forget that the biggest barrier to your hearing the gospel of Jesus was the racial and cultural prejudice of others. Some early disciples found it hard to believe that gentiles, people from ‘*ta ethne*’, the nations, could find a place in the kingdom. At a later stage the peoples of these islands were all considered beyond the pale of civilised early Christianity.

Migration is a fact of life and a fulcrum of church growth. Three things must inform our response. Firstly, we are minority members of the global community. Many who come to work here are fleeing poverty that our trade rules help to sustain, or political oppressors that our governments supported. Secondly, as Christians in this new world order our faith is not threatened by someone else’s right to worship in our society as their conscience dictates. And

finally, in the world church we whites and westerners are the minority. Many who now join us from Africa and Asia are part of the most dynamic parts of that church and they have much to teach us.

**Never forget that the biggest barrier to your hearing the gospel of Jesus was the racial and cultural prejudice of others.**



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STEPHEN SKUCE

# faith in ulster: facing up to diversity



JUST BEFORE CHRISTMAS, beside a small church on a dusty roadside 50 miles from Hatton, Sri Lanka the evangelist told me about the threats he and the small community of new believers had received that week. It was a Friday and the worshippers had been warned that they would be attacked if they gathered the following Sunday. Sunday came, and so did the attack. This has become a regular occurrence in Sri Lanka, a rising tide of religious persecution – attacking people because they are different to the majority community.

It happened again last night. Not in Sri Lanka but a bit closer to home. There was another petrol bomb attack on Portuguese workers in my hometown, Dungannon.<sup>1</sup> Of course they aren't really Portuguese, more likely to be Brazilian or Angolan, or perhaps from East Timor, but to a section of Dungannon, and indeed Ulster, these details are irrelevant. Those attacked were different – maybe it was their skin colour, or their language, or maybe their religion. They were just different.

Ulster has recently risen to notoriety, with Belfast specifically being named as the racist capital of Europe. A quick scan of most weeks' papers shows attacks on Chinese in South Belfast, perhaps an Asian in Co Londonderry and ongoing disputes over proposals to build a mosque in Craigavon. Beyond the surface details, two main issues seem to emerge: those of racism and religious freedom.

## Racism

The Northern Ireland Protestant doesn't come out too well in the area of racism. That other communities also fare badly isn't much comfort, but here we are looking at our own general constituency. Within Northern Ireland, historically, there have been relatively few racist incidents or persecutions directed towards non-Christian communities. The sectarian divisions in Ulster made the tiny ethnic and other faith communities an irrelevance to previous generations, but the measure of peace currently being experienced has, somehow, allowed some of this sectarian aggression to become directed at these minority communities. The parallels between sectarianism and racism are obvious.

The Ulster Scots thrived in the new colonies of America in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. More than most, they learned skills from the Native Americans and used those skills to their advantage in establishing prosperous new lives. A mark of that prosperity was slave ownership, probably the clearest expression of racism. The Ulster Scots rarely owned large plantations but the possession of a couple of slaves became the mark of success.<sup>2</sup> That evangelicals were at the forefront of the abolition of slavery movement is beyond doubt, but that many evangelicals, like Thomas Chalmers, accepted financial support from slave owners is also part of the mixed history.<sup>3</sup>

The Ulster evangelical believer has been sacrificial in supporting missionary outreach across the world. Most of us financially and prayerfully support missionaries and mission organisations with enthusiasm, we still go as missionaries in significant numbers, but are we more interested in others 'over there' than when 'they' come here? The evangelical community doesn't have a good history at accommodating differences – just look at the number of different churches in any town. Perceptions of a racial difference based on skin colour, physical features or language are further ways we can categorise people as 'them' rather than 'us'. Racism is arguably the worst form of discrimination as it opposes someone for who they are rather than for what they think or believe. Most of us would strongly deny that we are racist, but do we acknowledge that we stereotype people as different? Which of us would really welcome the arrival of a Traveller community on our doorstep as an opportunity to share the gospel? Since my hometown has Methodists, Free Methodists and Independent Methodists, let's not be shocked that we allow skin colour to make a difference and that difference results in separation. This is our problem as evangelicals for whom division is part of our heritage.

Ulster evangelicals need to become increasingly vocal in opposition to racism by upholding the biblical principle of the equality of all people.

**“Ulster evangelicals need to become increasingly vocal in opposition to racism by upholding the biblical principle of the equality of all people.”**

We know that all are created in God’s image (Gen. 1:26), and that all are equal in God’s sight (Gal. 3:28). This has to be a basic understanding that undergirds how we react to others. Equality of all before God is clear. We are all the same, we are all sinners, we all need a saviour. There is no different path of salvation open to the white, Anglo Saxon (or Ulster Scots) Protestant. If God treats us all the same, why do we sometimes try to introduce manmade divisions? The Gospel doesn’t allow this. As an evangelical community we need to stand up for this gospel value.

We need to resist racism in Ulster because heaven will be a multi-racial extravaganza! Revelation 7:9 reminds us that heaven will be an experience of people from every tribe and tongue worshipping together. In heaven we will stand beside Africans, Asians, Native Americans and people of more racial backgrounds we can possibly imagine, and they will stand beside us. Every time we pray the Lord’s Prayer we call for God’s Kingdom to come. In opposing every semblance of racism we have the opportunity to be part of God’s answer to our prayer.

There is a further Christian imperative to oppose racism found in the teaching of Matthew 25:31-46 where the discussion deals with who is acceptable in God’s sight. When we allow unbiblical attitudes and actions to fester we are allowing these attitudes to be directed towards Jesus. That we may not be aware of this is no excuse (Mt. 25:44-45). The teaching of this passage is plain. We are to treat all others as if we are dealing with Jesus. There is nothing easy about this task. It goes against human nature, but then so does so much of the Christian message.

So, an Ulster Christian advocacy of the rights of others is important in its own right<sup>4</sup> but has added importance in giving us a position from which to relevantly share the good news of Jesus with these emerging ‘people groups’. We still spend significant sums of money on overseas evangelism, and as a former missionary in Sri Lanka I’m an active part of this. But perhaps we also need to look closer to home and direct more of our energy in standing up for the rights of the marginalised and the ‘other’ in Ulster. No evangelical would argue that the gospel should not be shared with all. We still support the evangelisation of Africa and Asia, and need to continue to fulfil the Great Commission there but also to do so here. By standing up for the rights of the marginalised we build relationships with communities that make the sharing of the gospel a more relevant option. Paul became all things to all people so that he could win some for Kingdom (1 Cor. 9:22-23); this must include becoming advocates for the rights of others. The Day of Pentecost (Acts 1:1-47) was about directing the gospel proclamation towards all, no matter what the differences. This we must maintain.

### **Religious Persecution**

Racist attitudes, whether acknowledged or not, can spill over in denying rights to those considered to be the ‘other’, including basic religious freedoms. Ireland’s only organised religious persecution of a non-Christian community occurred in Limerick between 1904-1906 where a Redemptorist priest, Fr John Creagh, orchestrated an economic blockade of the small Jewish community, accompanied by violence.<sup>5</sup> Ulster evangelicals can rest in the knowledge that we had nothing to do with it. Where we can’t rest is over the position of the Muslim community in Northern Ireland. Leaving aside the initial refusal by members of Ballymena Council of a gift from the local Muslim community, the dispute over the proposed building of a mosque in Craigavon is much more problematic.

The problem is over freedom of religion. As evangelicals we oppose restrictions on Christians worshipping in various countries. We were part of successful campaigns advocating religious freedom in the former Soviet Union. We petition Islamic governments over their treatment of Christian minorities and I look for every opportunity to plead the case of the increasingly persecuted Christian believers in Sri Lanka. At the time of writing an anti-conversion bill is being debated in the Sri Lankan parliament, designed to stop the freedom of Christians to evangelise. Persecution of Christians is far from just a problem in some Islamic countries. Evangelicals in parts of Buddhist Sri Lanka and Hindu India suffer every bit as much. A largely unknown persecution is of Christian converts in the Islamic Maldives. This should be considered when browsing the brochures looking for that paradise holiday destination. We were part of campaigns for freedom for Christians in East Timor, but now that some have moved to Ulster our enthusiasm has grown a little muted.

Freedom of religion – the freedom to believe and practice your religion – is a world principal enshrined in United Nations and European charters on human rights. Are we in danger of stepping beyond the bounds of what is considered acceptable in our lack of support for freedom of worship for Ulster’s Muslims? Whatever the arguments over a specific location, by not supporting Muslims rights to worship in the way they wish are we denying to them what we argue for Christians elsewhere?

Rather than world opinion, it is biblical and Reformation perspectives that carry more weight in the evangelical community. Luther argued for the freedom of the individual to believe based on Scripture rather than having beliefs forced upon him or her.<sup>6</sup> Calvin had a mixed view, at times enforcing his religious understanding on others, but sharing with Luther an understanding of two kingdoms. The believer exists in both spiritual and earthly realms at the same time. Christian conscience should not be

**“We need to be activists for biblical standards, always conscious that we are to be increasingly different from the society around us.”**

forced to comply with civic commands if they counteract Christianity. His 1536 edition of *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* had a preface arguing for religious and political freedom for Protestants in France. Thinking Biblically, we distinguish between the need for religious purity for God's people (Deut. 6:14-15) and the command to welcome others (Lev. 19: 33-34; Ex. 22:21). As Christian believers we cannot compromise what we believe to fit in with political correctness or current trends. When Daniel was expected to bend to political expediency he refused again and again (see Dan. 1:8-17; 6:1-28). His stand was personally costly but it wasn't designed to gain him popularity or help him progress in his profession. Wanting to 'fit in' just isn't a Christian characteristic. God's people have to maintain purity but also an openness towards others. Our welcome to the stranger in our own land is rooted in Israel's experience of being a stranger. How non-Christians view us is important and so we have the injunctions to gain a 'good reputation with outsiders' (1 Tim. 3:7, see also Col. 4:5; 1 Thes. 4:12). How do Ulster's Jews, Muslims and Hindus view the evangelical community?

Jesus demanded purity of worship for God's people when he cleansed the temple (Mt. 21:12-17) yet showed great tolerance to those beyond the boundaries such as Romans and Samaritans (see Jn. 4:1-26; Lk. 10:25-37; 17:11-19; Mt. 8:5-13; 22:15-22). We have a personal purity to maintain, both in doctrine and ethics, but also need to allow freedom to others. Recent laws in France and Germany forcing school students to remove any religious symbolism are part of a secularisation agenda. Restricting the freedom of others is not a biblical way to promote our own values.

We don't have to agree with a religious viewpoint to allow it to exist. Evangelicals don't agree with the beliefs of Islam. We never will. But evangelicals need to allow Muslims in Ulster the same freedoms we want for Christians in Islamic countries, Sri Lanka and elsewhere. Freedom to live, freedom to worship, freedom to share their faith with others. We treat others as we want to be treated (Mt. 22:39; Gal. 5:14; Jas. 2:8), and if we want freedom of worship for ourselves and for Christian believers in other countries, we need to support the rights of others to worship in Northern Ireland. Deuteronomy 27 contains a list of people cursed by God for sinful actions, included on this list are those who 'withhold justice from the alien' (Deut. 27:19). Inaction, as Matthew 25 reminds us, is no excuse. We cannot hide before God behind the defence that we personally were happy for others to worship in Ulster, that we weren't stopping 'them' and so surely we maintained our witness? Our failure to actively advocate the principle of freedom of religion will be our condemnation.

### Conclusion

Racism and religious discrimination mix together in strange ways in Ulster. 'Protestant' youths in south Belfast, stoning Filipino nurses on their way home from worshipping in Donegal Road Methodist Church in late 2003, exhibit a racism that unites with an Ulster loyalism that is opposed to biblical standards and basic Christianity. The end result is secular Protestants attacking freedom of religion for believing Christians. If one of those youths were to be injured he may be treated by those same nurses he attacked and visited by the minister of the church whose members he was stoning.

