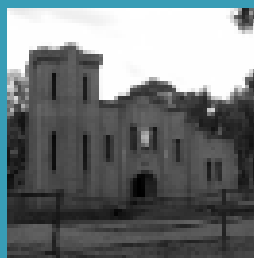


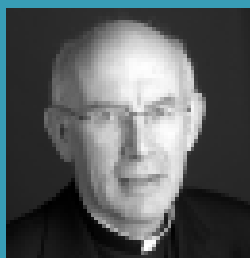
reconciliation:
ILLUSION OR
REALITY?



lion & lamb



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together.

editorial: Spring fever.



SPRING is in the air – there are signs of new life all around. Pages 4 and 5 explain more about our own organisational re-birth as the Centre for Contemporary Christianity in Ireland. This is the first official publication under our new name.

lion&lamb will still be sticking around to inspire, inform and provoke discussion on the pressing issues of the day. If you would like to contribute on a subject close to your heart, do get in touch.

This issue seeks to shed some new light on that old chestnut, Reconciliation. Michael Whitley sets out some of his questions, starting with 'What is reconciliation?' Johnston McMaster gives us a wider context in which to consider our responses.

Ten years on from the Rwandan genocide Earl Storey reflects on the legacy; Katharine and Russell Norton tell their story of one Anglo-Irish relationship which has not been afraid to take on some of the ghosts of the past; and David Chillingworth describes how the Church of Ireland is seeking to deal with difference, both institutionally and at a parish level.

This time we have not one but two interviews, with not one but two Primates of All-Ireland. We are grateful to both Archbishops of Armagh for offering us their thoughts on the current state of reconciliation in our society and their hopes for the future.

Maria Power looks back at the role ECONI has played in developing church-based peacebuilding on our island; while Patrick Mitchel looks to the future and asks, 'Are evangelism and reconciliation irreconcilable?'

If you saw the film 'The Passion of the Christ' last year, or even if you didn't, John Kiess suggests you rent *Dogville* this Easter and put the coffee on to brew for some late night discussion on the issues it raises. Drew Gibson begins a new Bible study series with 'Blessed are the peacemakers?' All this plus the usual book review section; it's a packed issue. I hope you enjoy it.

Due to a huge response to our last edition on Racism the full print-run of 3,000 magazines is now exhausted, though you can still access that edition online from our archive.

lionandlamb@contemporarychristianity.org is the new email address for comments and contributions. The postal address and phone numbers remain unchanged. See below.

Anna Rankin

P.S. If you would like to know what Alwyn Thompson is up to these days log on to the cheekily-named lioneatslamb.blogspot.com for his very own view on the world.

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SPRING
2005

lion&lamb

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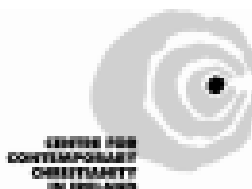
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CENTRE FOR
CONTEMPORARY
CHRISTIANITY
IN IRELAND

comment:

What is Reconciliation?



BRAND MARKETING is currently championed as the new business strategy which, supported by subtle advertising, attempts to create 'triggers' designed to elicit planned responses from us, the market. Successful 'triggers' evoke predefined images and expectations which, in turn, cause us to respond and act in predictable ways. If this trend is something you haven't been aware of until now that is probably because 'triggers' are most effective when they are either subliminal or indistinguishable from our normal environment and thinking. Contrary to any superior view we may have of our own rationality we are, in practice, all very easily manipulated – otherwise the marketing companies wouldn't be so successful and so profitable.

Is prejudice a triggered response? Think about a word or situation which immediately triggers images, attitudes or actions where a prejudgement is substituted for thinking. Could we regard instinct as a form of cultural prejudice? At times our instincts may be less to do with any inherent gifting than the consequence of repeated, practised responses.

What about my Christian preferences, priorities and practices, are these considered and purposeful or are they too a response to spiritual triggers?

Take the present high-profile term 'reconciliation', is this just such a spiritual trigger? Do we immediately buy into 'reconciliation' because it is a concept and aspiration which seems obviously Christian? Would we feel uncomfortable if we were instead seen to be intransigent or stubborn? Are we too quick to jump on this latest bandwagon?

Our interest is drawn to those who propose 'reconciliation', and we support and endorse those who engage in it – but do we actually know what they mean by 'reconciliation'? Can we articulate why we are, or should be, enthusiastic about it? Is 'reconciliation' actually good theology or just a commendable and practical way of dealing with dysfunctional people and bringing closure to uncomfortable situations? Did God actually give us the ministry and message of interpersonal reconciliation, or only reconciliation between mankind and God? [2 Cor 5:18-19]

Why do we need 'reconciliation' anyway? Is 'reconciliation' good in all circumstances and how do we judge? What is the alternative? Are we sure that we actually want 'reconciliation'? Do we properly understand what 'reconciliation' involves, or might require of us?

Is 'reconciliation' no more than just understanding the other person's position, without expecting change? Does it allow you to continue to be wrong if you wish, safe in the knowledge that I will not attempt to change you? If I am comfortable that we hold opposite views, is it a problem that I

don't appear to care that you are wrong? Is 'reconciliation' about liking or accepting each other even though we don't agree? Is this dangerously superficial or just a cover-up, with little inherent merit?

Does reconciliation require both of us to give up all, or part, of what we strongly believe or practise? Does it necessitate agreement, or accommodation, or compromise? Is it expected that everyone must move from their currently held position which has created the need for reconciliation in the first place? Is this a realistic thing to do if I am right and you are wrong? Is it ethical?

Does 'reconciliation' eclipse the need for criticism or the importance of challenge, disagreement or standing against something? How do we reconcile difference of opinion and 'reconciliation'?

Is 'reconciliation' a process or an end in itself? Is it about attitudes, or relationships, or engagement or status? What are we attempting to reconcile? What outcome are we looking for? Perhaps I am just wrong, and need to agree with you?

I suspect that only when we approach 'reconciliation' with the understanding of a clear biblical basis, and have a realistic appreciation of the process and outcome, can we be properly committed to it and recognise the outcomes as worthwhile.

Teaching and leadership methods which rely on creating and using spiritual 'triggers' are too easy and too common, and inevitably have only short-term impact.

And against this trend I have become increasingly aware of the use of questions in the discourses and challenges of the Old Testament prophets. Jesus also used questions extensively in both his teaching and in his discipling – questions which gave rise to clarity and understanding, and often had remarkable consequences.

If I were willing to ask more questions in all areas of my life then, perhaps, I wouldn't be so easily manipulated by the subtle triggers all around me. This must be even more important in the understanding and exercise of my faith, if I am to avoid being superficial and short-term in my enthusiasms.

Therefore I am approaching this edition of *lion&lamb* somewhat cautiously, as I expect it will expose my lack of understanding.

MICHAEL WHITLEY is an Architect and the new Chair of the Board for the Centre for Contemporary Christianity in Ireland.

from the director: Ireland is changing and so are we!

DAVID W PORTER



THE CHARACTER OF IRELAND in 2005 is virtually unrecognisable from that of 30 years ago. In what some observers have called 'post-Troubles Northern Ireland' and 'post-Catholic Ireland', the political, social, cultural and spiritual environment has changed significantly. While the challenges of building a peaceful and inclusive society remain, the bigger challenge now facing us is the everyday reality of this change.

The secular culture that has shaped the public space of most of Europe is now radically redefining the values and ethics of our society. Increasingly, Christians of all traditions throughout Ireland are acknowledging that Christianity will come to occupy a very different place in this new society. Together we face the challenge of understanding what a faithful biblical witness to Jesus Christ will look like in this new era.

These massive shifts in our culture have formed the backdrop to our work for the past five years. Increasingly they have shaped the content and direction of our ministry with leaders and congregations. This has led us through a process of careful consultation and prayerful discernment: our response to change is now to embrace change for ourselves. From April 2005, ECONI officially becomes the Centre for Contemporary Christianity in Ireland.

Experience tells us that change is unsettling, but it can also be an opportunity for innovative and radical initiatives. Conversely, failure to engage with change will mean the church becoming increasingly marginalized and irrelevant to our society.

Over the next five years we are committed to establishing the Centre for Contemporary Christianity in Ireland as a respected and recognised resource for the church throughout Ireland and beyond, where Christians can access biblical resources and practical support: a place to develop the knowledge and personal skills needed to serve their communities at points of contention, conflict and social change.

The new situation demands new acts of discernment, and will lead us to explore new models of leadership, new approaches to church, new opportunities for co-operation and new conversations in the public space.

We have chosen to prioritise three areas of concern building on the expertise which we have developed over the years – Conflict, Community and Citizenship.

Addressing conflict, both locally and globally, is integral to effective Christian witness in today's world. We will therefore continue to develop appropriate theological and practical resources to address conflict transformation and reconciliation.

As recent issues of *lion&lamb* have highlighted, the challenges which we face, living in an increasingly diverse society, are not to be underestimated. We will focus on helping churches, individuals and

communities to understand this rapidly changing situation; to enable them to explore diversity in all its forms and take a leading role, as Christians, in contributing to an inclusive and respectful society.

Thirdly, the relationship between faith and politics, moral values and public policy, discipleship and national identity are still key issues. Yet, both the ability and the right of the church to participate in the public square are increasingly being called into question. We will speak to the issues based on relevant research and analysis providing the church with a biblical perspective for debate and action.

To be faithful to God and to biblically engage in this new context requires us to learn to serve all people whatever their culture or belief and, in so doing, follow the example of Jesus.

We desire to see the Christian community in Ireland nurture a deeply-rooted and radical biblical faith. This biblical faith shapes and informs the evangelical ethos of the Centre for Contemporary Christianity. As evangelicals, we believe we are challenged to find new avenues of partnership and service across the Christian traditions. We will therefore draw on biblical reflection and informed comment from all who share faith in Christ and a commitment to his teaching and example.

Centre for Contemporary Christianity in Ireland will seek to be a catalyst. In order to serve and resource the church we will be offering a range of events and initiatives. We will also develop our own engagement with change in the wider community.

If the church is to nurture biblical faith through its worship and witness it cannot ignore the contemporary context. The task is to affirm a faith that not only gives us confidence to confront change, but to shape it. We are excited by what we believe God has given us to do.

Working alongside the churches and other faith-based groups and organisations, we want to contribute to a serving community of Christians that will be good news for the people of Ireland – a community that is both radical and faithful in its life and witness. We invite you to join us on this quest.

For further information visit www.contemporarychristianity.org or email info@contemporarychristianity.org – alternatively, you can telephone us on (028) 9032 5258.

If the church is to nurture biblical faith through its worship and witness it cannot ignore the contemporary context.



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CHANGING WORLD**

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the whole gospel for the whole world (and beyond...)

OUR VISION of reconciliation is often too restricted and narrow. Living as we do in a shrinking world, a network of global villages, and at the same time in an ever-expanding universe, we are one planet in a galaxy among millions of galaxies, our vision of reconciliation needs to seriously stretch its horizons. We are exploring cosmic dimensions, including a larger than cosmic perspective on God. Reading the Bible in this context provides us with imaginative and mind-stretching possibilities.