It is clear that elements within Ulster society are becoming more racist and seeking to oppose the religious freedom of others. Evangelicals are human and we are as capable of sinning as anyone else and some of us will share this overt racism. We are also in danger of being included in this segment of population by inaction. We need to be activists for biblical standards, always conscious that we are to be increasingly different from the society around us (Rom. 12:2). Let's stand up for the dignity of all people in Ulster and the freedom for all to live out their faith. I attend a Methodist church in Dublin where people from over 20 nations in Africa, Asia, Europe and the Americas worship together. It's a Revelation 7:9 thing, let's live it out.

### NOTES

- 1 7 June 2004. Dungannon is now over 10% Portuguese speaking.
- 2 See Rolston, B. & Shannon, M., *Encounters: How Racism Came to Ireland*, (Belfast: Beyond the Pale, 2002), pp. 35-38.
- 3 Rolston, B. & Shannon, M., *Encounters*, pp. 80-81.
- 4 See Presbyterian Church in Ireland, Race Relations Committee, Report to Assembly 2003 entitled 'Policy on Asylum Seekers and Refugees' available at [www.presbyterianireland.org/index.html](http://www.presbyterianireland.org/index.html).
- 5 See Keogh, D., *Jews in Twentieth Century Ireland*, Cork: Cork University Press, 1998
- 6 See Martin Luther, *On the Freedom of a Christian* (1520).

STEPHEN SKUCE is Methodist minister working as a chaplain in University College Dublin, lecturing part-time at the Irish Bible Institute and Queen's University Belfast. He has served in Methodist circuits in Ireland and as a mission partner in Sri Lanka.

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For a detailed analysis of Northern Ireland's ethnic minorities from the Office of the First Minister see:  
[www.research.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/raceandracism/section3.htm](http://www.research.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/raceandracism/section3.htm)

  
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# faith and practice



Canon Walter Lewis, members of the Select Vestry of St Thomas, the Imam and representatives of the Muslim Community in Belfast.

FOR 1500 YEARS, through the missionary work of St Patrick, Christianity has been the religion of the great majority of people on the island of Ireland. A consequence is that today we do not have an appreciation of the existence of other religions such as Judaism, Islam and Hinduism. Sadly, we know a great deal about the heritage of hatred and animosity between Roman Catholics and Protestants, but little about the people of other faiths, and how we should relate to them.

Northern Ireland society is changing. The largest ethnic group, with some 10,000 members, is the Chinese community. Since the 1960s, because of the media focus on the bombings and killings in Northern Ireland, the Chinese and other ethnic minority groups have been almost 'invisible'. However, the decline of violence since the early 1990s has resulted in an emerging higher profile for the Chinese and other minority ethnic and religious groups here.

New people have been attracted to Northern Ireland from other races and faiths. In the course of my work, I visit hospitals and nursing homes regularly, where one of the greatest changes in the last five years is the presence of male and female nurses from the Philippines, India, South Africa, and Zimbabwe. With the enlargement of the European Union, people from many more countries will come to work and settle here. Northern Ireland is becoming increasingly multi-ethnic and multi-faith.

We should welcome the newcomer. For centuries people

have emigrated from Ireland to the American colonies, Australia, New Zealand, and many countries around the globe. There they have settled, been accepted, and made their new homes and reared their families. We should not begrudge similar opportunities to those who choose to come to live and work in Northern Ireland.

Yet, immigration has resulted in increased hostility and verbal and physical attacks on people because of their race or religion. This has accelerated since 9/11 particularly, with attacks on the Muslim community. For example, last year the small Muslim community of 200 in Craigavon was refused planning permission to build a mosque. Eventually, permission was given but, by that time, eight Muslim families were intimidated and had to leave their homes. The Muslims decided not to build out of fear for the safety of their families and businesses. A few weeks ago, the homes of Nigerian men and a Bangladeshi family were attacked in South Belfast. All this is part of an ongoing pattern of violence against members of the ethnic minorities.

In our democratic society, there are legal safeguards for the protection of people who are being victimised in this way. Obviously, those measures are inadequate. Dr Jamal Iweda, President of the Belfast Islamic Council, says, "It is a small minority who do these things. The authorities and leaders should do more to tackle the problem". He said, awareness of the issue should be raised among clergy, politicians,

## “As Christians today, we are in the business of showing God’s love to all people without distinction.”

journalists, media people, teachers and community workers. “There should be a strategy to tackle racism”. Here, Dr Iweda is calling for more concerted action on a broad front by statutory and voluntary bodies who can make a difference.

The Churches have a duty to do a number of things:

- to extend welcome to the stranger and newcomer
- to recognise every human being as created in the likeness of God, regardless of race, class or creed
- to foster tolerance and promote understanding between people who are different.

In this regard, we need to bear in mind that Jesus transformed the lives of people by showing them beyond question that they were deeply loved by God. As Christians today, we are in the business of showing God’s love to all people without distinction. That means Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, agnostics, atheists, etc, as well as our fellow Christians!

The truth of God’s indestructible love for each person – which is at the heart of the Christian faith – is our guide in charting a way forward in our emerging multi-ethnic and multi-faith society in Northern Ireland. As we serve Jesus and seek to reflect God’s love we should have no fear. We remember that Jesus constantly included in God’s embrace people who were different – the Roman Centurion, the woman from Tyre, the ten lepers, the demon-possessed man, the soldiers who nailed him to the cross. It is interesting that those who assumed Jesus was the same as them – the Jewish leaders – were the ones who were most hostile to him. They were unable to accommodate the immense reach of God’s love which Jesus showed.

Applied to Northern Ireland today, the Christian churches should be to the forefront in challenging racial and religious hatred in all its forms, and in seeking to protect vulnerable people. We should be the voice of the voiceless, the defender of the weak, the advocate of the marginalized. We should also be trying to understand our neighbours who are different.

In my own Parish in South Belfast, we have had good relations for some years with the neighbouring Islamic mosque. Earlier this year, that contact was formalised in a meeting between St Thomas’ Select Vestry and the Belfast Islamic Council, when we shared information about the core doctrines and practices of Islam and of the Anglican tradition in Christianity. The time together was very much about meeting, getting to know each other, finding out about each other’s

religious beliefs and practices, sharing food together, and enjoying one another’s company. It was a most worthwhile event. Since then there has been ongoing contact.

In general terms, it is clear that there can and should be Christian-Muslim co-operation and common action on practical issues like combating anti-social behaviour and crime, environmental preservation, and care of the needy. Here in Belfast, the Islamic community is also very open to, and welcomes, religious exchange and dialogue, and the opportunity to meet members of the Christian Churches. They say that this is consistent with the Islamic teaching on the right attitude to others: “None of you is a believer as long as he does not wish his brother what he wishes himself” (Forty Hadith of an-Nawawi 13). There is much scope today for contact, engagement and dialogue between Christians and Muslims in Northern Ireland. This openness should be welcomed by the Christian Churches.

Society in Northern Ireland is changing, and will change further in the future as mobility between countries becomes easier, as national boundaries reduce in significance, and as ‘the global village’ increasingly becomes the reality. Such changes are forcing us to alter our mindset of how we view people of other countries and religions. Amid those changes, our Christian faith is our sure guide: we will seek to love God ...and to love our neighbour as ourselves.



CANON WALTER LEWIS is Rector of St Thomas’ Parish Church, Belfast.



In many ways Rose Ozo has successfully integrated with 'both communities' in Northern Ireland. Here she describes in vivid terms what it is like being on the receiving end of racism, a regular feature of her life here over the past 22 years, about which she has seldom spoken publicly. Rose describes her decision to give this interview as 'coming out'.

Rose Ozo is from Nigeria and has lived in Belfast for 22 years. She and her husband first came to Northern Ireland in 1982 to do postgraduate studies in Queens, in the fields of Education and Medicine, respectively. Her husband, Oni, is a pathologist in the Antrim Hospital and they have two sons aged 18 and 20. Some years ago Rose became a volunteer member of the Prayer Ministry Team at Restoration Ministries and is now full-time secretary there.

# WHERE THE HEART IS

## **What was it like for you leaving Nigeria and coming to Northern Ireland? How did your family react?**

I always say, flippantly most of the time, “I was young and in love” and I thought I was going for my honeymoon because I had just got married. I was only going for three years, you see. My family were happy for me and yet, being the youngest girl, I’m sure it was very difficult for them to let me go.

What I miss most is the extended family system that we take for granted in Nigeria. Most of the time here I was on my own with the children so I had to be mother, father, grandparents, aunts. My children missed out on that big family experience and on so many family occasions, being here. I have two sisters and three brothers. It is very hard.

I still feel lonely. Especially at Christmas. You wouldn’t like to see my phone bills – they are unbelievable! Thank God for mobile phones and texts. It’s been a very lonely road but in the last two years at least I have been home two times and my family have come to visit me as well.

I would love to go back tomorrow. I come from a very close-knit family. But I don’t know where home is anymore because of my husband and my children and what they are involved in here. My husband is very much settled here with his work. He is very academic and loves the challenge of the research and the opportunities he has here in Northern Ireland. They would be limited in Nigeria for the type of medicine he is practicing. He is a pathologist. He does biopsies, post-mortems, reporting, screening for breast cancer, that kind of thing.

My children have spent most of their lives here – they call themselves the ‘Irish Nigerians.’ If you hear their accents you know that they are definitely Northern Irish.

## **Apart from missing your family, what other difficulties have you had to face?**

We came here as students and had no plans to stay permanently – we just got an extension on our visitor’s visas every time. We lived for nine-and-a-half years in Northern Ireland, then went to New Zealand for 2 years. When my husband got a job in Saudi Arabia, I decided to come back to Northern Ireland with my sons so that they could continue on with their education – we had become part of the community here. I went to extend my visa and that was the beginning of a lot of problems with immigration. If I had asked for permanent residency after five years I would have got it automatically but I didn’t know that, I just did the six-monthly thing.

I had a terrible, terrible time for about two years with immigration. I remember vividly an incident where I went to the immigration office with my husband and I was explaining to the man that I needed to extend my visa. The official said to me, “It is the likes of you we want out of this country.” I said “Why? I have been here for nine years before we left and I have a house here and I have two children who were born here.”

He said, “You had no right buying a house in Northern Ireland, we want you out.” I have never been so humiliated, so degraded, in my life. It was painful. I said to the man, “What do I do with my children?” He said, “Just leave them and go, get out.” My husband said nothing so we got up and left, just left. I felt so sorry for my husband. So we went out and we had to get in touch with solicitors in London.

By that time I didn’t even realise that I was already in trouble. They

# WHERE THE HEART IS

were about to deport me and I didn't even know that! The solicitor that I had sent my papers to in London mishandled the whole thing.

My elder son is a British citizen. Between 1982 and 1985 the law changed so the younger one wasn't at that stage but he was an Irish citizen. I was paying for my children's school fees, I was paying my way. I never received one penny from anybody. This immigration officer believed I should leave my children and get out of the country. I put the older one into Methody so at least he would have that stability in his life. I thought if they are going to force me out, then I can take the younger one and go.

The church, parish priest and my friends just rallied round me. Sometimes, when I think about it I get really, really overwhelmed with the love and friendship I received. Until you are in trouble you don't really know how people value you. A friend of mine just went to the parish priest and said, "We cannot let Rose leave this country." He got in touch with the MP, Mr Joe Hendron who put my case across. I found out that the best thing was for my husband to come back to Northern Ireland. If he got a job here, it would be fine and then I could stay on his visa.

Having gone through that experience, the love and friendship and the support I received was quite revealing for me. I knew then that I had been accepted as one of them. It was a terrible experience but it was a blessing, a blessing and I salute the people of St Peter's parish.

## **Has the church always had a central place in your life?**

I am from the Igboe tribe, from the eastern part of Nigeria and we have strong connections with the Irish missionaries. My area was the first place they came to. It is just a matter of accident that the Irish missionaries came to the eastern part of Nigeria while the British missionaries went to the western part. Most of the west would be Anglican and most of the east would be Catholic. So it is not a matter of choosing what denomination you are. That was how it happened.

My great, great uncle – I can't remember it is so far back – was the first tribal or traditional chief to accept baptism from the Irish missionaries. Once he did that they were able to convince other tribes that they could accept baptism. So the Catholic Church is rooted in my area. The blessed Tansi, a Cistercian monk who was made a saint last year, comes from my hometown.

My father was one of the first teachers trained by the Irish missionaries – he was a headmaster for 25 years – and I was taught by Irish missionaries since nursery school.

## **How does church life in Nigeria compare to church here?**

I can never forget the first service I went to when I came – it lasted fifteen minutes. I thought, is this a joke or what? I was just warming up! If you attend Mass in Nigeria it will be at least one hour. I think it is to do with the cultural differences. We are

musical people; we have a freedom to dance if we want to dance, to express exactly how we are feeling. I find in the church here people don't sing. In Nigeria everybody sings. That would be one of the biggest differences. One of the things that I miss is the sense of celebration. I think it is amazing how people can be celebrating standing still, their faces not moving, you know what I mean? I am so happy, so very happy – you can't see it on their faces – I express the happiness on my face.

I think part of the problem is that in the western world people have very comfortable lives. You have water, you have light, you have social services. People in Nigeria or in what are called developing countries are not materially very comfortable but they rely solely on God – totally on God – so spirituality is for real.

Church has a different meaning or definition in Nigeria and it has a different outlook. If you are travelling by transport bus or coach and different people have boarded the bus – you don't know who is there and what denomination or what religion they are – once the driver starts the engine somebody says, "If nobody is going to start praying, I will pray!" And they pray for a safe journey, and when they get to the other end they thank God for a safe journey. When you witness that you say "That's church!" realising that you have all the denominations in that place, and Muslims as well, and they will all be part of this praying because they all believe in one God.

## **You lived through some of the worst of 'the Troubles'. How have you experienced the sectarian divisions here?**

I found it difficult to readjust because I had been away from 'the Troubles'. We came back in 1992 when the boys were about eight-and-a-half and six. Until you step out of this situation you don't realise what you have been living through. Although in some ways we were protected from that because we always lived around the University area, I am sure everyone is affected in one way or the other.

People try so hard to put you in a box – you have to be on one side or the other. This is the first time I have really come out and said, "I am a Catholic." In that regard, being black or being African actually does help because you don't fit in.

Somebody said to me, "Rose, ok we've established you are black, but are you catholic or protestant?" Somebody really asked me that – or rather, what they actually said was, "What foot do you kick with?" I had never heard that before! I was born a Catholic I married into a Protestant family in Nigeria, part of my family is Catholic and part is Protestant. So I kick with both. I describe myself as someone struggling to be Christian. I can easily worship in any church which professes Christ.

## **Have you found it easy to integrate in Northern Ireland?**

I made a conscious decision to be part of the community. I got

“I don’t want to offend anyone, but I want to say, ‘This is what it is like being a black woman in Northern Ireland.’”



into different organisations in the church and that helped a lot. You get to know people when you meet with them in little groups and they get to know you. But it is very difficult to get into these groups. Northern Ireland is a very small place and they all know each other – everyday I find there are more connections. You have to virtually go out of your way to make friends. If they have each other either through marriage or from school they don’t bother with an outsider coming in. Not that they are doing it consciously, but they have been together as a group so they don’t realise that if you are an outsider you need to get into these little groups. Once they get to know you they accept you for who you are and that makes it very easy.

I would say it was easier for the children. Children socialise and integrate easily. Mine are 20 and 18 and they still remain friends with the people they went to nursery school with.

I have also found this to be true in Church. I have to be careful here, it is not a criticism it is just a statement of fact from my observation, but if I would come into the church everyday and leave nobody would speak to me. I don’t know if this is because the Irish people tend to be very reserved, or they don’t know how to approach a stranger.

I had decided right from the beginning that I wasn’t going to be part of the sub-culture of ‘ethnic minority’ – I wanted to be part of the community. I wanted to belong to the two divided communities in Northern Ireland and I think we have managed to do that as a family.

**Did you as a family deliberate seek to build relationships within both communities?**

Yes, where we lived, through the school my children attended – Methodist College is like a United Nations. In Methody you

wouldn’t feel you were different because there are so many ‘different’ people there and they are not really in a minority. I wanted them to experience a microcosm of the world.

But I do have a painful story to tell. My sons are very involved in rugby and my older boy is very good. In his final year he was part of the team who played in the Schools’ Cup at Ravenhill. I think he scored the most tries in that tournament.

I didn’t realise how big rugby is here. I think it is a very rough game! But I always told them to get into sports because I think that is another way of integrating into the community. My children played everything from Gaelic football to tennis, rugby, soccer and athletics. They got to meet people from different backgrounds through all the sports.

I was at the Schools’ Cup final with my husband and friends. During the match we heard that there were disturbances in the stadium. The headmaster was saying, “This is terrible, they are going to stop this match if this doesn’t stop.” We were so involved in the game that we didn’t know what was going on.

Before the game we were having some odd phone calls to the house. I later discovered that a gang of people had actually got prepared and come to Ravenhill just to shout racist abuse at my son. People came to the stadium with bananas and threw them onto the pitch.

After the match my son was weeping. I asked him, “Why are you crying?” He said, “I am just overwhelmed with joy.” Later on my son was telling me he knew. Somebody told him that this was going to happen and he was worried that I would be there. This was one time when he would have been part of the community. I was very proud of him, proud that he did that for his school and for the community that we live in. But just because of the colour of his skin he was treated in that way. ☞

# WHERE THE HEART IS

A week earlier Neil Lennon, playing football for Northern Ireland, was booed so much that they had to withdraw him from the match. He vowed to never play for Northern Ireland again. What happened to him in the form of sectarianism happened to my son a week later in the form of racism. I felt this was so sad.

The *Belfast Telegraph* carried the story about the cup final<sup>1</sup> and of course people can't handle things like that. All I have heard is that there is no racism in Northern Ireland. Some even twisted it and said, "It's not racism, they must have found out he was Catholic."

I think because we ignore the fact that sectarianism and racism are so bad it is difficult for us to acknowledge that these things happen. It happens to my family in one form or another every single week – and I have been here for 22 years.

## **In what other ways have you experienced racism here?**

In Nigeria naming a child means a lot because we name our children according to what is happening in our lives. But when my children were at school we had a teacher who refused to call my son by his name and said, "Why can't you have a proper name?" My child was only about five. He said, "Why won't she call me by my name? She refuses to call me by my name." Now, I can handle a lot of things but when it affects my children it really breaks me. When a seven-year-old or a five-year-old comes to me and says, "She wouldn't call me by my name because I haven't got a proper name." What do I do?

Some things are so subtle, some are so blatant. I feel sorry for my Irish friends because sometimes when I am walking on the street with them, a car will slow down and the people call me every single dirty name they can call me as they drive past... that happens regularly – to me and to my children.

When I said to my boys I was going to give this interview and I asked them "How do you experience racism?" They said "Mum, where do I start?" What about when someone says "Go back to your country"? They say to him, "But I was born here." Whether you were born here or not, if your skin is black you are not from this country. That is what some people are letting them know. So you work hard to be part of the community but you are reminded regularly you are not really part of this community. The more foreigners we have coming here, the more people feel threatened. I have said to somebody "Hello" and they have said, "It is the likes of you who come here to use our hospitals."

Working in Restoration Ministries I am sort of cocooned because if people get to know you as a person the colour of your skin doesn't matter so much because they know that you are a human being and you have removed the label they have for you. I'm sure that applies with sectarianism as well, once you get to know the other person. People know me as Rose. So you go out and you experience racist abuse, but when somebody calls you a friend then you know you are not 'only black' here.

They experience the person.

## **Do you think racism is taken seriously in Northern Ireland?**

We went to the anti-racism rally and it was the first time I had been to a rally. And I actually came away from it feeling sad. I thought not many people responded to that call. They don't seem to think it's a big problem.

A lot of people are in denial. Racism happens in America and London, not here. One time I was in the company of two of my colleagues and someone mentioned about racism in Northern Ireland. This person said, "Oh, that's just a one-off incident. There is no racism in Northern Ireland." And he asked me directly, "You don't experience racism here, would you?" I could see my two colleagues nodding. I said, "Well, actually I do." He said, "Are you not just being oversensitive?" And I told him, "No, I don't think I would call myself oversensitive."

When my children grew up I decided I would go back to work. I have a degree, I have a diploma in teaching and I have a postgraduate diploma in teaching from Queens. I went from one recruitment agency to another and most of them said to me, "We have no cleaning jobs for you." After looking through my certificates! "If we find a cleaning job for you we will give you a ring." Now that is painful.

My husband came out one morning to go to work and just came in and said, "I have to call a taxi." I said "Why?" He said, "Come and see our car." There was 'National Front' in black spray paint all over the car.

Each time I suffer any racist incident I get so much love in return when people realise what has happened, so when you balance it out it is not too bad. And Northern Ireland is not alone. There is racism in every part of the world including in my own country. We have different tribes so there is racism there as well. But it *does* happen here.

## **Do you see a similarity between sectarianism and racism?**

The only difference is that if you are walking down the street no one would know if you are catholic or protestant or if you are from Dublin or Poland or Russia. No one will open the window and say to you "Nigger go back where you came from!" If I walked down the street it is so obvious – that's the difference. But if you turn it around, then I am free to walk down the orange streets or the green streets.

I don't want to offend anyone but I want to say, "This is what it is like being a black woman in Northern Ireland."

## **How do you respond when you experience racism?**

I guess it depends on the space I am in. If I am in a good space I can handle things better. If I am in a bad space it breaks me.

You see, people assume a lot. Even here in Restoration Ministries I meet people at the door and I have had people say to me, "Oh, you keep this house nice and clean for Ruth,"

“People have said to me, ‘You cannot understand the Troubles,’ but as a child I lived through the Biafran War.”



[Ruth Patterson, Director of Restoration Ministries]. I say, “No I don’t. Ruth lives here and she cleans her own house.” And they say, “But you do a very good job,” Even as I am saying that I am not the resident cleaner here! I find it funny sometimes, and sometimes I find it humiliating and insulting.

Or somebody picking up the phone and hearing your voice and your foreign accent saying, “Is there nobody else there to answer the call, somebody I could talk to?” If you listen carefully, you will understand what I am saying.

**What do you think the different communities in Northern Ireland can do to try and overcome racist attitudes?**

My children observed something during the Holy Thursday ceremonies. We came out from the washing of the feet and they said to me “Mum how do they pick the people who get their feet washed?” I said, “Out of the community.” They said, “There were no young people there, they are part of the community. And it would have been nice if they picked one foreign person.” At that time racism was being highlighted in the media and I said, “Yes, it would be a statement that we acknowledge you and welcome you as part of the community.”

**Do you think the church is doing enough to welcome the stranger?**

In our church a group of people and the parish priest organised an evening to welcome all the foreigners in South Belfast, actually at the height of the publicity about racism back in March. I don’t know what happened, people are fairly new here and people are shy and I don’t know if it was how it was organised but not many people came for the evening. The children from the school had done a fabulous job of Irish dancing, Irish singing and short

dramas but we didn’t have a lot of foreigners attending. I said to the parish priest, “Please don’t give up – do this again. We need to send out a message to people.”

I think the churches would like to do something but they don’t know how and they don’t want to be seen to be political. But on a one-to-one they are very supportive.

**How can we build better relationships with others in the community and particularly those we regard as ‘different’?**

In some ways I am an extrovert who will approach people first, I’ll talk to somebody at the checkout – when they have their name badge I address them by their name. I really do think that in a community you not only have to look after one another, you have to respect one another, no matter how small or where you come from. We need to realise that we all need each other.

I think that the typical Northern Irish person wouldn’t approach you. The ones who travel, the young ones, are better because they come up to you and ask, “Where are you from?” It is very good to ask these questions.

One of the first experiences I had in 1982 was going into a shop and a young child ran up to me and wanted to touch me! I was stooping down to let this child touch me to feel my skin. The mother just came and pulled the child away. I said, “It’s ok,” but the mother pulled the child away. I felt that was a very destructive thing she did because it was as if you don’t go near people ‘like that’. I think that is a wrong message. If you had let this child feel my skin and ask me I would have answered her and the child would have been more informed.