Book-end Theology

I admire bookends, though I do not own any. They hold together a little collection of books. The Bible is a collection of books and it has fascinating bookends. The two bookends are creation and new creation, a significant biblical perspective. The story or stories of faith, and often anything but faith, are mainly stories of human beings. It is a very human story and sometimes a story about very particular humans. But the Bible begins and ends not with humanity but with the bigger picture of creation. The story of faith and the struggle for faith is set in the larger context of creation/new creation. The bookends, holding together the library of books we call the Bible, provide us with the big picture. We humans are part of and live within a universe, a whole creation, of which we know only a very small part. The bookends perspective or bookend theology is highly significant, because it challenges a popular perspective.

Many of us live out of an anthropocentric, or human centred, view of things. We hold a very human centred view of the world. We hold that humans are at the centre of the world, the most important beings in creation and things around us only have value and worth if they serve human needs. This anthropocentric perspective has become the key lens through which we see the world and history. We view the rest of creation from our human centred and human dominant perspective. Anthropocentrism has also become the lens through which we perceive salvation and reconciliation. We interpret the Bible and its themes of salvation and reconciliation from an anthropocentric perspective. That really means a very narrow, self-centred perspective, that is too restricted.

The Bible's bookend theology is not anthropocentric but cosmocentric. We begin and end with the much bigger picture of the cosmos, the universe, the whole creation. We are to read, imagine, experience and understand from a cosmocentric perspective.

Does a cosmocentric perspective make a difference to our living the faith story? What difference does it make?

Living the Cosmic Vision

Between the bookends there are other writings that provide us with cosmic vision. Because of our anthropocentrism we have often missed the bigger picture. Two good examples are the letters to Colossians and Ephesians.

Both of these cities were located in Asia Minor. They were important cities in the Roman Empire, a context that needs to be taken seriously in trying to understand what these letters were attempting to say to their small faith communities. The people of Colossae and Ephesus lived under a domination system. Life was dominated by a military superpower which was also an oppressive economic superpower. Reality was defined by imperialism and colonialism. It was characterised also by Greek/Hellenistic culture with strong oriental colouring. The vocabulary used in these letters reflects the imperial and cultural experiences. Both cities were metropolitan melting pots with populations drawn from many countries and not a few people without a country.

Culturally the perspective was cosmic. The cosmic view or belief systems were centred on cosmic powers or elements of the universe which controlled life. Everything was programmed, predetermined or fixed by Fate. People were also very aware of a cosmic fault, a cosmic catastrophe or the belief that there was a deep fault line between the higher and lower worlds. Living out of this kind of cosmology their ultimate concerns and deepest questions were around meaning and meaninglessness. These were the key experiential or existential questions.

Salvation was a common word in their vocabulary and understood from a cosmic perspective meaning the restoration of cosmic unity. Colossians uses these thought forms and in a remarkable text, Colossians 1:15-20, offers a vision of the cosmic Christ at the heart of creation and through whose life, death and resurrection there is the reconciliation of the cosmos.



‘Creation and new creation, the bookends holding together the library of books we call the Bible, provide us with the big picture.’

It is a breathtaking vision of Christ and reconciliation in cosmic context.

Ephesians also offers a vision which is cosmic in scope (Eph. 1:10). God’s dream, purpose, plan is to bring together the parts of the cosmos which are scattered, fragmented, divided and separated. God’s cosmic intention is to reconcile, make peace, break down dividing walls of hostility, bring all things in the universe into a cosmic unity in Christ. Again, a staggering vision of cosmic reconciliation, or unity in all its incredible diversity which stretches far beyond what we humans have ever dared to imagine or think.

Cosmic Reconciliation

Much of our vision of reconciliation is limited by our human perspective. In other important New Testament texts reconciliation is visioned in particular contexts as reconciliation between God and humanity and between humans. The Romans 5 and 2 Corinthians 5 texts are significant in their Pauline contexts of human alienation and division, vertical and horizontal in Rome and Corinth. In Colossians and Ephesians reconciliation is cosmic. It is the reconciliation of ‘all things’. In Romans 8 though, Paul is also concerned with the restoration and liberation of nature/creation. Indeed, he sees no liberation or restoration for humans without that of all creation and vice versa. In Romans the life, death and resurrection of Jesus disarms or defeats the principalities and powers, the domination systems of the world. Reconciliation and victory are key motifs. The same imagery and word pictures are also found in Ephesians and we need to remember that we are dealing here with word pictures and metaphors. All of this suggests that the cosmic reconciling work of Jesus transforms creation, institutions and people.

In the thought forms and word pictures of Ephesians Jesus is Cosmic Lord and this is developed into a missiology and responsibility with cosmic scope. A key phrase in Ephesians is ‘the all’ which means the entire cosmos. The Lord of the cosmos is also portrayed as the Lord of the Church, a subversive title and role given that the Imperial Emperor was acclaimed as Lord. Much of the New Testament vocabulary is the language of the superpower intentionally being used to subvert and critique the idolatrous claims of the 1st century superpower and every superpower.

The Lord of the cosmos and church defines the responsibilities of the faith community in the face of all domination systems. The cosmic concerns of the Lord, the real and radically different emperor, are shared by the church. The church in Ephesians is therefore to be a sign and agent of reconciliation and peace in the world and cosmos. The church is also in a servant role making visible the loving presence of God (Eph. 2:7; 3:10; 6:10-20; 4:12). The church is not to be another domination system, oppressing, controlling, exploiting or behaving in a triumphalist or imperialist manner. The church is a servant community, especially a servant of God’s purpose of the reconciliation and unity of all things. The church in its prophetic/servant role is to ‘stand against’ and ‘resist’ the powers or systems and institutions that are violent, oppressive and dominating (Eph. 4:12; 6:13-14). The church therefore has a world/cosmic reconciling responsibility (Eph. 2).

Key Question for discussion

This leads us to a key question. If bookend theology and the faith story offer us a cosmic vision of reconciliation, then what are the ethical implications, ie for faithful living, in the face of the great ethical challenges of our time?

Three of the major ethical challenges affecting the cosmos and all of life at the beginning of the 21st century are:

- 1 the world dominating culture of violence and war, including weapons of mass destruction on earth and in space;
- 2 the environmental crisis and destruction of creation, planetary and stratosphere;
- 3 inter-faith dialogue and the need for a shared ethic of eco-human well-being and eco-human justice.

DR JOHNSTON McMASTER is Lecturer and Programme Co-ordinator of ‘Learning Together: Education for Reconciliation’ – the Continuing Education programme in Northern Ireland at the Irish School of Ecumenics.

rwanda ten years on



'I realised afresh that my enemy is my neighbour – the one that Jesus commands me to love.'

SOMETIMES it is because churches are places of such beauty or history that silence is the only appropriate response. Sometimes . . . but not always!

I asked our guide if it would be appropriate to enter the unremarkable redbrick church. Going through the front door and walking down the aisles I noticed myself doing something very strange. I realised that I was practically tiptoeing – somehow feeling that I was on sacred space. It was also a walk to be made in total silence.

Nyarubue Church is no ordinary place. Not now. Set in a village and high in the hills of eastern Rwanda it was a place that thousands of people fled to in 1994. The reasoning was simple. As a church, surely it would provide a place of sanctuary for people fleeing genocide. In a country and at a time when neighbour was turning against neighbour it seemed to offer one of the few places of safety and security. It was not to be the case.

Over a short space of time the church and its environs became thronged with terrified people. It was at such a time that someone gave the word to the militias. What followed was an attack on the church in which over twenty-five thousand people were murdered. What was meant to be a sanctuary became a mass killing ground. Some of those who ought to have been protectors had in fact been the betrayers.

It is a brutal fact that during the 1994 genocide in Rwanda the machete was most often the weapon of choice. In the space of one hundred days approximately one million people were murdered in this country. Perpetrators did not come from afar. Murder, rape and maiming were committed by fellow citizens. It was quite literally a case of neighbour against neighbour. On occasion it was even family member against family member.

My reason for being in Rwanda was as part of a seven-person team from CMS Ireland.¹ The Anglican Bishop of Kibungo, in eastern Rwanda, had invited us to lead a residential training week for his clergy. Our task was to teach on subjects such as leadership, development and reconciliation. Everywhere we went, and in all the people we met, the scars of genocide were never far from the surface.

What prompts the citizens of a country of approximately eight million people to commit such acts of intense madness? Why was Rwanda propelled from being an obscure country to being a main news item in 1994?

Rwanda was colonised during the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century. Colonisers decided to use a well-trying tactic for maintaining power – the tactic of divide and rule. At that time Rwanda was largely made up from three tribes: Hutu, Tutsi and Twa. Encouraging inter-tribal jealousy, suspicion and insecurity was a way of distracting the population from the fact of colonial rule.

During the 1950s and early 1960s Rwanda eventually gained its independence. The success of 'divide and rule' as a means of maintaining power was not lost on those who came to political power. The ideology of tribal division became well developed and articulated by those in power. Two disturbing features ensured the success of such a tactic. One was a compliant media that seemed happy to broadcast messages of hate, suspicion and division on behalf of the government. The other was a compliant church. Church had become close to power. In the process, its hierarchy not only failed to criticise such unchristian propaganda but also, in some cases, even supported it.

It is always easier to preach a difficult message of peace and reconciliation to someone else in far away places. On my first Sunday I was guest preacher at a local Anglican Church. My sermon was on the story of the Good Samaritan. Jesus was explicit about what was needed to inherit eternal life – to love God more than anything else, and to love our neighbour as ourselves. Jesus was making the point that our neighbour is not only our friend. Our enemy is also our neighbour. By tending to the needs of his Jewish enemy the Good Samaritan was loving his neighbour.

I was nervous about preaching such a message. Here I was in a country that was not my own and I did not want to cause more harm than good. I was also concerned about preaching such a message among people who had suffered far more than I would ever understand.

The congregation warmly received the message. It was later that I discovered that in the church were those orphaned and widowed by the genocide. Also in that congregation were people who, by action or by silence, had committed such terrible acts. Both sides of the conflict were represented in the church. To talk about loving your neighbour as yourself, in the terms of The Good Samaritan, was not lost on these people. They would understand it only too well.

As a visitor I had no right to tell them who their enemy was. But, I could tell them I knew who my enemy was in Northern Ireland – my



Nyarubue Church in eastern Rwanda. Photos: Earl Storey

political opponent, a person I profoundly mistrust, someone from the 'other' community. Not only that, it would also include people who were part of organisations that had killed or maimed friends.

We don't get to choose our 'neighbour'. Jesus is frighteningly to the point and relevant. I realised afresh that my enemy is my neighbour – the one that Jesus commands me to love. If Christianity in my divided community is to have any integrity this is what must be lived out.

What is truly remarkable in a people to have suffered so much, so recently is their open commitment to peace and reconciliation. The message is preached energetically by both government and church. At the end of our visit I met with the Vice-Chairperson of the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission, who happens to be a committed Christian. He was unequivocal in saying that the message of reconciliation had to be preached clearly and unmistakably. All this from a man whose father was murdered in tribal violence in 1963! I reflected on how tempting it is for the Church in Ireland to be so 'careful' in its talk about the most fundamental teaching of Jesus – loving our neighbour. So 'careful' in fact that the real impact of the teaching gets lost in our fearful diplomacy.

The message I saw the Church in Rwanda preach was also holistic. It was a message of the need for personal salvation. There was also an important emphasis on the need for development. This was a message of particular power and relevance in a country with few natural resources and much poverty. It was clear that the gospel message had to be about lifting up the poor. Running through the very sinews of the Church was also the message of reconciliation. The cost of such a message would not need to be explained in such a country.

It seems as though the Church in Rwanda has managed to weave together the threads of personal salvation, development and reconciliation. It is not a case of 'either/or'. To preach one of these is not to diminish the importance of the other. This is a lesson for the church in Northern Ireland where the Christian community tends to polarise round one of these threads to the exclusion of the others. In so doing, there is the temptation to look askance at others with different emphases. The power of Christian witness in our own community is where we have a burning heart for people's souls, for the poor, and for reconciliation in our divided community.

One reflection has taken time to come together in my own mind. In

Rwanda there seems to be an agreed narrative about the awfulness of what happened during the genocide. No one tries to justify or excuse what happened. There is no appetite for calling it something other than what it was. This honesty is a vital part of what makes reconciliation possible. This seems to be absent in Northern Ireland. There is an attempt to 'sanitise', rewrite and justify the unjustifiable. Maiming and murder does not transform into something else with the passage of time. It may do so in the telling of the story, but not in reality. Airbrushing the story will impede rather than enable reconciliation.

The genocide of 1994 in Rwanda did not just come out of nowhere. It was not created in a vacuum. It was the result of hunger for power, a constant message of division and the absence of a critical voice either in the media or from the church. So why is Rwanda a remarkable place? Is it because of the unspeakable scale of the horror? Does the sheer volume of loss of life mark it out on its own? In one sense, yes. Yet, in another, it does not do justice to this country or these people! What is remarkable is the honesty and mercy with which this population is dealing with the legacy of its past. Their motivation is a desire for the horrors of the past not to be the story of the future.

1 The Church Missionary Society (Church of Ireland).

EARL STOREY is a former Church of Ireland Rector who now works with a Community Development Company. He is also running a peacebuilding project in Derry and Raphoe dioceses. Earl is Chair of Community Relations and Christians – an umbrella organisation for churches of all denominations in Derry/Londonderry.



RUSSELL & KATHARINE NORTON

anglo-irish relations

"I'M DELIGHTED to hear that you're going out with Russell. Just one question though, is he English?!" This question was put to me, Katharine, when I wrote from England to a friend back in Ireland with news of my boyfriend. It was not her anti-Englishness that prompted the question, but rather her concern about my own nationalistic tendencies!

We are now 16 months married. This paper looks at how we, a Dublin woman and a man from southern England, have faced up as Christians to the troubled relationship between our countries. This is our story so far...

Acknowledging our Cultures and History

We made a study of these things while at Bible college together last year (2003-4) where we were directed to *Love Across Latitudes* (Fraser-Smith 1993), a workbook for those either in, or considering, a cross-cultural marriage. The book helped us highlight the distinctive cultural and historical perspectives that we each bring to our marriage.

We found contrasts, such as English tending to stick to the rules while Irish lean towards a more flexible application of rules, and between Irish group culture and English individualism. We also acknowledged among the Irish a sense of victimisation and only very recent emergence of national pride, and among the English, both ethnocentrism and a crisis of identity.

Katharine recognised that her understanding of the colonisation of Ireland by the English was idealistic and emotional and Russell recognised that his understanding of this aspect of history was limited. So for us the next step was to read what historical accounts we could to inform ourselves on the facts of the situation.

Much of what we read fills us with sadness. We feel it important not to ignore this and to grieve appropriately for the sins and hurts of our countrymen and women. Since we are both musical, we intend to do this by composing some laments together. Parker (2001) suggests lament as a suitable biblical response once the pain of conflict has been acknowledged. Katharine, as an ethnomusicologist who has helped Christians in Africa to express their heart to God, is keenly aware that lament is often absent from our contemporary Western worship, but is something from which we can benefit.

Walking Away from Hostile Attitudes

In our discussions we observed that there are British and Irish attitudes today that perpetuate the hostility of the past: anti-Englishness on the part of Irish people; attitudes of superiority and ethnocentricity from English people. We saw that we could walk away from these things in our lives and marriage for the sake of reconciliation with each other and those whom we encounter. So, Katharine decided that when England are playing in international sport, instead of supporting the opposition,

'Our cultures traditionally mock one another or try to marginalise each other...'

as the Irish tend to do, that she will support England (unless it's against Ireland, of course!). Russell avoids ethnocentric comments and gently challenges his compatriots when they presume to talk with authority about Ireland, inviting Katharine to share her perspective.

Marriage as a 'Third-Culture' Zone

Our cultures traditionally mock one another or try to marginalise each other, but in our marriage, we want to give the other room to express their Englishness/Irishness. The other culture is intrinsic to the one we love, and we each want the other one to flourish. Marriage itself creates a 'third culture zone' (Fraser-Smith 1993:52-53) where we can explore the best of both cultures and allow them to mix in new and creative ways. We explore each other's culture through films (e.g. *Bend It Like Beckham*, *The Madness of King George*, *Passage To India*, *Michael Collins*, *The Field*), reading (e.g. Frank O'Connor short stories, *Pride and Prejudice*), food (e.g. Irish soda bread, potato cakes, tea brack, Avoca salads, Cornish pasties), and music (e.g. Iona, The Corrs, The Secret Garden).

We made a point last year of celebrating St Patrick's Day together, even though we were in England at the time. Then we were asked what we were doing for St George's Day! This seemed harder to do as Englishness is not celebrated in this way. It struck us that the English are unsure how to celebrate their identity without appearing superior and imperial again. However, we wanted to celebrate the positive. First of all we had to find out when St George's Day actually is! (It's April 23rd.) The only celebrations we could find on the internet were drink-related, so we came up with our own ideas. We decorated the house with red roses, went out for fish and chips, and because we learned that St George was martyred for objecting to the cruel treatment of Christians in the Roman Empire, we decided to use his day to pray for the persecuted church.

Rooted in Celtic Christianity

As we have looked back into the history of our islands, we have found ourselves looking beyond the 700 years of colonialism and oppression to the rich heritage of early Celtic Christianity. Here we find a rich Christ-centred heritage that spans our different backgrounds. Patrick, who brought Christianity to Ireland in AD 435, is understood to have been a British Celt. Later, Celtic Christians left the shores of Ireland for Iona, and from there travelled on foot throughout England, bringing the life and love of Jesus to everyone they met. Aidan, the Irish saint who led the evangelisation of England, worked in friendship with Hilda, a Saxon abbess. Also, since Russell is half-Cornish, we note that other Irish saints brought Christianity from Ireland to Cornwall.

Ray Simpson, of the present-day Community of Aidan and Hilda, has said that going back to the roots of the Celtic Church

can make healing of our divisions possible (Simpson 1994:230). This applies to us. We have discovered a positive common heritage which we are celebrating together. We enjoy reading what we can about these remarkable people and have visited sites of Celtic Christianity in both Ireland and England. In addition, we are learning many good things from Celtic spirituality that we can imitate for our own wholeness in our missionary life: e.g. a rhythm of work and prayer, hospitality, identifying with a culture in everything except sin, worshipping God in every aspect of life, following the call of the Spirit.

Conclusion

We feel like we are on an exciting journey as we begin exploring these things and notice that our marriage has been enriched by tackling these issues rather than avoiding them. As we now go to live and work in East Africa, we pray that we can share our experiences with people there who struggle with division and inter-ethnic hatred, or with the memory of colonialism.

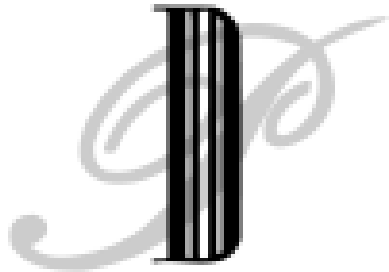
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KATHARINE (nee TRAVERS) and RUSSELL NORTON work with Wycliffe Bible Translators, (although the views expressed are their own). They met at the Wycliffe training centre in England, and married in September 2003. They can be contacted via the Centre for Contemporary Christianity in Ireland or lionandlamb@contemporarychristianity.com



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DAVID CHILLINGWORTH

the hard gospel

'I want to see a return to the hard gospel. That is the solution to the problem of sectarianism. The hard gospel is... that you love God and love your neighbour as yourself. End of story.'

That comment from a retired Church of Ireland Rector, quoted in the preface to the Hard Gospel Report, provided the 'brand name' for the Hard Gospel movement which is about to become a three year programme for the Church of Ireland. Touching the lives of dioceses and parishes and engaging with the central structures of the church, the Hard Gospel has the potential to reshape significantly the life of the Church of Ireland in the future. Its roots, of course, lie much further back.

In the recent book on Archbishop Robin Eames, Alf McCreary quotes him as saying that Drumcree was 'My Calvary'. It was no less painful for the Church of Ireland as a whole. If you live in Portadown, you tend to see everything through the lens of Drumcree. But I believe that Drumcree was the key event which exposed a number of historical ambiguities with which the Church of Ireland and other churches have lived for too long. Internally divided and externally criticised, the Church of Ireland found itself year after year unable to detach itself from a tragedy not of its making but with which it was inextricably linked.

Historic, institutional churches are broad coalitions. People belong by faith conviction – but also by birth and family tradition. Faith is deeply held but sometimes may not be consciously 'thought out.' Where faith is held as but one element of personal identity alongside strands of cultural and political belonging, there is room for the growth of sectarianism. In such an environment, 'our people' may be the visible community of faith – or it may be a much broader community of cultural or political identity and interest. The Church of Ireland and other churches have begun to recognise that it is in those ambiguities of language and practice that sectarianism has room to grow. Churches can be 'part of the problem'.

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'In every part of Ireland today, people are challenged by differences of culture, colour, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, age.'

The churches, of course, have long recognised this and have attempted to respond. Clergy have called for restraint and forgiveness at the funeral of victims of the violence. There has been a transformation in inter-church relationships. The leaders of the four main churches have given a valuable witness to the shared concern of the churches for our whole society. At local level, there is growing evidence of a desire to co-operate and share. The churches have been setting out the new patterns of relating. The problem is that they have not also dismantled or decommissioned the old. To put it at its simplest, most congregations contain people who believe that it is a primary task of the church to be an agent of reconciliation. Those same congregations contain people who believe that the Church of Ireland is there to sustain the religious, political and cultural identity of the broader protestant community. And many people believe both at the same time.