**The mother might have been afraid of offending you, but the child was just being curious and had no inhibitions.** ←

# WHERE THE HEART IS

Exactly. It would have been a very natural thing – let this child ask me, “Why is your hand black?” If this white person comes to my village in Africa where maybe they haven’t seen a lot of white people, they will be saying, “Is she for real? How can anybody’s skin be so light?” I think difference should be welcomed, in welcoming difference we know more. I think we will be enriched by the diversity of our culture.

I’ll tell you a funny story. My sister-in-law came from Boston to visit us and after a week she said to me, “Do you not have any friends?” I said, “But people have been coming and going here all week!” She said “They are Irish.” I said, “But these are my friends!”

I went to visit her. They live according to their origins in ghettos that are well demarcated, which I found very stifling.

## **Do your children still feel they are not welcome here, even though Northern Ireland is their home?**

Yes. Because people are hearing about political asylum seekers everyone is now labelled a political asylum seeker, whoever you are, even if like my children you were born here.

The basic needs of any human being are to be loved, to belong and to be able to feed yourself. If I am described as a political asylum seeker or an economic migrant I don’t think there is anything wrong about me trying to better myself. Millions of Irish people left this island because they were hungry and they wanted food, they wanted to better themselves and they wanted a better future for their children. That is quite the natural thing. When I went to Westport last year I went to see the famine ship monument [the National Famine Monument], near Croagh Patrick<sup>2</sup>. I was standing there and I could feel the shivers down my spine. This is exactly why Mexicans and Cubans are drowning in the sea, this is why people are swimming the channel. This has been happening for centuries – it is not new. Which makes it very sad because it shouldn’t be happening now, should it? We have resources. If they were distributed equally, people shouldn’t have to drown.

I think things will change. I think it is a challenge to Northern Ireland that the people keep coming. I keep saying the world is on the move. We are always moving. How many people are going to travel to different parts of the world on holidays? When you look though the channels on the TV it is all about ‘relocation’ people are relocating, moving from England to Spain or to America.

Travel is very good; it is very enriching. We have been so fortunate in the family that we have lived in the five continents of the world so it has been very good for us. But it is always an ordeal to go through the airport – even before 9/11 and Iraq. You are questioned and searched and always asked to stand aside. Some of them are ok they are just doing their job, but some of them just treat you like a criminal. It’s humiliating – that’s the word I would use – going through the airport,

through immigration.

Every culture is rich and we learn from each other. People have said to me, “You cannot understand the Troubles,” but as a child I lived through the Biafran War [1967-1970]<sup>3</sup>. One million children were killed in that war. I know about the ‘disappeared’. Three of my brothers disappeared and we never got their bodies back. I have been in those shoes. I remember walking with our belongings on our heads for three days and three nights – a refugee in my own country. You cannot compare pain, but no one has the monopoly on pain. Mine was just as real, but life goes on.

It is very difficult when people are in pain. I think that is why I have a heart for this job in Restoration Ministries. I have been wounded. I grew up in a war situation and therefore I have empathy. It was amazing for me to meet one of the mothers of The Disappeared here and to realise that my mother must have felt this way. And I realised how long I had been waiting for my brothers to come back, and they never did.

## NOTES:

1. *Belfast Telegraph* 06 April 2001 ‘Racist taunts shame at rugby final’ by Smyth Harper. The *Belfast Telegraph* online archive is at: <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/search/search.jsp>
2. The National Famine Monument was unveiled by Mary Robinson, the President of Ireland at the time, on July 20th 1997. The sculpture by John Behan depicts a ‘Coffin Ship’ with skeleton bodies and commemorates the anniversary of the Irish Famine 150 years ago, when the population declined from 8 million to 4 million. See image on <http://www.croaghpatrick.com/natfamine.html>
3. For a brief background on the Biafran War, read ‘Biafra: Thirty years on’ by the BBC’s Nigeria correspondent Barnaby Philips <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/596712.stm>

ROSE OZO was interviewed by Anna Rankin at Restoration Ministries on 21st June, 2004.

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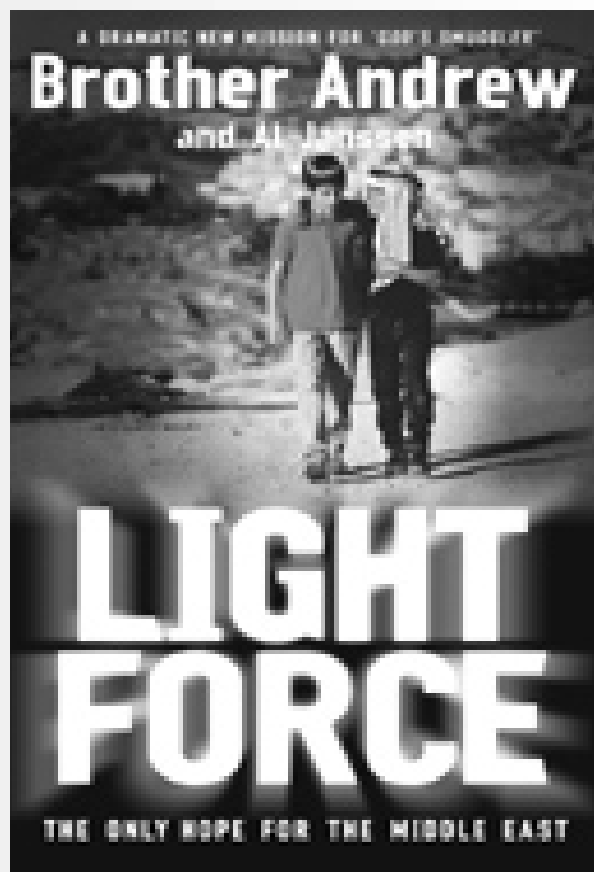
When the phenomenal success of "God's Smuggler" made it too dangerous for his contacts in the underground church, Brother Andrew decided he could not return to Eastern Europe. He quietly turned his attention to the Middle East, and for the last thirty-five years he has been serving the Christian Church there as well as witnessing to Jews and Muslims.

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# chinese church

THE BELFAST CHINESE CHRISTIAN CHURCH is the only Chinese church in Northern Ireland. Now one of the largest Chinese churches in the UK, with a membership of just over 100 and over 200 people attending regularly, it traces its roots to a fellowship of students who began meeting in 1975. The church, which is evangelical and non-denominational, comprises three congregations serving three different language groups – Cantonese, Mandarin and English and receives support from the Chinese Overseas Christian Mission (COCM). People travel from a wide area to attend services, Sunday school and youth group meetings as well as classes in English and Cantonese in the church building on Lorne Street, formerly the halls of Ulsterville Presbyterian Church.

In comparison to other countries, the Chinese community in Northern Ireland has a short history of only 40 or 50 years. It is, nevertheless, one of our longest-established minority ethnic communities. Statistically, the second language of Northern Ireland is Cantonese.

For many Chinese it has not been easy to integrate locally, with language being one of the biggest barriers. In addition, a high proportion of Chinese are either self-employed or work in the catering sector – in restaurants or takeaways. Working long and often anti-social hours makes it even harder to integrate; their main support mechanisms are usually found within their own ethnic group.

Julie Chaing Li, an Elder in the Chinese church, highlights a sense common among many ethnic Chinese living here of “not being a ‘true member’ of society because we are not really from either community. We often feel ‘where do we fit in?’” This seems to be a result of living in a society that is continually being defined along the sectarian lines of ‘the two communities’.

For the second generation this can be a particularly difficult question to answer. There are around 30 teenagers in the church youth group, these are mainly second generation British Born Chinese (BBCs). Growing up speaking English, integration is easier for them than for their parents’ generation but they are still perceived as ‘different’ and many experience a kind of identity crisis. “Most attend state schools, which are protestant historically, but they do not share that cultural heritage. Work patterns at home mean that it is not always easy for the family to build quality time together and to maintain a sense of their own cultural identity. It is quite challenging for them,” says Dr Paul Coulter, Assistant Pastor at the Chinese Christian Church. Paul is from Northern Ireland; his wife is Malaysian. Paul works with the English-speaking congregation, the youth and with the programme of student outreach. (Two positions for Chinese speaking Pastors are currently vacant.)

**Paul:** There is a perception among many of the young that Northern Ireland isn’t a place that you want to be long-term. Most want to go to university in Scotland or England and haven’t a strong desire to come back here. Typically, they are fairly high achievers and contribute to the brain drain, as they see less opportunity for employment in Northern Ireland, though there are some signs that this may be changing.

Reaching the second generation and meeting them at a culturally appropriate level is a challenge. Big city life is a big draw – especially Hong Kong and the youth culture there – there is a sense that they will always be drawn away from us. But who is going to reach the Chinese here in the future?

## What other challenges does the community face?

**Paul:** Racism is something we are all aware of in the community and in the church. Some attacks have affected members from our Mandarin congregation directly. Those who have been here longer and have been accepted within their local community are less affected, especially if they live in less troubled areas, but the newer immigrants who have come recently to inner city areas feel particularly vulnerable. Local communities don’t seem to mind one or two people but when numbers increase they feel under threat. There is a sense that they are competing for territory.

## How can racism be tackled?

**Paul:** I feel it is difficult for us as the minority group to tackle racism directly. I think most of those initiatives need to come from the wider community. We get a lot of invitations from different groups inviting us to different initiatives but we just don’t have the manpower to be involved in everything. There seem to be a lot of low profile things going on but maybe not enough big initiatives to really tackle the issue effectively.

**Julie:** Until 1994 we didn’t have a Race Relations Act here. There was legislation about discrimination on sectarian grounds but not on grounds of race. Racism is one of the biggest issues but we tend not to talk about it. There is still that attitude of “keep your head down and get on with it.” There is still that type of anxiety within the community; it is maybe a kind of taboo.

**Paul:** I think Julie is right, the Chinese community here would be very happy to live quiet, peaceful lives but there are longer-term issues to be considered. I am sure none of us would like to think of ourselves as a racist society but I think we are. I think it is widespread and deeply rooted and a lot of it stems out of ignorance. When racist attacks happen you don’t often see local people interviewed saying, “This must not happen.” It’s usually politicians or spokespeople for organisations, not the local residents who speak on camera. As ordinary Christians we must send a clear message that racism is not in keeping with what we believe or profess.

**Julie:** I see both racism and sectarianism as issues of imbalance of power; prejudice is about power and the ability to exclude people you think aren’t important.



**What can we do to make society more open to cultural diversity?**

**Julie:** Local people who want to do something for ethnic minorities tend to want to group them all together. The 'Multicultural Festival' is a popular idea – it's easy to organise, people bring different foods and there is music and dance representing the different cultures. But personally I have to say that sometimes the locals seem to benefit more from the experience than the ethnic minorities! There is a school of thought that encouraging multicultural diversity is about putting all the ethnic minorities together under the same roof. People think this is a good thing to do for the ethnic minorities and it looks good on the annual report. Being put together with other ethnic groups can make us feel vulnerable unless we have enough support. We already have some way of relating to the dominant culture but with different people from different cultures with different languages all together it is difficult. Different experiences and expertise is needed for dealing with different groups. Maybe other people do not realise this.

**How do you relate to other churches in the local area?**

**Paul:** As a local person involved in the leadership here, I see part of my role as being to facilitate the growing programme of student outreach and the creation of more links with the churches in the area. It would be a positive thing if we can lead the way in linking other Christians with the Chinese community and with the wider local community here.

People are welcome to come and visit us here and get a feel for it but it is a big thing to step out of your comfort zone and to put yourself in a situation where you are the minority and observe people in their natural setting.

In terms of making links with people from the Chinese or other communities, some of the other ministers ask, "What can we do?" "What could a group of local people do?" Simple things like saying "Hello," inviting your neighbour in for coffee, go a long way.

**Julie:** At the beginning some people asked us "Why do you meet separately as a Chinese church? We have experience of doing Christian work or of good teaching." It is often easier for Chinese to outreach to other Chinese people. We share the language and culture and understand the common difficulties. Also it can be quite a sensitive thing for Chinese people who might not want to proclaim in public that they are Christian or belong to a church. Having said that, a few have been baptised in this church. To do that and to give their testimony in public is quite a breakthrough.