And we don't talk about it. 'Whatever you say, say nothing,' is the order of the day. For the fear is that to open up such emotive issues will make the coalition unsustainable. So when the Orange Order at Drumcree insisted on worshipping in a Church of Ireland church while refusing to respond to the concerns of its neighbours, the Church of Ireland was helpless.

But gradually the Church of Ireland began to respond. In 1997, the General Synod asked the Standing Committee 'to identify ways in which the Church may be deemed to be accommodating to sectarianism ...' In response to this request, the Report of the Sub-Committee on Sectarianism was presented to General Synod in 1999.

Writing about the Report, Joe Leichty of the Moving Beyond Sectarianism Project said: 'No denomination has ever addressed sectarianism as an internal problem so directly and publicly, consequently helping to take discussion of sectarianism out of the realm of angry accusation and furtive gossip and to make thinking and talking about sectarianism an ordinary part of what it means to reflect on being Christian today.'

'The Hard Gospel' Report followed and was presented to General Synod in 2003. The Report attempted to 'map the landscape' of the Church of Ireland in regard to sectarianism and drew an extraordinarily strong response from clergy and people throughout the church. A set of studies and discussion material linking the main themes of the Report with biblical passages was prepared for Lent 2004 and was used throughout the Church.

The Hard Gospel Report recognised that sectarianism is only the most obvious of a wide range of 'living with difference' issues with which we

are confronted today. Sectarianism, a failure to deal positively with religious and political difference, becomes a sign of a failure to deal with other areas of difference. In every part of Ireland today, people are challenged by differences of culture, colour, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, age. This ensures that the people of the Church of Ireland in every part of Ireland can recognise in the issues of their daily lives echoes of the sectarianism which they might otherwise dismiss as purely a 'northern problem.'

The Church of Ireland is well placed to meet this challenge. The diversity and geographical spread of its membership means that the Church of Ireland already carries 'living with difference' issues within its own life. Patsy McGarry, writing in the Winter 2000 issue of *Search*, said, 'No other church or religious grouping, no political party or public institution in Ireland commands within its ranks the loyalty of such a proportion of both major political traditions.'

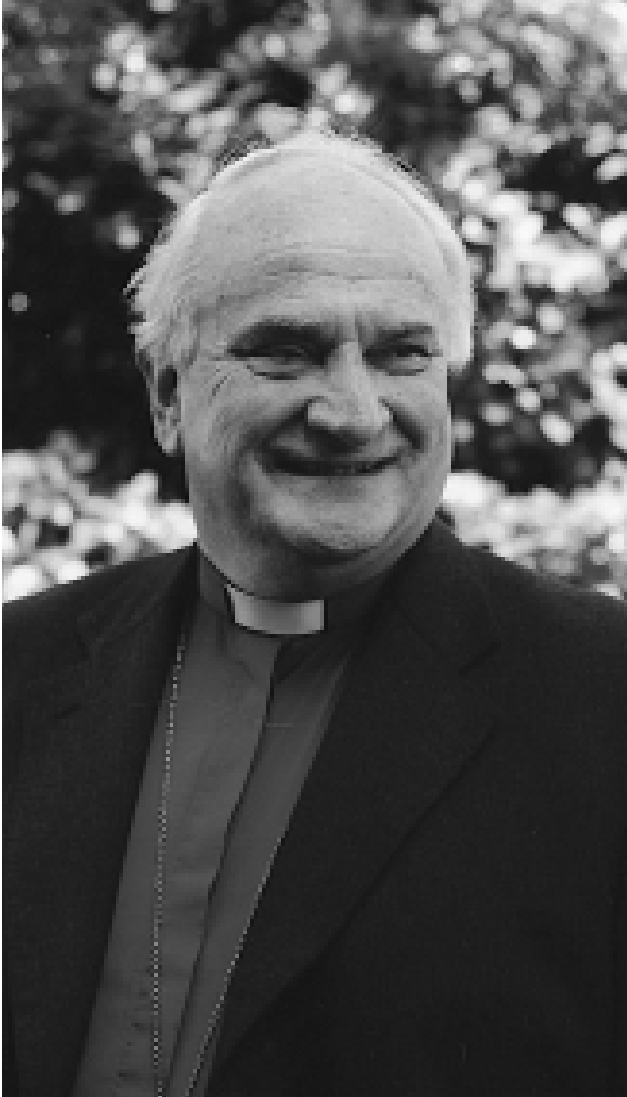
The Church of Ireland is now ready to embark on the Hard Gospel Programme. Major external funding is in place and is being matched by the Church of Ireland's own resources. The programme will focus on two aspects of the life of the church. It will work with people and clergy in parishes and dioceses, helping them to think about the tangles of faith and identity with which we have grown up – encouraging people to make faith the element which shapes the whole of our lives. The Hard Gospel will also work within the central structures and decision-making processes of the Church of Ireland and will help the church to become more aware of how it deals with difference in its own life and of its role in the wider society of Ireland, north and south.

The Church of Ireland is embarking on this project, knowing that other major churches in Ireland are beginning to move in the same direction. For this is ultimately about the spiritual renewal which all churches seek individually and together. Only churches which are spiritually strong will be able to overcome sectarianism. Only churches which have overcome sectarianism will become free to respond to the leading of God's spirit.

DAVID CHILLINGWORTH is now Bishop of St Andrews in the Scottish Episcopal Church. He was until recently Rector of Seagoe Parish Church, Portadown and Chair of the Hard Gospel Committee.

RECONCILIATION

a view from armagh



The Most Rev Dr Robin Eames is Church of Ireland Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of all Ireland. A lawyer by training and a cleric by vocation, he recently served as Chairman of the Lambeth Commission on Communion, which produced the Windsor Report in October 2004. Alf McCreary's 2004 biography of Archbishop Robin Eames, *Nobody's Fool*, is published by Hodder & Stoughton.

How do you see the current situation? Are we more divided than ever? The Peace Process is the in-phrase that people use and for years it has worried me that this phrase is perhaps clouding the real situation. Everybody talks about the Peace Process, but what they mean is the political process. I always try to draw the distinction between the political, which establishes structures that will allow reconciliation to take place and government to move on, and what is happening in the hearts and minds of people on the ground, because you cannot impose reconciliation. You can produce legislation geared to help people to live together, but until people on the ground – in their homes and their jobs, in their churches, wherever they are – are prepared to see reconciliation as something worthwhile, you are only dealing with part of the process. I have been dealing with people in the pastoral realm and because of my position I have to have very close contact in the political world, but to me the number one priority is what happens to ordinary people.

I share the disappointment of so many about the progress of political agreement. However I remain optimistic in the long term that some agreement will emerge. But I still have to concentrate on the hearts and minds battle, which is for people. Comparing the current situation with when I was ordained in 1963, Northern Ireland has progressed beyond all recognition in so many ways. The dreadful dark days of the murders, violence and atrocities are over. We see paramilitaries now in terms of criminal acts rather than in terms of involvement in political violence. We still await decommissioning and 'the end of the war', but in terms of the normality of Northern Ireland we have come light years.

When people get a bit disheartened and say to me, 'There are so many problems still to tackle' I say, 'Yes, but see how far we have come. Take heart from that.' And that is biblical because the prophets were always saying that vision is linked to experience and your experience of the past should inform your perception of what's possible in the future. Memory and dealing with memories is probably the most important ingredient in people's lives. How they deal with their past experience determines to a very large extent the sort of person they are and the sort of person they will become. Deep resentment of something you or your family has experienced in the past will colour your judgement. If, on the other hand, you can say, 'The past is the past, and we move on,' it helps. But in a Christian sense we have to constantly turn back to the experience of the goodness and guidance of a God who is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow.

Can we find a way of remembering that doesn't reinforce sectarian divisions?

Forgiveness, recognition of hurt, acknowledging that everyone, irrespective of political outlook or religious tradition, is made in the image of the same God, all of these are vital.

The desire to move on puts things in perspective and other things find their own level of importance, but I think it is important to realise that unless we recognise the role of memories, the future will be artificial. Your generation may not have the same memories that some of us have of the very darkest days and what it did to people. I think irrespective of our age group or our tradition we need to recognise there are those in this society for whom memory is a very, very controlling thing.

'You cannot impose reconciliation. Until people on the ground are prepared to see reconciliation as something worthwhile, you are only dealing with part of the process.'

We have yet to deal with memory in the wider collective sense. Over the years I have had close contact with my friend Desmond Tutu. When it was first voiced that we might have a Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Northern Ireland, similar to the one in South Africa, I took the trouble to get him to give me all the data on what happened in Cape Town. The more I have studied it, the more I am convinced that we cannot simply take the South African model and say this will work in Northern Ireland. But I do think the time may come when we may have to find a way to allow people to bleed in public. Now I haven't the answer. I'm not saying, 'This is the model'. I am simply saying, collectively, we may have to find a way to allow people's memories to be recognised.

I have buried many, many people who were murdered. I know their families and what they have gone through and I know what it has done to their faith. Therefore I am conscious that there is no easy answer. But I have to recognise that, as we move into a new era, we cannot push away memories and say they are not relevant. We mustn't lose the lessons of the past, because we know what the dangers are.

Is reconciliation still about Protestants and Catholics or is there a need for reconciliation in other areas?

Traditionally and historically the divisions in Northern Ireland between Catholic and Protestant, unionist and nationalist/republican. But while we were preoccupied with our narrow sectarian divides the world has grown.

In Northern Ireland we were a fertile ground for racialism because sectarianism in the religious and political sense taught us how to be over-defensive. In the past, if you were from the other community immediately you were seen as the enemy, as someone out to undermine my position and the position of my community. You were nothing to me other than a threat.

In the early days of the Troubles I was a rector in east Belfast and I saw the UDA born in my parish. It taught me that for a society or a community under threat defensiveness is the first reaction, retreating into your own kind whenever you feel or perceive you are under attack.

The same principle applies to other things, if I don't like your sexuality habits I will defend mine at all costs, I won't even seek to understand you; if I don't like your politics, I'll defend my position, I'm not going to move, 'not an inch!' – the unionist thing. Because I don't like what you are saying, you are a threat to me. Sexuality, politics and religion are all the same in this respect. If you get the human reaction to it you begin to understand much more why people say and do the things.

Now, thanks to the political process, we are beginning to see that in fact there is room for power sharing, there's room at a government level for acting together. What we haven't yet done is to realise that our defensiveness in that realm has so easily been translated into our attitudes towards anyone who

isn't of our outlook, or gender, who doesn't hold our particular ideas of justice.

I have just finished a year's work on behalf of the Anglican Communion on the whole homosexual issue – the Windsor Report has just been published. Very serious divisions arose within the Anglican Communion over the question of our attitude to sexuality, particularly in official positions in the church. What I have seen in Northern Ireland in terms of the sources and the depth of sectarianism is not confined to political and religious issues. We have yet to understand the universality of humankind – that what binds people of colour, gender, class, creed is far more positive than what divides them. What we are seeing now, in terms of these divisions, is the world coming of age. These divisions are at least out in the open and for that we are grateful. They are no longer whispered in dark corners. Political and religious differences, differences on the issue of sexuality are all coming to the surface and forcing the world in our generation to say, 'What is our attitude to this?' 'What does difference mean?'

The Anglican phrase 'unity in diversity' is part of my make-up. It is my experience that there is a basic unity in people being different. Two things matter: how you recognise difference and how you allow difference to coexist. Those are the keys to these questions. It doesn't matter whether it is political, whether it is Protestant/Catholic reconciliation or race-relations, my answer would be the same.

The word 'reconciliation' has become the most misused and misunderstood word of our generation. If I reach out to someone of a different colour or creed or political outlook there are many people in my community would say, 'You have surrendered,' the implication being that it is a sign of weakness. Reconciliation has got to be seen as a sign of strength not weakness, in whatever context.

When asked the question, 'What is reconciliation?' I have tried to say reconciliation is like this: there are two people walking through a field, talking. One is whatever label you want to tie to him the other is another label. True reconciliation comes when A says to B, 'This is what I believe and this is why I believe it, please tell me what you believe and why you believe that.' Or, 'This is the sort of person I am and this is what has made me what I am. Tell me what sort of a person you are and what has made you that person.' Then the next question, 'How can we see what is common in our concerns and what makes us human?' And all the while we will continue to walk through that field. I won't ask you to change your colour, religious conviction or your political aspiration but I will try to understand what is important to you so that I do not infringe upon you, and what is important to me I would ask you not to infringe in my case and we continue to walk together, we don't stop walking. The next step is not to speak but to think about how much we have shared and to realise we are still walking in parallel across ➡ [continued on page 16]

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a view from armagh

that field. For the word 'field' you impose your locality, your world, your nationality – anything you like – but the two figures walk on into the distance. But they have made a million miles' progress in terms of understanding and that's reconciliation.

Reconciliation has to involve pain, it's got to involve sacrifice and it's got to involve compromise, but it has also got to involve truth. You may be different to me in many ways, but I don't ask you to change totally so that you can be reconciled to me. I have got to be reconciled to the fact of difference and to respect that but to realise that at the bottom of it all you and I were made in the image of the same God.

What do the churches need to do?

First of all the churches need to recognise they are no longer in competition. What is at stake is that the one gospel has to be expressed in ways that people will understand the universality of humankind. Secondly, we need to be far more active on the street level – we must come out of the sanctuary and out of the pulpit and get our hands dirty.

We must be prepared for people to say, 'You have given us a bland answer to this issue. That's not good enough'. We have got to be prepared to listen when they say that to us. We have got to say to them 'Isn't it important that we believe in a Calvary experience?' That Christ who was sacrificed through the evil of the world so that he might raise us to a new realm of understanding?

I cannot see a gospel in any other terms than getting my hands dirty. It may mean misunderstanding of what I am doing or saying, or anger and resentment for what I am doing, but for me the important thing is at the end of the day can I get on my knees and say, 'I have tried today Jesus to do what I think you would have done in spite of the fact that people misunderstand me and don't accept the way I want them to go.'

The churches must get new courage in speaking the truth from the heart. I think we have to be more courageous on speaking out on big issues, such as racialism. To me the needs of the world are the most important aspect. When you get to the basis of human need you realise the common call of humanity and that is nothing to do with religion or politics or nationality or colour. It is to do with the fact that in a world that God made there is such want and need and injustice and so many people in the so-called civilised west are going through their lives as though that didn't exist.

The churches have got to recognise that they are often preaching to the converted. Young people say to me more and more, 'We haven't lost faith, we haven't lost a sense of the spiritual but we don't like or don't understand what is coming out of the sanctuary or the pulpit.'

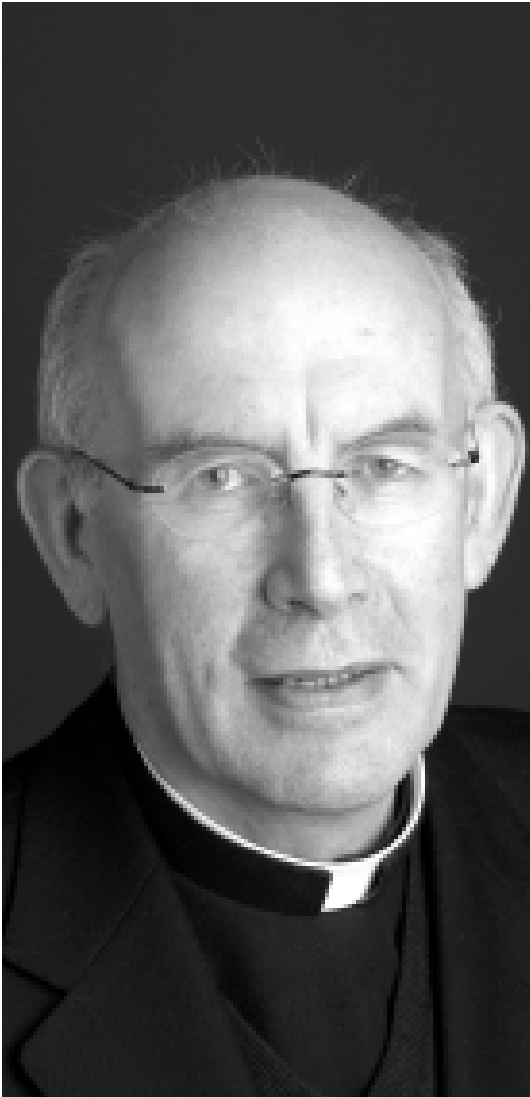
The church has got to leave the comfortable pew and has got to go out to the real needs of people. In a secular Ireland, in a racially motivated and a sectarian Ireland, until we have

people who are not necessarily wearing a clerical collar doing the work of Christ we won't have really grappled with the real problems. The ministry of the laity has become a priority in my lifetime, for my tradition and for most churches, and I think the role of clergy in relation to laity is changing vastly. We have to motivate and empower laity to do the work of Christ rather than thinking we are the only ones who are equipped to do it. That transformation is going on and it will take a long time but I think it is a total priority for the churches. In the structure of a church like mine, yes there is authority, but if I have contributed anything to the understanding of authority in the Church of Ireland I hope it is that service is more important than authority.

Sectarianism remains the really deep illness of this society and we haven't conquered it yet, nor are we within sight of conquering it. The Church of Ireland has engaged a very expansive approach called the Hard Gospel. To me, that is one of the most valuable things that has happened in my primacy in the Church of Ireland and it is bringing results. It is getting local congregations to think. It's not, 'You're sectarian, I don't want anything to do with you.' It's, 'What have I got that is sectarian in me?' That's the way in which I believe it is beginning to bite in my own tradition. I think we have a lot to share with others because of what we are going through in this project.

The churches have never worked more closely together as they do now. In my lifetime there has been a tremendous coming together of, not just church leadership, but people at the ground level realising the commonality of faith, of forgiveness and of religious experience. When I was ordained there was very little real contact between the main churches. Now the Roman Catholic Primate and I meet regularly, the Presbyterian Moderator, the Methodist President, the leaders of all the other churches, we are in very, very regular contact. This is the way I believe it should be. If the church has been part of the problem in terms of sectarianism, it's the old phrase; it has got to be part of the solution. We are slowly learning that.

ARCHBISHOP ROBIN EAMES was interviewed by Anna Rankin on 26th November 2004.



The Most Rev Dr Seán Brady is Roman Catholic Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All-Ireland and is currently President of the Irish Bishops' Conference. A native of Co Cavan, he taught at St Patrick's College for 13 years before serving as Vice-rector and Rector at the Irish College in Rome until 1994.

How do you see the current situation? Are we more divided than ever? Last week I was speaking at the reopening of St John's Church on the Garvaghy Road and I took the text from Isaiah chapter 2 about the swords and spears, the symbols of war, being battered into ploughshares and pruning hooks. I thought it was appropriate for this time when we are talking about decommissioning. There is a call to all of us, not to just leave it to politicians, to examine our own attitudes towards people who are different to us and see what in our own attitudes has to be hammered into ploughshares. The people of Northern Ireland have waited patiently for the type of peace envisaged by Isaiah in chapter 65, where the hunter and the prey, wolf and lamb, lie down together. I was appealing to everyone in our society to continue to hope and to work towards that hope.

I am quite hopeful about reconciliation. The people in Northern Ireland have made a remarkable journey. Some might be getting weary and believe that nothing more can be done or has to be done, but we must continue to hope that generosity and new approaches to old problems can bring a brighter future.

I do believe that new relationships are possible – in some cases they already exist. They must be marked by generosity, understanding, patience and forgiveness. If these hopes were to be dashed again the cynics would win and the losers would be the people who believe that we are quite capable of dealing with our own affairs through locally elected politicians. We are once again at a delicate moment and that is why I am urging people to keep that hope alive.

Is reconciliation still about Protestant and Catholics?

As our society becomes more pluralist the issues of how we welcome people from other countries arise. It really is about how we deal with difference that is important. When people are confronted with difference they often feel threatened and therefore do not welcome people from other countries as they should. Jesus always extended the boundaries of expectation, especially in terms of the diversity of unexpected people he welcomed into his company. St. Paul also tells us to make hospitality our special care.

I suppose the big divider here is still the religious/political one but great progress has been made. The term reconciliation is a difficult one. On a personal level, say within a family, when attitudes harden and hard words are spoken, reconciliation is difficult. Reconciliation is also difficult at the societal level, especially in an era when people don't seem to take personal criticism too well or reflect critically on their attitudes and actions. I think we need to evaluate ourselves and examine ourselves more.

Have we adequately addressed the issue of sectarianism?

We have grown in our awareness of sectarianism and do give it increased consideration but sometimes people don't see it as an urgent matter. They feel there are more urgent things to be dealt with, like the implementation of the Belfast Agreement; they would see that as important.

The situation is improving and not just at the church level. I was at a function last week where the GAA chairman for Armagh, Joe Jordan, referred to the fact that Annetta Flanagan had been released and there was a spontaneous outburst of applause which I thought was fantastic. Maybe we are too much inclined to keep it at the cerebral level, it has to come down

RECONCILIATION

a view from armagh

into the emotions of people so people can identify with the suffering. People identified with the suffering of that family. There was a spontaneous empathy and compassion for the person concerned. That is cathartic; that is purifying.

We are, I think, realising that sectarianism is something that has to be grasped and addressed and overcome. What we need to ask is, 'Have I more Protestant friends or more Catholic friends than I had years ago?' 'How often do I meet them?' There is an awareness people are not just content to settle for tolerance of each other. I think they are quite right to have higher ambitions. We can enrich each other with our different traditions – not just living side-by-side in a tolerant coexistence. I think the future will have to be shared or it won't be a real future. There is no other future on offer to us.