**Paul:** That is one reason why our congregations are bigger in number than our actual membership. It is one thing to study the Bible or to come to a service, but to actually become a member – if it were known about in mainland China – may be difficult.

A lot of our members are fairly new Christians. Our aim is to reach every Chinese person in Northern Ireland with the gospel.

The Chinese community is not just one community, but represents

a wide diversity of people even within language groups. It remains to be seen how the different language groups relate to each other in the future. There is a combined service once a month but meeting together less often may mean our relationships will move apart too. We don't want them to break away but it has been a blessing to allow each separate congregation to develop in culturally relevant ways.

We are not professing to be the only church that can reach Chinese people but we do have experience and we can offer fellowship which is culturally sensitive and in the appropriate language. We shouldn't assume the Chinese church is the only one appropriate for them. We are not fighting for sheep.

**Julie:** But if people only attend worship and go again, if they do not have opportunities to participate in the life of a church it doesn't help that person to grow; they need to have opportunities to serve too.

I would like to see our young generation grow up to become mature Christians. There has been a long history of missionaries from the West going to China. God may use Chinese people to outreach to English-speaking people here, maybe not in this generation but maybe the next.

**Paul:** Our English-speaking congregation has a great potential. There is a particular role for this community within the Chinese church, caring for people whose cultural identity is different, like the second-generation Chinese and other East Asian immigrants. We are happy to be increasingly open to anyone, while keeping a sense of our history and core identity.

**Julie:** This is the first Chinese Christian Church in Northern Ireland. I hope it will not be the last.

PAUL COULTER and JULIE CHIANG LI were interviewed by Anna Rankin. The website for the Belfast Chinese Christian Community can be found at [www.bccc.co.uk](http://www.bccc.co.uk)



# religious liberty in the shadow of drumcree

IN THE WAKE of the row centring on objections to granting planning permission for Northern Ireland's first purpose-built mosque, three miles outside Portadown, and an increasing number of racist attacks against Muslims in the area, a number of meetings were organised between the mainstream churches and representatives of the Muslim community in Craigavon. Methodist, Presbyterian, Church of Ireland, Catholic and Mennonite church leaders took part in the discussions facilitated by NICEM (Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities).

Discussion centred on two main aspects. Firstly, to find agreement among the local churches in regard to the persecution of members of minority ethnic communities and the personal attacks on families in Craigavon, some of whom had been burnt out and intimidated out of their homes. "As a persecuted minority you tend to assume the whole community is against you. Through these discussions their community representatives were able to discover that many in the wider community wanted to defend their interests and rights," says Archdeacon David Chillingworth who was involved in the talks.

There is widespread concern about vulnerable minorities in the area and in particular incidents involving South East Asian nurses. Some anecdotal evidence suggests that not everything is reported in the media but enough is reported to cause serious concern. "These nurses are hugely respected in the community and they are seen to be gentle and kind to an extraordinary degree."

The second area of discussion was linked indirectly to the dispute about planning permission for the mosque at Bleary in terms of what it would mean for the churches to defend the right of Muslims to have a mosque in Craigavon. Plans to construct the £200,000 mosque, funded by the Muslim community, on land donated by a member of their community, have been stopped in their tracks. There are about 200 Muslims in the Craigavon area. Friday prayers have been taking place in a community centre since vandals burnt a temporary mosque five years ago.

"From the Church of Ireland perspective, we wanted to be very clear that there was a need to be definite that the focus should not be interfaith issues or theological judgement – our concern was for religious freedom and the protection of minorities." This concern to bring the language of civil and religious liberty to bear on this particular issue in Craigavon is underlined in a statement issued by Bishop Harold Miller:

"The Christian Gospel and the example of Jesus Christ should inspire Christian people to love and protect the small minority of people from other religious backgrounds who have made their home in Northern Ireland. This is a test of our preparedness to abhor racism, and especially subconscious and unacknowledged racism.

The whole issue of Bleary is not a question of interfaith worship, or of watering down our sincerely held beliefs – it is an issue of freedom of religious expression, something which we would all uphold."

**"It is very difficult to do anything that is not just tokenism unless we develop real and lasting relationships."**

The intimidation many are experiencing is being seen as a transfer of sectarian feeling towards vulnerable minority ethnic communities. "In terms of the level of intimidation it is similar to what took place in Belfast in the mid-1970s. It is subtle and unseen but once people have been intimidated it is very difficult to stop them moving out."

Much work remains to be done to provide adequate protection and support to these vulnerable communities. "The subtext to all these conversations was the realisation that it is hard for communities to support one another where there is no history or experience of relationship between Christian churches and the Muslim community." Is this something the mainstream churches are taking on board? The discussions have at the very least generated a commitment to ongoing dialogue and ongoing assessment of the situation in regard to vulnerable minorities, but what more can local churches do?

David Chillingworth identifies the basic problem as the lack of ongoing, visible contact with people from ethnic minorities. Often, people are simply not aware that they are there and when trouble erupts they are out before anything can be done. "It is very difficult to do anything that is not just tokenism unless we develop real and lasting relationships – in which case many things become possible – this applies as much to ecumenical relations as to relationships with people from minority ethnic communities."

"This is one example of how we in the Church of Ireland are becoming much more conscious about what Christian identity actually means and questioning at an institutional level what our 'community of interest' really is. The Hard Gospel initiative that I am involved in is, in part, a consciousness-raising initiative taking place within the Church of Ireland. It is an attempt to see racism, sectarianism, sexism, and discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation etc., as issues which are all linked and which basically stem from an inability or unwillingness to deal with difference." The Hard Gospel process is trying to get the Church of

Ireland at all levels to engage with these issues.

"We have had to ask ourselves 'What does civil and religious liberty mean in the shadow of Drumcree?' If we seek to uphold civil and religious liberty it must be for everyone, not just for some." He is confident that by and large the church has been moving away from over-identification with sectional interests and the defence of traditional alliances in favour of an approach which seeks to express concern for the good of all people in society.

In the end, Craigavon Borough Council granted planning permission for the mosque and the Muslim community in the area are now taking time to consider how best to move forward with the project.

ARCHDEACON DAVID CHILLINGWORTH is Rector of Seagoe Parish. From a conversation with Anna Rankin on 5th August 2004.

# small steps

## “Welcoming ethnic minorities might help churches in Portadown to work together constructively.”

IN THE BIBLE narrative our response to the ‘stranger’ is a test of our commitment to God. Hospitality is a central practice of the faith: do we welcome the stranger amongst us in our willingness to dialogue, eat, play and converse together or do we make the stranger an enemy? The Old Testament commands the people of God to care for the stranger, though the enemy does not have the same privileged position as the New Testament. In the New Testament it is everywhere: Jesus as a child refugee, Jesus embracing outsiders of all kinds, his solidarity with the excluded on the cross, all pointing to Paul’s revelation that the divisions between peoples were destroyed by the cross. We were strangers to God and yet were not abandoned by God, rather we were received into the very life of God from the cross. In turn how we treat the stranger indicates what we really believe. On top of it all, the stranger might be an angel!

Portadown churches are taking a few small steps in the right direction but much more could be done. There is plenty of sermon material on welcoming the outsider, and good worship resources from Corrymeela or Iona. The social dimensions of the sacraments – for example communion as the space where all of us acknowledge our status as welcomed outsiders or baptism as the act where enemies of God join God’s people. Local Methodist and Presbyterian churches have directly addressed the issues and even had parts of sermons published in the local paper! Churches could interview someone from a minority background to get right to the heart of the issues. Ken Newell said it right, “Christians need to stand up and say that this is not the kind of society we want to live in. If minorities are being attacked, the first people round to support them should be the members of our churches. We should be doing all we can to create a multi-ethnic and inclusive society.” (CRC News March, 2004). We have found that a visit right after an attack or act of intimidation was very warmly welcomed.

Probably the most important thing is to visit, talk and eat with these strangers in our midst. As Ken Newell put it, “Open your hearts and your home.” (*Belfast Telegraph*, 09/08/04) Some of us have begun to do this with Filipinos – a very enjoyable experience as we have found them to be a warm and generous people. Find an excuse – offer support when a story breaks of minorities under pressure; invite them for a meal; ask them to show your children where their country is on a world map; thank them for their contribution to your town (cultural diversity, hospitals, food preparation, restaurants, etc). The CE of Craigavon hospital has said that the hospital would need to drastically curtail its operations if the Filipino nurses went home.

In Portadown, where many of the minorities are Catholic or from Catholic backgrounds, the Catholic clergy are active in visiting and building relationships with them. Once a month the church has a Filipino mass. PACE [Protestant and Catholic Encounter] Portadown used the theme of the ‘stranger’ for the annual carol service this year, and in June organised a CRC funded public Question & Answer event to help air the issues around minorities.

A local Christian of Indian origin – Nelson Rajh – has gathered a few of us to organise events to bring minorities and locals together. The first of these – an ethnic feast – was a success despite low numbers (around 20 minorities, outnumbered 4:1). Nelson cooked Indian food for all of us and showed a video of Portadown’s growing ethnic pluralism. There was some ethnic dancing and singing, both Filipino and Irish. Everyone agreed it had been a good night and we should do it again.

Several voluntary and statutory bodies have come together to form an Ethnic Minorities forum for Craigavon. This has met three times and currently includes two church representatives (hopefully this will be expanded). The forum aims to have representation from all the minority groups in the area before setting any definite agenda. The last thing needed is for us to tell the minorities what they need. Currently we are trying to establish the demographics, which is proving to be a difficult task.

Community groups on Loyalist estates have been working on the ground to ease the tension around ethnic minority issues. Loyalist community leaders have a tough job in areas where people are already finding change difficult but they are tackling the issues. The PSNI have appointed a community officer to focus on racism who has proved to be very supportive to all of us.

Could it be that welcoming ethnic minorities might help churches in Portadown to work together constructively? Might God be calling us to this as our opportunity to witness to God’s character at this time? It could very well be.

DUNGANNON

# migrant workers



JOSE CARLOS LARA, a Baptist pastor, and his wife Marizete from São Paulo in Brazil are missionaries with Latin Partners. In February 2004 the couple and their three daughters came to Northern Ireland to work among the growing Portuguese-speaking community in the Dungannon area.

There are more than 1,000 Portuguese-speaking immigrants in the area – mostly working for companies such as Dungannon Meats and Moy Park. Though often referred to simply as ‘the Portuguese’ this is misleading as the workers not only come from Portugal but also from its various former colonies, including East Timor, Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde and Brazil.

Jose Carlos and Marizete have an open-door policy with those seeking assistance. They are available to help with practical problems, translating for a visit to the doctor, filling out forms and documents and addressing legal matters or difficulties at work. They run English lessons and organise social events as well as Bible study groups and worship. They also provide counselling and support to workers, many of whom are separated from their families and are a long way from home.

The migrant workers experience many day-to-day difficulties and often have work-related grievances which they can do little to resolve. Three or four big agencies recruit for the companies in the area but, Jose Carlos says, they do not always act fairly. “They provide accommodation but put too many people in the houses so they have no privacy, sometimes two or three people are sharing a bedroom.” There are also reports that, though the companies pay double-time for holidays and Sundays, the agencies do not pass this on to the workers. “We encourage people to apply directly to the companies for a work permit

and to bypass the agencies because they are being exploited. Then they will have to find their own accommodation and sort out their own paperwork but they will be more secure.”

Although they have many friends in the town, the family has also been on the receiving end of attacks to their property. Their car was burnt and a week later bricks were thrown at the house in an unsuccessful attempt to smash the windows. “Some think it was sectarian, some think it was racist, or that the people were drunk. We don’t know who did it or why.”

It seems that anti-Catholicism has added to the current of resentment towards the foreign workers. The Lara family come from Brazil where 20% of the population are evangelical Christians, however, “Because I have darker skin,” says Marizete, “people think I am Portuguese and therefore assume I am a Catholic.” For this reason she avoids some parts of town. In this case, being outsiders does not afford them neutrality in the conflict here, even if the sectarian labels they are given don’t quite fit. It seems their car may have been burnt in reaction to Jose Carlos reading a prayer the day before at a family festival event in Dungannon at which there was inter-denominational participation.