There are problems still to be solved, but they are the sorts of problems which often arise in post-conflict situations. Maybe you do hear some stories of hardening of attitudes but I think what we are seeing these days is something truly historical. Opponents are sitting down and talking and revealing their potential to move and to change and hopefully to deliver us devolved government, and hopefully good government, applying their energies and delivering policies to which the whole community can sign up. That's my hope.

What do the churches need to do?

We need to remember that one of the objectives of every follower of Christ is to be a peacemaker, and to strive for the kind of unity that Christ desires. Everyone who is in Christ is a new creation. Reconciliation is a vital challenge for the churches.

2 Corinthians 5 says we are ambassadors for Christ: God reconciled us to himself in Christ and gave us the work of handing it on. We cannot avoid that challenge and I think civil society quite rightly looks to the church and to church leaders to be ambassadors of that reconciliation. The questions we have to ask ourselves are, 'Am I a fit person to be such an ambassador?' 'Am I a conciliatory kind of person?' 'Am I sensitive to other people?' 'Have I the capacity to stand in the other person's shoes or walk the road alongside them?' We need to be self-critical and examine if we are using all the opportunities available to us to be reconcilers and bridge-builders.

There are certainly many more meetings between clergy, but also at parish level. In Cookstown there is a church forum as well as a clergy forum and they come together and exchange visits and organise trips away. More and more of that needs to happen so that we grow in our understanding.

In my first years up here I addressed a service at Fitzroy Presbyterian church and we said the Creed together and, to my shame, it was the first time I had really realised how much we have in common – all of those great truths that have come down through the centuries, chiselled out in the first millennium. That unites you and me, we are in Christ.

As followers of Christ, we are interested first and foremost in the peace of Christ, which is reconciliation with the Father. But it is also tied to reconciliation with our brothers and sisters because the forgiveness he offers is tied to the forgiveness which we offer to those who trespass against us. We have to be bearers of hope, and signs of hope in a time where there is a lot of tendency to despair.

How can we remember the past in a way that doesn't reinforce sectarian divisions?

When I was reflecting on this I thought of the Lord's command to us 'do this in memory of me' at the Last Supper, when he was talking about the Eucharist. Now he didn't intend that to be done in memory of him to recall the injustices that were perpetrated against him. I think, rather, he is calling us to remember the love he had which enabled him to overcome that injustice and the unjust suffering and death that was inflicted upon him. Through his love and through the love of the Father he was raised up and he overcame evil and overcame the injustice and somehow in there are indications for us for how to remember.

Memory is very important. Discovering the truth is very important because the truth shall set us free. Not by recalling in an acrimonious way but in a healing way; facing the reality of the situation, but also facing the reality of our own situation, our own limitations, our own sinfulness and weakness and trying to extend understanding of the situation.

I think some kinds of ritual of remembrance are very important because within the ritual there is the possibility of healing. In our church we have the Sacrament of Confession where people recall their sins and confess them not alone to God but to the church. Because if I sin, if I kill somebody, I'm not alone offending God, I'm sinning against my neighbour and the wider body of the church, therefore it is only right and fair that I should seek forgiveness from them. The big thing that has to be emphasised in reconciliation is the need for forgiveness. We are reluctant to do that because we are reluctant to admit that we, in fact, are sinners and need forgiveness. I think that is crucial.

Reconciliation is a big challenge and yet Christ has set out the way for us. He forgave those who put him to death. I think we can remember faithfully and honestly what has happened not in a spirit of recrimination or bitterness or blame but in sure confidence that God can draw good out of any situation. 'For those who love God all things work together onto good.'

Is there a link between inability to deal with sectarian division and the rise of racism in our society?

I'm not too sure whether it is inability, maybe it is unwillingness. Difficulty coping with difference is not confined to Catholics and Protestants; it is part of the human condition. We live in

‘Maybe we are too much inclined to keep it at the cerebral level, it has to come down into the emotions of people so people can identify with the suffering.’

a very broken society.

The number of incidents against people from other countries is shameful. Of course it is linked to our reluctance to welcome difference whether it is different religion, different race or different colour of skin. Racism is a disgrace wherever it happens, especially when followers of Christ do it, but it is part of this fear of people who are different and a lack of appreciation of their dignity in the sight of God. They are made in the image and likeness of God, as we are, and we are equal in the sight of God. We have to try and change attitudes and improve our appreciation of the value of every human being. In God’s eyes we are equal. We are not the same – or else the world would be very boring – but we are equal in dignity.

I think people are becoming ever more conscious of their own personal dignity. They know when their dignity is being offended. Everyone has the right to be respected. Dignity is the basic motif in matters of religious freedom, for example. No one may be compelled, we believe, to act against his or her conscience and no one can be prevented from acting in accordance with their conscience; that is the basis of religious freedom. I think that fact needs to be underscored.

Do you see a need for reconciliation in other areas?

I am totally opposed to the irresponsible use of the resources of this earth. The environment is something created by God, God saw that it was good. It is given to us to help us on our pilgrimage through life. We shouldn’t divinise or absolutise the environment in the sense of giving it a value that the creator didn’t give it. But it is something good and certainly not to be exploited irresponsibly. That is one of the limitations of the consumer society, people are being urged to consume, consume, consume. It is a disgrace how much energy certain parts of the world consume. We appreciate the gifts of this earth, we should be thankful for them but we should be very respectful. One of the things the Africans can teach us is a frugal lifestyle, the advantage of simplicity of lifestyle. We need to hold this relationship in a proper balance.

The gap between the rich and poor in the world is the biggest threat to world peace. The poor have a right to a share in the goods of this earth and it is only basic common sense, even in terms of providing for our own security, to take steps to ensure a fairer division of the goods of this earth. Progress has been made, but more needs to be done and we need to be aware of that. God’s will is for justice, the work of justice is peace and the work of peace is justice. That’s the basis of peace: truth, justice and solidarity with the weaker nations of the world.

There are also inequalities between the sexes which should be addressed. The Lord created the human race male and female, different but equal. That equality needs to be recognised, accepted and appreciated. The ability to procreate and bring children in the world would point to a complementarity of the

sexes, that man and woman are called to co-operate not to compete.

Marriage and the family, for me, is God’s plan for the world because every generation comes from a union of men and women. That plan is very important and very sacred. The harmony of relationships is crucial I think to the stability of society, to peace, to giving children a fair chance in life, to their education and their emotional development. When a man and a woman bring a child into the world it is a great privilege but also a huge responsibility. In God’s plan they are to co-operate not just in bringing a child into the world but in rearing and educating that child.

We need to be aware of the importance of reconciliation when conflicts arise, as they do in all family situations. People need to seek to achieve reconciliation rather than walking away which seems to be the common solution. The number of shattered relationships is frightening. Some people, especially children, are paying a very high price for these divisions, our inability to cope with difference and our inability to accept our own limitations.

I am greatly touched by the image from the Book of the Apocalypse in chapter 5, verses 1-7. The angel asks, ‘Is there anyone worthy to open the scroll?’ The elder suggests the lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David. But it is not the lion, who has triumphed, it is the Passover lamb, who has suffered and who represents not one tribe but all the people, who has the mandate to open the scroll and reveal God’s secret plans. The movement in this passage is from the few to the many, from the aggressiveness of the lion to the sacrificial self-offering of the lamb. I believe that Christian disciples have always glimpsed this dynamic in the Lord Jesus and his attempt to embody that for the peace of the world. Even though we might keep slipping back occasionally, my prayer is that, especially at this crucial moment in the quest for peace and reconciliation, we have to keep coming back to that image of the lamb. We all still have a lot to learn from this startling vision.

I am very grateful to you for this opportunity to speak to the readers of *lion&lamb*.



Professionalising the churches' contribution to reconciliation?

MARIA POWER

church-based peacebuilding

Assessing the
developing role
played by ECONI in
church-based
peacebuilding in
Northern Ireland.

This article is based
on a case study
from PhD research
on the history of
inter-church relations
in Northern Ireland
carried out by Maria
Power independently
but with the full co-
operation of ECONI.

WHEN THE BELFAST AGREEMENT was signed in 1998, the critical challenge facing Northern Irish society was the need for reconciliation between the Protestant and Catholic communities. In contrast to previous political agreements, such as the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1985, the Belfast Agreement reflected the ethos of the growing community grassroots movement, with its emphasis upon the involvement of local people in the community and the need for the participation of all shades of political opinion in the maintenance of peace. Two issues were fundamental to this desire for reconciliation: trust and understanding. Thus, in order for the two traditions to even contemplate trusting one another, they needed to understand the culture and beliefs of other community.

This emphasis upon the need to develop trust and understanding between the two communities as a means of promoting reconciliation is nothing new. Faith-based organisations, such as Corrymeela and other smaller, lesser known, local groups have been working in this way since the 1960s. Most of this work has operated on an inter-church basis, involving clergy and lay people from all denominations as a matter of course. It was usually run in an unplanned manner, reacting to the wants and needs of the local community rather than applying a strategic approach. By drawing upon biblical principles such as justice, forgiveness, and peace, these organisations have developed programmes and projects which allow members of the Protestant and Catholic Communities to come together in a 'safe environment' to build trust and understanding, eventually reconciling with one another.

Since the mid-1980s however, faith-based organisations have changed the way in which inter-church relationships of this kind operate. Groups such as Youth Link and Mediation Network have been invited into local communities and have worked with them to promote peace and reconciliation. In doing so, they have 'professionalised' the way in which this trust and understanding is built by providing community-relations and reconciliation courses which can be adapted to suit most groups. Through their work with Evangelicals, ECONI have been central to the development of this movement in two ways: first through their education work, which promotes an understanding of the Evangelical Community and second through their training which introduces people to the language and process of Christian reconciliation in a structured manner.

ECONI stands within a broad tradition of church-based peace and reconciliation work in Northern Ireland which includes both inter-church and mono-communal organisations. Furthermore, although they aim to speak to the Evangelical constituency within Northern Ireland, dealing with issues such as sectarianism and identity, their work both in education and training has had a significant impact upon peace and reconciliation work.

Not only have they contributed to the methodological development of the community relations and reconciliation courses offered by the faith-based organisations, but they

have also brought the Evangelical community into the mainstream in Northern Ireland. They have done so by creating an alternative voice to a more fundamentalist Evangelicalism, helping evangelicals to think about the issues surrounding an engagement with the Catholic Community as well as promoting understanding of Evangelical beliefs and culture.

In common with a number of other peace and reconciliation agencies, such as Youth Link, ECONI has produced a wealth of resource material which, although aimed primarily at Evangelicals, has found an audience within the wider Christian community. This material has been the key to ECONI's contribution to peace and reconciliation work within Northern Ireland as it has helped to create an understanding of the culture and religious beliefs of Evangelicalism, both amongst Evangelicals and, more importantly, other Christians. Such publications have ranged from the Pathways series to Glenn Jordan's research project *Not of This World*, which provided a rich account of the range of contemporary Evangelical identity. This creation of understanding as helped to demystify the Evangelical Community in Northern Ireland by providing clear and thoughtful assessments of issues central to Evangelical belief as well as reflections upon biblical issues, such as forgiveness and justice, which are central not only to Christian but also to communal and political reconciliation.

Such work was further promoted through ECONI's training programme which, again, focused primarily on Evangelicals. The main value of this kind of work, which took participants through a process of exploring their own faith and political identity, was to strengthen and reaffirm this identity in a positive manner. Many people in Northern Ireland suffer from what can only be termed as a negative identity: they define themselves by what they are not, instead of what they are. The courses offered by ECONI help to rectify this by eventually moving participants into an exploration of other forms of identity, both religious and political, examining the myths surrounding these as well as their own attitudes regarding them. In designing and facilitating such training programmes, ECONI has developed important peacemaking tools which alleviate the ignorance surrounding the two communities in Northern Ireland and create the foundations for trusting, open relationships to be built.

ECONI's work, both in the fields of training and education, has reached countless people. However, like most organisations of its kind, it now faces a period of renewal, during which it must decide whether to take a new strategic direction. So what lessons can be learnt from the past and what might the future hold for them?

The first major lesson centres on the influence that ECONI has had upon church-based peace building in Northern Ireland. Consciously and indeed prudently, they have only gone to the edges of their own community in their efforts to build peace. They have provided them, as well as those outside, not only with an understanding of what it means to be an Evangelical in the 21st Century, but also with biblical reflections upon issues central to peace building such as

forgiveness, justice, love and reconciliation.

Furthermore, after 17 years in existence, ECONI has carved a niche for itself within the Evangelical community. During this time it has moved further towards the centre of the religious spectrum in Northern Ireland and represent the moderate voice of Evangelicalism. The impact of this work, both in terms of its contribution to reconciliation and its effect upon the Evangelical community in Northern Ireland, should be assessed and built upon. A key element of ECONI's future programme should be the more 'political' aspects of their work, such as the Church in the Public Square. Such work examining the relationship of the religious to the political is sorely needed and could hopefully result in a theological reflection upon the current situation in Northern Ireland.

However, now that ECONI has consolidated its position within Evangelicalism, and now needs to begin working with the Catholic Community without losing its mono-communal identity. One result of this might be a tentative dialogue between ECONI and Catholics surrounding community relations issues as, although they have not previously been able to do this, the conditions now seem to be in place for such conversations to occur. This dialogue could then be extended to examine issues surrounding the churches in the post-conflict era, such as secularisation.

ECONI has been highly successful and courageous in creating an understanding of the Evangelical Community in Northern Ireland and presenting it to the wider world, perhaps the time has now come for them to take this expertise and put it to use examining some of the issues that Christians, both Protestant and Catholic, have chosen to ignore.

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CORRECTION

In the interview with Rose Ozo, published in *lion&lamb* issue 37, reference was made to her involvement with St Peter's Parish. This should have read St. Brigid's Parish. We apologise for this error and any misunderstanding it has caused.

evangelism & reconciliation

are they irreconcilable?



THIS ARTICLE looks at the place of evangelism in the context of a divided society like Northern Ireland. It does not pretend to offer any easy answers or quick-fix solutions but I hope it may stir some discussion. I confess that, in part, what I write is motivated by a vague sense of unease at what I perceive as to be a downplaying of the traditionally central evangelical characteristic of evangelism. Let me explain what I mean.

To be evangelical is to be evangelistic. Jesus' 'Great Commission' of Matthew 28:18-20 to 'go and make disciples' implies that the first step in the journey of discipleship is becoming one. Jesus' command assumes that there is a definable message to proclaim and that must be heard before a response can be made (see Romans 10:14-15). In other words, this 'gospel' (*euangelion* from where evangelicals get their name) has an objective content that can be passed on from generation to generation. Without this core content, the gospel message would remain culture-bound to the Jewish world of the first century. Jesus' parting instruction to his followers to go to 'the ends of the earth' implies that the gospel message can, and indeed must, be translated to other languages and cultures. By association, it also implies that the Christian message will inevitably at times be confrontational, revolving as it does around the absolute truth claims of the incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection of the Son of God.

As historians and theologians of the evangelical movement have noted, of one of the marks of historic evangelical faith has been a practical commitment to evangelism. One of David Bebbington's four well known historic 'markers' of evangelicalism is 'conversionism' – representing an emphasis, expressed in evangelism, on the necessity for personal spiritual conversion to faith in Christ.¹ More recently, Rob Warner, in an astute study of contemporary trends within evangelicalism, argues that an emphasis on conversion is indispensable to the movement. If conversion is denied, whether formally by rejecting its necessity or informally by downplaying its significance, the result is the same, a departure from recognised evangelical faith.

... when some populist leaders insist that 'social action is evangelism', and that there is no need for a narrow emphasis on personal saving faith once the church has recovered a broad socio-political agenda of 'extending the kingdom', it seems that a Rubicon has been irrevocably crossed ... an activism that abandons any emphasis upon personal conversion has little claim to be an authentic inheritor of historic evangelicalism²

The 1970 Evangelical Alliance Basis of Faith (EA-1970), which John Stott had a major influence in drafting, stresses that belief in the core doctrines of the Christian faith 'should issue in mutual love, practical Christian service and *evangelistic concern*' (my emphasis). This point was repeated in the recent basis of faith produced by Evangelical Alliance

Ireland (EAI-2004).³ Perhaps the theologian Donald Bloesch sums it up best when he says an evangelical Christian is:

one who affirms the centrality and cruciality of Christ's work of reconciliation and redemption as declared in the Scriptures; the necessity to appropriate the fruits of this work in one's own life and experience; and the urgency to bring the good news of this unmerited grace to a lost and dying world ... we must also be fired by a burning zeal to share this salvation with others. To be evangelical therefore means to be evangelistic.⁴

In short, evangelicals of many different hues affirm together the central importance of proclaiming and teaching the need for a personal response of faith in Jesus Christ. I would go further, and argue that mission needs to shape our individual and church lives. As the theologian Emil Brunner said, 'The church exists by mission as a fire exists by burning'. Without a clear prioritising of mission, the church loses not only direction but ultimately its life. The God of the Bible is a missionary God. His people are to be missionary minded. What then are particular factors that may be hindering the task of mission in Northern Ireland? Several could be suggested,⁵ but I am going to focus on just two.

1. The bitter reality of sectarianism

Much water has flowed under the bridge since Jesus' words to an unlikely crew of missionaries on a Palestinian hillside. Two millennia of church history have complicated the picture somewhat in comparison to the 'virgin' Gentile missionary field into which Paul so determinedly and successfully ventured. In Athens, Paul had to start from scratch to an audience who had absolutely no prior knowledge of what he was talking about. Patrick faced pretty much the same challenge in Ireland. Christians today, committed to an evangelical understanding of the gospel, by definition face the same call that Paul and Patrick did – to make the good news of Jesus Christ known to the surrounding world. However, layers upon layers of history, tradition, theological dispute, not to mention a thousand years or so of 'Christendom' and bitter Catholic/Protestant conflict in Europe (of which Northern Ireland for a variety of reasons has been an especially long-lived example) have accreted all sorts of connotations to the word 'Christian'. It is my belief that often these connotations act as barriers or obstacles to effective mission. Why? Because they blur, distort and obscure what it means to be a Christian.

In Ireland, the task Christians face involves communicating the gospel to a 'Christian' culture familiar with Christianity since the 5th Century, surrounded by cityscapes full of steeples and soaked in recent memories of bitter sectarian conflict. It is an obvious point, but Northern Ireland is not 'virgin territory' for the gospel! It is, we are told, one of the most evangelised places on earth. But, paradoxically, I believe that the very success and power of the churches in the North, operating in a context

‘Northern Ireland is not ‘virgin territory’ for the gospel! It is, we are told, one of the most evangelised places on earth.’

of a political struggle for power between two ethnic communities marked by their religious affiliation, has become a profound hindrance to the advance of the gospel. The sheer depth of political division in the North makes it almost inconceivable to contemplate what mission across the ethnic, cultural and religious divide would even look like in practice, especially for ‘mainline’ denominations.⁶ Evangelicalism in Ulster, historically a Protestant movement, remains largely ‘trapped’ within the confines of its own ethnic group. Churches, both Catholic and Protestant, remain largely in the role of ‘chaplains’ to their own ‘sides’. Given the continuing, and perhaps even deepening, sectarian divisions during the ‘Peace Process’ era, the difficulty is that unless evangelism is ‘safely’ confined to ‘our side’ it will be perceived as a threatening attempt to extend political power. The difficulty of unravelling the message of the gospel from a political agenda is of course not a new problem in Ireland!⁷ But just because it has been around a long time does not mean it has lost any of its capacity to damage community relations while, at the same time, obscuring the message of the gospel.

2. A consequent (right) emphasis on the desperate need for reconciliation within the claustrophobically divided political context of Northern Ireland

Norman Porter’s book, *The Elusive Quest: Reconciliation in Northern Ireland*, begins with the words ‘Reconciliation matters’ and goes on to pursue the agenda that ‘reconciliation is a good thing which should shape the priorities by which we share our collective lives in the North’ and ‘is integral to the process of making Northern Ireland a decent society’.⁸ It is not my purpose here to discuss Porter’s vision of reconciliation save to say that given reconciliation’s deep biblical heritage most Christians would agree with his vision if not necessarily his method of getting there.⁹ As has often been remarked, Paul’s account of reconciliation in 2 Corinthians 5 has both vertical and horizontal elements. Christians are first reconciled to God through Christ (vertical) and are then given a ministry of reconciliation (horizontal). Both sides need to be maintained if a holistic biblical understanding of reconciliation is to be maintained.

An exclusive focus on the individual’s experience of reconciliation with God will likely lead to a privatised faith, withdrawn from any costly engagement with the world. Such an attitude is all too frequent within fundamentalism and evangelicalism and is one against which ECONI and others have long argued.

In contrast, those engaged in reconciliation in the wider social and political sphere, contend that such reconciliation is not ‘a secondary issue, a diversion, for example from the task of evangelism’, but is a central requirement of Christian witness.¹⁰ In this view, the quest for political reconciliation, whereby communities can ‘live together with difference’, builds on the social implications of the biblical model.¹¹ Here, the opposite danger to an overly privatised faith applies. Where,

however subtly, the primary emphasis on the vertical aspect is lost or downplayed, the end result can be an attempt to achieve communal reconciliation in a way virtually indistinguishable from that of pragmatic politics – ‘lets find ways to respect each other, and live together in peace’. In this scenario, the Christian notion of reconciliation can be emptied of its power. The need for evangelism may not be so much denied as quietly sidelined as ‘politically incorrect’. Instead, an emphasis on the catholicity of the Christian faith transforms reconciliation into little more than a quest for ‘inclusivity’.