“After the attacks people advised us to move. We talked about it but we didn’t want to run away.” After the attack on their car Jose Carlos says, “I started to read the local papers and discovered similar incidents happening every week, but these are often played down by the media. For example, ten men in black masks and bats broke into a house and smashed everything in the living room but the next day the paper announced that this was not a racist attack. I went and talked to a local newspaper editor. He said he wanted to keep it low-key to avoid provoking a reaction. I could see his point. Can you imagine 1,000 immigrants getting angry? Some of them are from Africa, they have come from violent places, some are from East Timor, which has had a civil war.”

“It isn’t easy, there has been some bad behaviour and it gets them all a bad name. People say this town used to be so clean. People say, ‘They drop the litter’ and it’s true, it is them! There are reports of anti-social behaviour, loud parties and drinking, and there is a big problem with alcohol.

“I can understand how local people are feeling. Three years ago there were no foreign people here. Now it must seem like an invasion.”

From a conversation with Anna Rankin on 28 July 2004. A full interview with Jose Carlos and Marizete Lara will appear in the next issue of *lion&lamb*.

**“Talking about racism in Northern Ireland is dangerous. People get angry very easily.”**

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RICHARD KERR

# embracing the stranger

**“The treatment of people seeking asylum is closely aligned and intertwined with racist, selfish and exclusive attitudes in society; including the Christian community.”**

ISOLATED, alienated, ostracised, vulnerable, victimized, vilified, virtually voiceless; all words that could well describe a person seeking asylum in Northern Ireland today. Stateless, insecure physically and emotionally, open to exploitation, racism and dehumanising treatment and essentially powerless to do anything about it. Forbidden to work, the opportunity to contribute to the welfare of family and society is limited. They have fled from situations of hardship, persecution, and war; many have witnessed suffering and the loss of relatives and friends. They come to Northern Ireland seeking a better life.

Quite honestly, I have been taken aback by the vulnerability of people seeking asylum in Belfast. Having spent over a decade in a country considered one of the poorest in the world, I am appalled to see people so much at the mercy of the establishment here. In Malawi, despite my ethnic and cultural differences, my faults and my failings, I was welcomed and accepted as a member of the community. Yet many asylum seekers in Ulster are met with impatience, indifference, suspicion and even open hostility.



A couple of years ago, a number of Christians from across the churches felt there was a need to respond to this situation and they formed Embrace; Christians together with asylum seekers and refugees in Northern Ireland. Although still a small organisation, Embrace seeks to inform and resource the wider Christian community about the plight of asylum seekers and act as an advocate on their behalf. The basis of our response is the biblical mandate to defend the marginalised and the vulnerable and welcome the stranger.

God is portrayed in the scriptures as identifying with fallen and broken humanity. God revealed Himself as the God of the outsider when He intervened in the lives of the Israelites in Egypt. His liberation of His people from their oppression displayed His commitment to the marginalized and the vulnerable. And it is this concern, compassion and commitment that God holds up as a blueprint for His followers. His message to the people of Israel is that they must protect the orphan, the widow, the stranger; the weak and the vulnerable. The Old Testament usage and association of the Hebrew term *'ger'* (stranger or sojourner) suggests the dependency and vulnerability of a person far from home and from family and community networks of protection and support. The exposure to exploitation is compounded when the stranger is also poor, a woman or a child.

God's message regarding the stranger is best summarised in the book of Leviticus with the instruction "when an alien lives with you in your land, do not ill-treat him. The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the Lord your God."<sup>1</sup>

The Israelites themselves are portrayed as sojourners or tenants on the land that God has given them and their tenancy is linked to their obedience to God. Indeed, the way in which the stranger, together with the widow and the orphan, is treated, is an indicator of the Israelites' obedience to the law of God and it is this commitment to justice and the defence of the weak that the prophets highlight repeatedly. God does not want lip service; He desires obedience. He requires us to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with Him.<sup>2</sup> The stranger provides the opportunity for the Israelite to reciprocate the heart of God for the downtrodden and the oppressed.

Jesus takes this a step further when he tells his disciples that what they do to the stranger, they do to Him. He is in the guise of the stranger, the poor and the weak and His call is to treat all people as we would treat Him. In the incarnation Jesus comes as a stranger into this world. Even His own do not receive, recognise or welcome Him. He didn't fit the



Richard Kerr, Chair of Embrace (centre) with speakers at the Embrace AGM: Sr Brighde Vallely, CORI and Patrick Corrigan, Amnesty International.

mindset, mould or expectations of the religious establishment. He was a threat to their positions and power, comfort and complacency. Indeed many of those who do recognise Him are on the fringes of Jewish society; the woman at the home of Simon the Pharisee<sup>3</sup>, the Roman centurion<sup>4</sup> and the Syro-Phoenician woman<sup>5</sup>. His very birth illustrates this. He is born in a stable because his family are excluded from the inn. The angels announcing his birth appear to a group of uncouth, social misfits; the shepherds. A group of foreign, gentile astrologers follow a star to find Him.

Not only was Jesus a stranger; He was also a refugee. He experienced exile in Egypt. Sought by a tyrant, at the mercy of others, He became a refugee, fleeing with his parents for his life; making a hazardous journey and seeking asylum in another country.

Jesus understands those who seek refuge and asylum and identifies with them. As the stranger on the road to Emmaus, He draws alongside and supports the weak. His great call is to hospitality, a central theme of scripture. Jesus epitomised hospitality in his welcome and treatment of those on the fringes of society. But it was more than a welcome. His hospitality was about reconciliation and the transformation from stranger to guest and from guest to friend. Examples of this include the well-known stories of Zacchaeus and the woman at the well in Samaria.

The treatment of people seeking asylum is closely aligned and intertwined with racist, selfish and exclusive attitudes in society; including the Christian community. In the light of recent racial abuse, it is worth drawing our attention to the dignity that God bestows on all human beings, created in His image. Through the investment that God has made in Christ; His identification with humanity in taking on human form, His rejection and suffering, all human beings are given a dignity and respect. If God so loved, who are we to segregate and exclude. Mistreatment of the stranger and the person seeking asylum and refuge is an insult to God Himself.

The early church reflected a whole spectrum of social, ethnic and gender differences. The first Christians were not an homogenous group but people brought together in their common faith in Jesus Christ. Yet there were challenges in their relationships; something reflected in Paul's letters. People seeking asylum come from many nationalities, ethnic groups and religious, cultural and language backgrounds. This wealth of different experiences offers a great opportunity to learn from other people and perspectives; something which is particularly important in Northern Ireland. It also poses challenges for any coordinated approach to supporting people seeking asylum. Further, most have faced incredible

hardship and witnessed terrible situations first hand, prior to coming to Northern Ireland, and their treatment here makes most reticent about social interaction and especially speaking about their experiences.

Embrace has been active in implementing practical measures, including providing transport, helping with outings and support groups. We work together with other agencies to provide support for people seeking asylum and refuge. Our main focus however is to inform Christians of the reality of the situation for asylum seekers and refugees in Northern Ireland, to develop resources for those who want to know more and get involved and to challenge information in the media and wider society that would paint a misleading picture of people coming to Northern Ireland. We also have a website [www.embraceni.org](http://www.embraceni.org) which you can visit for more information.

The Epistles describe Christians as aliens and strangers in this world; misunderstood and vulnerable. Surely we, more than most, should understand, welcome, protect and support the strangers living in our communities.

#### NOTES:

- 1 Leviticus 19:33-34
- 2 Micah 6:8
- 3 Luke 7
- 4 Mark 8:5-13
- 5 IVP *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (under 'foreigner')
- 6 Mark 7:24-30

RICHARD KERR is Assistant in Fisherwick Presbyterian Church and is Chair of Embrace.

# reviews:

## On Eagle's Wing

written and composed by John Anderson

REVIEWED BY ETHEL WHITE



IF *ON EAGLE'S WING* set out to answer the question in the song "Do you know who you are?" it failed for me. Well maybe not quite, at least I know that although I could claim to be Ulster-Scots, or as the programme states, Scots-Irish, I have only the vaguest connection to the people whose story is so energetically portrayed in this music, dance and visual extravaganza. It follows the journey of a group of people who left Scotland because of famine and when they weren't welcomed in Ireland moved on to the fledgling America. There they struggled to establish themselves but eventually made it their home to the extent that they claimed modern American culture as their own. It's an inspiring story about overcoming adversity and of contributing and shaping the evolution of a country. These are the Scots who didn't stay in Ireland, and one wonders how our story would have been different if they had stayed.

It is intriguing why this event is significant to Ulster-Scots. True, the Scots in the story settled in Ireland for a period but it is doubtful their experience here was sufficient to shape an Irish dimension to their identity. The answer to the question posed about their identity is that they became American and, unlike many other emigrants, didn't hold on to their original culture alongside the new. So if this event is an attempt by those Scots who stayed behind to grasp at identity, then maybe we need to look again at the richness and diversity of the Ulster-Scots contribution to Ireland and be willing to claim those whose political stance differed from the 'traditional' outlook of Ulster-Scots today?

Everything about the performance was impressive – spectacular dance sets, evocative singing by soloists and choirs, a variety of cultural items – traditional Uilean pipes, pipers, drummers. Local celebrities had an opportunity to show their talent – B J Hogg sang as Andrew Jackson and George Jones got to die an agonising death. The four 'clowns' added yet another layer to the event, particularly in a cleverly choreographed and well-acted scene as drunks. Whilst the set was simple, the varied

costumes worn by the dancers were imaginative and fun. The screen show was absolutely essential to appreciating the soloists – Peter Corry added gravitas but the drummer was the show-stopper, a virtuoso performance of technical brilliance and musical quality.

Attempting to portray a story which covers a few hundred years makes for difficulties in building characters with whom the audience can relate. Putting on an event on the scale of this one also precludes intimacy between the audience and the characters. Adding in an all-embracing philosophy to the lyrics was a weak counterpart to the technological and artistic collage that was the real attraction and success of this show. Essentially it tried to do too much, to appeal to too many, the strong faith of the emigrants did not rest comfortably with the hedonistic materialistic culture of their descendents. Was the event really anything more than energetic entertainment?

I didn't learn much about my identity because these particular Scots moved on within a century of arriving in Ireland and many were here for as little as a couple of decades. So what does it say to those of us descended from the Scots who stayed behind? Do we need to see the opportunities we have to contribute rather than feeling under siege in a post-agreement Northern Ireland and in a rapidly enlarging EU? We may want to lay claim to these Scots-Irish and their heritage but maybe we should allow their success to inspire us to confidently shape the society and culture in which we now live?

### *ON EAGLE'S WING*

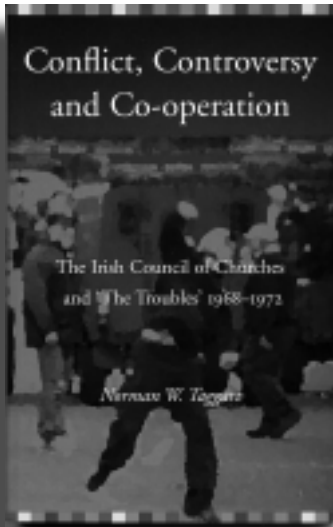
Written and composed by John Anderson

Odyssey Arena, Belfast  
28-29 May 2004.

DR ETHEL WHITE is Chair of ECONI and is a Research Scientist with the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.

## Conflict, Controversy and Co-operation by Norman Taggart

REVIEWED BY JOHN W MORROW



NORMAN TAGGART has recorded a very significant part of the story of the Irish Council of Churches and how it developed and responded to the first four years of the “Troubles” when he was its Executive Secretary.

It is easy to forget that prior to this period there was very little contact between the main Protestant Churches and the Roman Catholic Church. Many people will be unaware of the various steps which were taken on that journey during this period, partly stimulated by Vatican II but also in response to the social and political crisis which had emerged in Northern Ireland. The ecumenical journey in Ireland has never been an easy one. When it involved the official representatives of the churches it was faced with much internal opposition as the ICC sought to give leadership in obedience to the call of Christ to express our unity on the most central aspects of our faith and life. The deep suspicions in the wider society sparked off by the “Troubles” made any efforts at a united witness inevitably political as well as ecclesiastical. Indeed, those of us who had formed the Corrymeela Community felt that the need to find consensus on every decision meant that the case for a more independent initiative – freer to speak and act more quickly – was justified.

However, it would have been too easy to opt out of the attempt to create a structural instrument and allow our churches to evade the challenges of common witness posed by our divided society. We must therefore salute those who gave so much of their time to fashion such an instrument whereby we could speak and act together at a crucial point in our history. Norman gives many examples of the tensions this produced as they sought to give leadership but at the same time avoid being so out of touch with grass-roots feelings as to be counter-productive. Although that opposition or critique came partly from blatant anti-catholic or fundamentalist sources it also came from sincere evangelicals who felt that truth was being sacrificed for the sake of unity.

The record shows that whilst it was often

necessary to begin co-operation on less sensitive issues such as drugs or housing the council did eventually succeed in tackling difficult issues like violence through the setting up of joint structures. In this way many important relationships were nurtured and trust developed between many key leaders of this period. The influence of the wider global ecumenism is also evident, and the contributions of the European Council of Churches and the German churches were, at times, very significant. Without this wider ecumenical support, joint witness would have been hard put to survive against the forces of distrust and opposition. A deep-seated tendency to equate ‘dialogue’ with ‘betrayal’ constantly dogged our steps.

The book outlines the process which led to the setting up of the first Irish Inter-church Meeting at Ballymascanlon, and the progress which led to the study, *Violence in Ireland* (later published as a book). Although some people were inclined to exaggerate the possibilities which this opened up, they were undoubtedly land marks on a necessary but painful journey. Many others have built on the trust which was pioneered during this period by Norman and other key leaders. There is honest reflection on successes and failures, interesting information about Youth developments, Conferences like Glenstall and the role of the Media. It is a valuable record of an important phase in Irish Ecumenism and will be a valuable resource to all who seek to follow on this journey in obedience to the call of Christ to make a common witness in our time.

**CONFLICT, CONTROVERSY AND CO-OPERATION:**  
*The Irish Council of Churches  
and the Troubles 1968-72.*

Norman Taggart

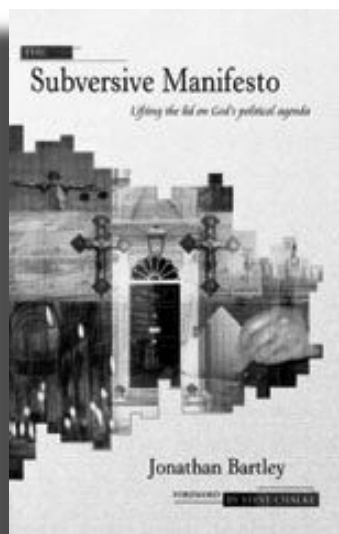
Published by  
Columba Press, 2004.

REV DR JOHN MORROW is a former Lecturer at the Irish School of Ecumenics and former Leader of the Corrymeela Community.

# reviews:

The Subversive Manifesto  
by Jonathan Bartley

REVIEWED BY JOHN KYLE



I'M NOT SURE what the Desert Fathers would have made of this book. Their response to a corrupt world system was to withdraw to the desert while Jonathan Bartley's is the opposite – radical engagement.

One would expect a book called *The Subversive Manifesto* to be provocative and it is. Bartley, a director of the think-tank Ekklesia and columnist for the *Christian Herald* and *Third Way*, begins by challenging the evangelical tendency to interpret scripture from a personal perspective. Hence the parable of the Good Samaritan is not only a lesson in neighbourly kindness but also has implications for how we, as a nation, treat immigrants, asylum seekers and persecuted minorities. In other words the parable is not merely a morality tale but, like the rest of scripture, is replete with political comment. He then proceeds to illustrate this with a whistle-stop tour of salvation history translated into modern political vocabulary.

The 'sacred-secular divide' is expertly dismantled and he argues convincingly that God cares about the stuff of everyday life, which can therefore have as much eternal resonance as prayer and preaching.

Jesus' proclamation that he had been anointed to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind points to the gospel's social and political dimensions. His actions demonstrated that God's politics are quite different from the world's and that his Kingdom has an entirely new set of values. The kingdoms of the world operate by domination and control but God's Kingdom is a kingdom of service and sacrifice. This is where the subversion comes in. We are to engage politically but not to seek power or popular support. We should not be motivated by self interest or a desire to dominate but are to introduce God's new order of justice by our speech and actions, laying down our own interests and giving up power for the sake of others. This behaviour, he states, is inherently subversive and will inevitably provoke a reaction from those with vested interests, namely those in power.

Bartley provides numerous examples from

his own experiences in local politics and at Westminster. Many are impressive, showing that it is possible to do things differently.

The recurring motif running through the book is that our mission is to stand for justice. This I can agree with but it is not always easy to discern what is just: one man's justice can be another man's injustice. It would have been helpful if he had elaborated more on what makes a cause just.

For someone so committed to political engagement he is surprisingly cautious about membership of political parties, which he views as a dangerous road down which to travel. This may be the voice of experience speaking, but it seems strange to encourage involvement at every other level of political activity yet to abrogate responsibility to others when it comes to exercising political power.

This book challenges us to "Rediscover the fullness of the gospel message, the political gospel – that the gospel is good news to all of creation, to our hospitals and prisons to our town halls and businesses, to our rural and urban environments." If you are unconvinced of the political nature of the gospel you should read this book; if you are already convinced you should also read it as an inspiration and an encouragement that simple actions inspired by the biblical imperative to act justly and love mercy can have significant and lasting repercussions.

*THE SUBVERSIVE MANIFESTO:*  
*Lifting the lid on God's political agenda.*

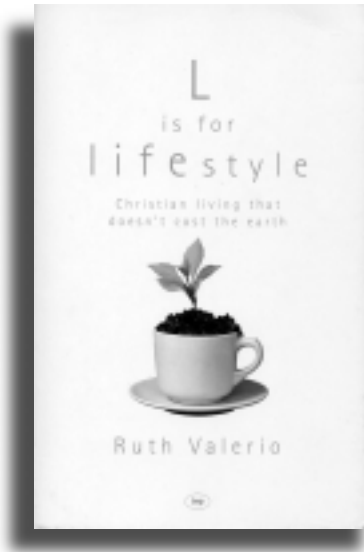
Jonathan Bartley

Published by  
BRF, 2003.

DR JOHN KYLE is a member of ECONI and a GP in Belfast.

## L is for Lifestyle by Ruth Valerio

REVIEWED BY CLAIRE MARTIN



*L IS FOR LIFESTYLE,  
Christian living that doesn't cost the earth.*

Ruth Valerio

Published by  
IVP, 2004.

ARE YOU CONCERNED with promoting social and economic justice in the world? Do you want to see people all over the world living better lives? Do you donate money to organisations that help to bring this about? Do you ever stop to think that one trip to the supermarket might undo some of that good work?

This was the first revelation I had when reading *L is for Lifestyle* – and I hadn't even made it to the end of the introduction! The book, of course, is not saying that giving to charity is not worthwhile or that supermarket shopping is wrong, far from it. What it does is to encourage taking a more holistic approach to the way we live our lives and examine some of the areas where we should perhaps make adjustments in order to "Act justly and love mercy".

Each chapter deals with a different topic and 25 chapters neatly take the reader through the alphabet from A (is for Activists) to Z (is for Zeitgeist). (I know there are 26 letters in the alphabet, but for some reason Q is not covered – my [Q for] question is why not?)

The topics dealt with are very relevant to our lives today – Food, Globalisation, Investments, Money, Recycling, Unwanted Peoples, Paper, Water, to name a few – and are discussed using balanced and factual information as well as being considered in a biblical light.

Fitting nicely with the topic of this issue of *lion&lamb*, the chapter on "X is for Xenophobia" deals with racism. It shows that racism, and the consequences of it, spread a lot wider than you might initially think.

"So many of the issues that we have been considering, such as HIV or water, predominantly affect people who are not white. Many of us reading this who are white may feel pretty confident that we aren't racist. But one of the challenges of this book is to consider where we may yet be contributing to global racism and how we can begin to change that." (143)

The book certainly covers a lot of ground and can really only scratch the surface of each issue. As the author herself says,

"Throughout this book we have been trying to make some sense...of the 'glorious mess' that is our world. Glorious mess wonderfully encapsulates what we see as we consider the many different topics that make up this book". (155)

But this is not primarily a theoretical book. A is for Activists, as the first chapter says, and so is this book. There is no need to read from cover to cover, although it is very easy and enjoyable to do so, instead you can dip in and out of topics that interest you. At the end of each section, "Good Contacts" are listed, giving the reader plenty of opportunities to explore the topic further – I probably spent as much time looking up the many recommended website links as I did reading the book. A list of "Action Points" encourages the reader to follow through from what they have read and take action. After all, Ruth Valerio wants this book to be "a call to change our lives in order to respond to the many challenges facing our world." (157)

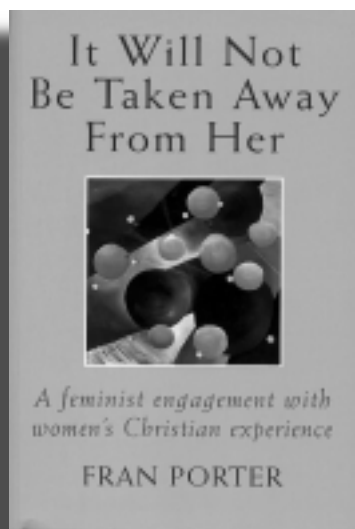
CLAIRE MARTIN is Programme Co-ordinator with ECONI.

# reviews:

It Will Not Be Taken Away From Her

by Fran Porter

REVIEWED BY CARY GIBSON



*IT WILL NOT BE TAKEN FROM HER,*  
*A feminist engagement with women's*  
*Christian experience.*

Fran Porter

Published by  
DLT, 2004.

FRAN PORTER'S *Changing Women, Changing Worlds* (Black Staff Press, 2002) focussed on the issues facing evangelical women. *It Will Not Be Taken Away From Her* broadens her focus to women's experiences across all of Northern Ireland's church traditions.

Beginning with the question, "Why do women stay [in church]?" this is a succinct and provocative exploration of the central challenges that feminism brings to Christianity and the impact of gender issues on women's faith experience.

Porter weaves an impressive synthesis from a range of feminist commentators, which will be insightful for those who are familiar with this territory and a comprehensive introduction for those who are not.

Porter rightly reminds us that feminist critique is not the cause of gender conflict but instead feminism exposes the conflict by naming it. Yet feminism continues to be received with deep suspicion by many. It is troubling how evidently vital feminist critique remains: it has neither been accepted as part of mainstream Christian discourse or practice, nor indeed is it merely a clichéd preserve of the liberal fringe. The experiences revealed by Porter's interviewees are in turn moving and disturbing, acting as powerful complement to her thesis.

Porter's is not a comparative analysis, but by exploring women's experiences across church traditions, she exposes that, while different church structures offer varying practical challenges, subordination and exclusion of women persists in all.

She calls for a reform of the assumed gender norms fundamental to all traditions, and central themes include: the God-man-woman hierarchy pervasive in our theological worldview; exclusive male language in Christian "God-talk"; the dichotomies of male/female, spiritual/physical, public/private, and self/other; how women's Christian identity is shaped; women's subordinated positions and roles within church structures, and in a society marked by conflict.

The resulting picture is a web of oppressions where church (and society) loses out on Christian women's contribution, and women (and

men) typically fail to have holistic faith experiences.

If women make up the majority of church membership and church continues to play such a significant role in Northern Irish society, then this cannot be viewed as a fringe issue. Porter's work strikes at the heart of our praxis, exposing what is no less than collective heresy and idolatry. As we deny ourselves the opportunity to be living witnesses to the gospel's radical alternative, not only do church numbers continue to decline but our contribution to society becomes increasingly weakened.

Church should be the place where the established dichotomies are subverted and where to be "made in the image of God" should be realised by recognising each of us as 'fully human' rather than as gender stereotypes.

What Porter makes clear is the need for transformation in our theological interpretation of gender, and consequently in our language, structures, and the roles women can take in faith communities.

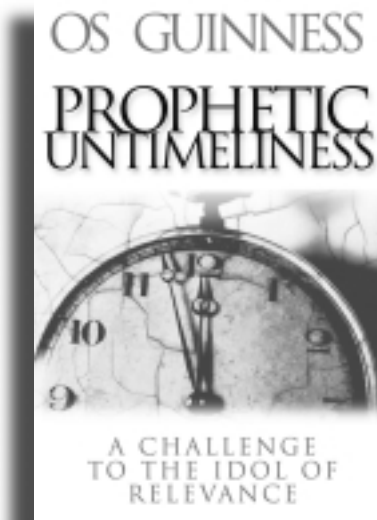
I am left thinking we face serious challenges if we are to find liberation from the complexity of problems Porter explores. How do we encourage widespread meaningful and transformative dialogue between women of multiple traditions, between church as congregation and leadership, between those remaining within the church and those without, (or indeed the many on its fringes), and that does not set women up against one another, while discouraging a male/female dichotomy?

This book does not offer much comfort but it is certainly not without hope. I look forward to Fran Porter's continued contributions on this issue and only hope that churches respond with the engaged commitment that it rightly deserves.

CARY GIBSON is a contributing member of both zero28 and the Ikon community. Her MPhil (Peace Studies) focussed in large part on the relationship between feminism and Christian praxis.

## Prophetic Untimeliness: A Challenge to the Idol of Relevance by Os Guinness

REVIEWED BY PAUL RANKIN



*PROPHETIC UNTIMELINESS,*  
*A challenge to the idol of relevance.*

Os Guinness

Published by  
Baker Books, 2004.

IN 1 CORINTHIANS, Paul writes that he has “become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some” – a Jew among Jews, a Gentile among Gentiles, ... In this book, Os Guinness explores the dilemma that has faced the church ever since: how to balance the need to make the message fresh, relevant, readily understandable in new and ever-changing contexts without stripping it of its essential characteristics. Guinness’s contention is that in making being relevant its idol the modern church in the West has lost the message somewhere along the line.

This book rests heavily on a discussion of the role of time in the modern world. In the first section, Guinness shows that the clock is the source of many of the pressures and stresses of modern life and that it has colonized us to the extent that we now see the world in temporal and not spatial terms (the Barbarians were ‘uncivilized’ because they lived beyond the physical limits of ‘civilized’ Rome whereas today’s uncivilized are behind in time – they are ‘primitives’ or ‘reactionaries’). Words such as ‘progress’ or historical terms like ‘Dark Ages /Middle Ages/Modern Age’ subtly communicate to us that we, now, are the apotheosis of history. The consequence of all this, Guinness suggests, is that our modern world has rejected the past, has an inflated view of its own present, and lives ever more in the future – and at speed. And the church has chased headlong after it. With the result that we have bent over so far to be relevant that we have been wrenched from our roots; without a matching commitment to faithfulness, we have merely become like those we wish to be relevant to.

Guinness chronicles this pursuit of relevance at all costs in Section 2 (characterized by conformity to the world around us, the quest for popularity, and by fashionability/trendiness), and thus holds up a mirror to much of what we see around us today (“Evangelicals have followed the broader cultural shift from ‘religion to spirituality’ and [...] have become chronically individualistic rather than corporate; they have become ‘do-it-yourself’ in their preferences rather than living under authority” [98]).

In Section 3 he considers the pain of being faithful, suggesting that it means being constantly out of sync with prevailing trends in our churches, and proposes a framework for developing ‘resistance thinking’ which would incorporate the unfashionable and historical as well as the eternal.

Looking back, I found myself wanting Guinness to go further with the issues he raises in this book. He puts his finger on real problems, but I am not entirely convinced by his response. There is an undercurrent which implies that through faithfulness we will become relevant – yet this depends entirely on what we see ‘faithful’ to be. ‘Faithful’ is something we work out in the context of our times: today’s ‘faithful’ will not, in all probability, look like that of our parents. I would have been interested for Guinness to examine the impact the challenge of relevance has on creating a newer, renewed vision of faithfulness, with a wider remit to encompass issues such as the environment, consumerism, food, racism, rather than a narrowly ‘spiritual’ one. Otherwise, our resistance thinking may become merely counter to what we see around us, rather than a means of taking us towards an alternative vision of how things ought to be. Instead of simply swinging the pendulum away from relevance toward faithfulness I needed him to reset the balance between them, and this is lacking, except in very general terms.

That said, I liked this book, as it asks real questions about where we are and where we are headed. These are vital issues relevant to the future of church in Northern Ireland in a changing cultural context.

PAUL RANKIN is currently completing a PhD at Queen’s University Belfast in Translation Studies.

# reviews:

## Two Little Boys

by Edward O'Neill with Barry J Whyte

REVIEWED BY JOHN GILLESPIE



*TWO LITTLE BOYS:*  
An account of the Dublin and Monaghan  
bombings and their aftermath.

Edward O'Neill with Barry J Whyte

Published by  
Currach Press, 2004.

VICTIMS ARE a key concern, both North and South. We have had the Victims' Commission, and the Corey report and the ongoing controversy about the Pat Finucane case. The families of the victims of the Omagh bombing continue to crusade for justice and recognition. A Truth and Reconciliation Forum has been mooted as a way forward. In this context, the publication of *Two Little Boys* is timely.

It deals with the 1974 Dublin and Monaghan bombings. Written by Edward O'Neill jnr, son of one of the victims, who as a four-year-old was just coming out of a barber's shop with his father Edward and seven-year-old brother Billy when the bomb went off killing his father and seriously wounding both of them. Eddie junior, his face deeply lacerated by shrapnel was thrown right across the road. Thirty-four were killed that day, and the toll would have been far greater had not Dublin been much quieter than usual, because of the bus strike.

The four chapters that describe the bombing in Dublin are the heart and strength of the book (the Monaghan bomb is scarcely mentioned). The devastation of a loving family is poignantly recounted – the immediate political context is sketched, the events of the day outlined, the immediate reaction of Dublin described, the government's response noted and the media's reports' recalled. Most tellingly the chapter entitled 'Eddie O'Neill' searchingly portrays the effects of the bomb on each member of the O'Neill family from the loss of Eddie and Martha O'Neill's unborn child to the tears of a son thirty years on, wanting his father to put his arms around him and hug him and tell him everything is ok.

The other chapters recount the attempts by the victim's families to persuade the government to hold a public enquiry as a means of getting justice for their loved ones. It is a story of controversy, splits within the 'Justice for the Forgotten' campaign, rivalries and continuing disappointment. This account reveals what a difficult road they have had to tread.

That is why the authors not just provided

an account but sought to alert the public to the injustices and cover-ups that have surrounded these atrocities. They are highly critical of a succession of Dublin governments, accusing the Cabinet committee in 1974 of engaging in a cover-up of the Gardai's cover-up for its inaction, and of the RUC and the British government's unwillingness to act helpfully in the situation. The current government's reaction to the Barron report is, for them, further evidence that "the Irish government, once again, has let its citizens down", especially in suggesting that the British government should conduct a public enquiry, rather than them.

The book has its limitations. Its brief historical introduction is inaccurate and superficial stating, for instance, that during the two hundred years (sic) between the Plantation of Ulster and the 1880s, the beginning of the Home rule crisis, Ulster was "docile and loyal". And Edward Carson is called William Carson! They should have started with the events of the UWC strike in 1974. Nor is it analytical, presenting evidence, discussing it and drawing conclusions. That book about the bombings remains to be written. But it is a most effective cry from the heart – a cry of anguish, loss, frustration; a cry for justice, and an attack on the evasiveness and apathy they have encountered. Sadly, there is no mention of significant Christian help in this situation.

We are taken inside the mind of suffering victims and forced to ask crucial questions: How can justice be done? How can justice be done for so many atrocities over such a long time? How can victims be helped? And what can the politicians do? There are no easy answers.

PROFESSOR JOHN GILLESPIE is a member of ECONI and Head of School of Languages and Literature at the University of Ulster, Coleraine.

## Son by Andy Flannagan

REVIEWED BY DAVID SMITH



FOR SOMEONE who often feels like he resides on the fringes of Christian sub-culture, I was somewhat cautious when asked to put down my thoughts about Andy Flannagan's new album, *Son*. My music collection – which I like to think of as, at worst, eclectic in taste, and, at best, encyclopaedic as far as good music is concerned (“who doesn't?” you may say) – rarely strays into the ‘mainstream Christian’ bracket, I have therefore found myself questioning my ability to review an album that would sit most comfortably in the ‘Modern Worship’ section of a Christian Bookshop.

In saying that I am largely ignorant about Christian music does not mean that I'm open-minded. I have to confess that, based on years of hopes raised then cruelly dashed, I am somewhat cynical towards most music coming from Christian sub-culture into the world of music at large.

So, now that you know all my secrets, I have to say that *Son* has so far been unable to change my gut feeling about most Christian popular music. As with so much Christian music it lacks that ‘x-factor’. For want of a better explanation, most tracks on *Son* lack ‘the edge’ that most successful secular music bases itself on.

Of course my opinion is just that, my opinion, any critic can only bring themselves to the production or piece that they are reviewing. I'm sure that an ardent Andy Flanna-fan (sorry, I couldn't resist the cheesiness) will be happy with this, his latest offering.

In fairness to the album, its standing is definitely raised by three tracks which come nearer to that euphemistic ‘edge’ I mentioned above than many other songs from Christian artists. ‘Talk All Night,’ the first track, is an upbeat love/worship song that is thoroughly sing-a-long-able and shows a genuine musical creativity. Both ‘Stop’ and ‘Arms’ meanwhile use strong lyrics to raise the issue of justice for the poor of the world and the responsibility of love that we have towards others. I particularly like the line, “Now we'll give you food, we're

the generous ones, but only if you buy our rockets and guns.”

Essentially, *Son* is a great worship album. Most of the tracks are the kind that a slightly progressive church would consider using in an alternative worship service. They're also the kind of songs that would go well with audio-visual presentations in contemplative sessions, particularly as this album comes with CD-Rom bonus material for the creative worship leader which includes: sheet music for all the songs on the album; videos to “Open Arms” and “Stop”; Powerpoint mock-ups and cell group outlines.

But what's my bottom line? If you're looking for a new worship resource for your cell group or for an alternative service, *Son* would be worth checking-out. However, if you're hoping against hope for a new album by a Christian artist that can happily rub shoulders with the best of secular music, I'm afraid the search goes on.

*SON*

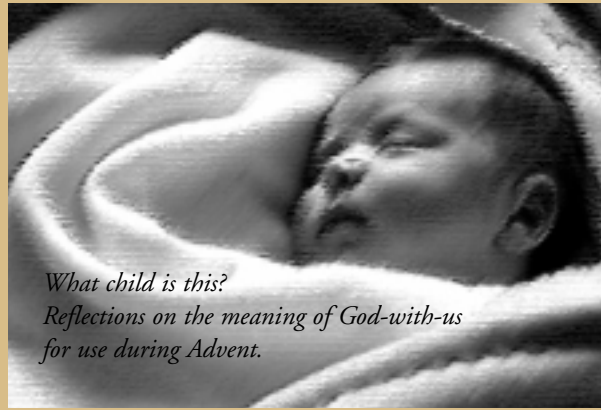
Andy Flannagan

Distribution: ICC Records  
and Wesley Owen

DAVID SMITH is Project Officer for “Preparing Youth for Peace,” a project of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and is a contributing member of Zero28.

# coming soon

*WHAT CHILD IS THIS?*  
studies and reflections on God-with-us  
for use during Advent.



*What child is this?  
Reflections on the meaning of God-with-us  
for use during Advent.*

This resource is FREE  
and will be available from 6th November  
- please contact Anna Rankin on 028 9032 5258  
or [resources@econi.org](mailto:resources@econi.org) for further details.