Are then evangelism and reconciliation irreconcilable? No! I am not suggesting this or that those involved in the quest for political reconciliation inevitably lose a clear-sighted focus on the proclamation of the gospel. But the pressure is there, and, to be fair, one that many Christians engaged in peacemaking have recognised. Joe Liechty and Cecelia Clegg comment on how truth claims can become threats to building understanding and pressure is exerted to eliminate difference so as to promote a washed-out version of reconciliation.¹² The authors of *A Time to Heal* acknowledge how ‘reconciliation can be shamelessly misused to downgrade difference’.¹³ ECONI has consistently resisted any attempt to promote unity by a bland uniformity.

What I am saying is that the intertwining of religion within deep communal divisions makes the task of communicating the gospel in a way that is ‘heard’ much more complicated and difficult. It also applies pressure against any activity (like evangelism) that may be perceived harming the goal of reconciliation.

Back to the future?

In such a context, I wonder at times if, ironically, a more secular, pluralist, post-nationalist Northern Ireland would actually be a ‘good thing’! Would it help to level the playing field for mission? A brief glance south may help to illustrate this point.

Certainly the Republic of Ireland is a lot further down the post-nationalist road than the North.¹⁴ Now of course, evangelical Christians in the Republic face their own significant challenges. I am not suggesting that an increasingly, and at times aggressively, secular society is an easy context for mission. Indeed, the great missiologist Lesslie Newbigin dismissed that there is such a thing as a ‘religiously neutral’ secular society.

What comes into being is not a secular society, but a pagan society ... which worships gods which are not god ... it is not surprising that the age which calls itself secular has produced an unprecedented crop of new religions. The secular society is a myth, and it has the power of a myth to blind people to realities.¹⁵

It is remarkable how quickly and how far the imposing religious barriers of De Valera’s Ireland have fallen. But, as Newbigin predicted,

'It is remarkable how quickly and how far the imposing religious barriers of De Valera's Ireland have fallen. Now everything is up for discussion.'

now everything is up for discussion. The vacuum is being filled with a myriad of beliefs in just about anything. This has its own spiritual danger of course as 'secular' society 'blinds people' to spiritual realities. Nevertheless, there is a refreshing openness to ideas and discussion, free from the claustrophobic political atmosphere of the North, where everything seems somehow to come back to the constitutional question! Amongst these changes I believe that the message of the gospel is being 'heard' by many people, 'free' from historical and political connotations in which it has for so long been wrapped (often in a flag). Of course, this is a gradual process. It is impossible to communicate the gospel in a way completely detached from the divided legacy of Irish history. However, it does seem that people are at more liberty to encounter the message of Jesus on its own terms, at least somewhat detached from the cultural and political package in which it has historically been contained. It is thrilling to see signs of spiritual life as numbers of churches grow and develop, made up of people not only from Protestant and Catholic backgrounds, but joined by an increasingly multinational array of fellow Christians (Galatians 3:28). Are we getting back to a missionary context which Paul would much more readily recognise and feel at home? Is this already, or will it be, increasingly true for Northern Ireland as well? I, for one, hope so.

NOTES

1 David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989). His other 'markers' are 'crucicentrism', 'activism' and 'biblicism'.

2 Rob Warner, *Reconstructing Evangelical Theology* (draft of doctoral thesis).

3 For discussion of this Basis of Faith see Patrick Mitchel (ed.), *Together We Believe: a common faith, a common purpose* (Dublin: Evangelical Alliance Ireland, 2005).

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

5 The impact of what Don Carson calls 'philosophical pluralism' – the insistence that the idea of 'Truth' is neither attainable nor desirable – is certainly another strong factor exerting pressure 'within the camp' of evangelicalism. Symptoms include a drift from its theological heritage, 'selfism', the pursuit of 'relevance' at all costs and paying mere lip-service to the authority of Scripture. For further discussion see *The Gaggling of God* (Leicester: Apollos, 1996) chapter 11. If we accept the general thrust of his discussion, all of this has clear implications for evangelism. What sort of message will be left to communicate? What place, for example, do God's holiness, our sin and his judgement have in our communication of the gospel? Unfortunately, space here does not permit opening this can of worms, but it is an issue that faces all

of us living in a consumerist culture that worships at the altar of the self. 6 I am aware that some newer churches have intentionally attempted to build a non-denominational identity in order to foster a sense of welcome and belonging to people from whatever 'side' they originate. See for example Paul Reid, pastor of Christian Fellowship Church, *A New Easter Rising* (Leigh: Logikos Christian Publishing, 1993) pp.113-15.

7 Joe Liechty describes a fascinating example. In the nineteenth century, Lord Farnham, a leading lay evangelical who founded the Cavan Association for promoting the Reformation, argued (with considerable foresight it must be said): 1. The claims of Irish Catholics must be conceded if they continue in their present strength of numbers. 2. If conceded, the Church Establishment must fall. 3. The separation of Ireland and Britain would follow. Therefore, maintaining the political status quo depended upon converting Catholics to Protestantism. Catholics bitterly resented the political intentions of evangelism. 'The Bible, without note or comment', said one Catholic pamphlet, 'is not less a means of Protestant dominion than the Orange Yeoman's military array.' Joseph Liechty and Cecelia Clegg, *Moving Beyond Sectarianism: Religion, Conflict and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland*, (Dublin: Columba Press, 2001), pp.88-89.

8 Porter, *Elusive Quest*, p.12.

9 See Stuart Noble's review of Porter's book in *Lion&Lamb*, No. 36, Spring/ Summer 2004, p.23.

10 Norman Taggart, 'Christian Perspectives on Reconciliation' in *Lion&Lamb*, No.16, Spring, 1999, p.5.

11 For a presentation of this approach see The Faith and Politics Group, *A Time to Heal: Perspectives on Reconciliation* (Belfast, 2002).

12 Joe Liechty and Cecelia Clegg, *Moving Beyond Sectarianism: Religion, Conflict and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland*, (Dublin: Columba Press, 2001), pp.43-44, 293. See especially chapter 6 for how an absolute truth claim can be held without necessarily being sectarian.

13 *A Time to Heal*, p.5

14 In saying this I am not making any value judgement about 'the South' being 'more advanced' than 'the North'! Political circumstances have allowed the Republic to 'move on' towards a post-nationalist state while 'the North' remains locked in a struggle between two nationalisms.

15 Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (London: SPCK, 1997) p.220.

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Photo: Lions Gate Films 2004.

dogville and the drama of redemption

While Mel Gibson's *Passion of the Christ* was stirring controversy and drawing huge crowds to cinemas last year, an independent film called *Dogville* quietly snuck in and out of the Queen's Film Theatre. It now has a second life on DVD, and is worth renting alongside *the Passion*.

If Christians want a film that stimulates serious dialogue on some fundamental issues at play in Christianity, argues John Kiess, their time is better spent in *Dogville*.

A SKILLFULLY EXECUTED, if slightly disturbing film, *Dogville* addresses many of the same themes as *the Passion* (violence, suffering, sin and salvation), but in a far more indirect, understated fashion. Viewed together, *Dogville* emerges as the superior film, more thought provoking and challenging because it is content to say less, and let the viewer respond to the questions it poses. Where *the Passion* overwhelms, *Dogville* disarms, nudges, and invites.

Stylistically, the two films diverge along two very different paths. Gibson's *Passion* is a thoroughly realist tale; Lars von Trier's *Dogville* is allegory in the style of the old Brecht plays. Gibson is focused on presenting the world of the gospels as authentically as possible, from the clothing to the language, architecture, and, most important of all, the many sufferings of Jesus. While we rarely hear much about the suffering Christ in today's churches, especially the Jesus who still suffers with the poor and hungry (I'd like a movie on that one), Gibson aims to right the ship... and then some. As has been discussed at great length, Gibson's film is filled with violence, from the sword fight in Gethsemane to the brutal whippings by the Roman legions to the Stations of the Cross. There is a sense of spectacle, even titillation in the way Gibson relentlessly uses close-ups and sound effects to enhance the gore and misery. He's passionate about his Passion.

My concern with the violence is not its excess, but the distorting effect it has on the arc of the Gospel story. Even though Gibson has made very clear that he was making a film only about the last days of Christ, the exclusive focus on the violence becomes a way of re-narrating the Gospel itself. Gibson's story is not so much about the person of Jesus (his divinity or humanity, his purpose on earth, his ethics, his radical Kingdom), but the violence He endured. Jesus becomes incidental to the ordeal. In watching scene after scene, we wonder, 'My God, how could anyone go through that?' instead of asking, 'Who is this man undergoing all of this?' (It doesn't help that Jesus is bloodied beyond all recognition.) If we are moved, it is not toward Christ, but away from the violence.

To his credit, Gibson does try to break up the intensity of the passion scenes with little vignettes that tell us more about the person of Christ (I was particularly struck by the scene where Jesus draws his finger in the sand in defense of Mary Magdalene). But the inclusion of these scenes only underscores the point. Major parts of the gospel are re-ordered and narrated from the point of view of violence. Every flashback happens at some point in the ordeal, such that we only get access to healings, preachings, humor or the Last Supper through the lens of violence. Violence is Gibson's gospel optic. Jesus' ministry is literally an afterthought from this point of view. Violence is



rendered the condition of possibility for God's saving act, which is to say, violence itself becomes salvific. Gibson is treading on dangerous ground here.

In relation to this, I find it telling that so many people came away from *the Passion* talking about the violence. It was as if the violence was one of the main characters. It drove the plot and shaped the narrative. The arc of the Gospel narrative we know, however, is not shaped by violence, or even peace or love, but Jesus Christ. Christ is front and centre, and it is not what he underwent that grounds the narrative, but His being, His identity as Son of God, maker of heaven and earth, the Word made flesh. A film that sets out with an exclusive focus on the violence Christ underwent cannot be anything other than just another movie about violence. The real questions, which *the Passion* is purportedly about – sin and salvation – are lost.

Dogville, a film more about the soul of America than anything to do with Christianity, raises precisely these kinds of questions, and does more to stimulate hard thinking about the Gospel than the explicitly Christian *Passion*. The film is directed by Lars von Trier, a Dane, who previously directed the critically acclaimed *Breaking the Waves* and *Dancer in the Dark*. He was a founding member of the Dogme movement, a group of young directors who banded together in the early 90s to renounce the glossy, overproduced methods of filmmaking that had come to dominate contemporary film. While *Dogville* strays from some of these principles, it remains highly unconventional. The Depression-era American town is set on what appears to be a large sound stage surrounded by blackness, lending the film an eerie, claustrophobic air. Houses and streets are depicted by chalk lines, and townsfolk mime most of their actions, from opening doors to cooking and cleaning. That is not a real dog you hear barking, that's the dog's chalk outline.

Early on in *Dogville*, a character named Grace (played by Nicole Kidman) enters the town, on the run from a group of mobsters on the other side of the mountains. She befriends a young idealist named Tom Edison, a kind of Emersonian lecturer/preacher figure, who convinces the townsfolk to provide Grace safe haven. The community initially appears benevolent, and accepts the stranger into their midst. But after Grace volunteers to earn her keep by doing small jobs around the town, the local folk begin to take advantage of her, and the veneer of goodness lifts to expose layers of greed, envy, lust and malice. She starts as a cook, then tutor, then a friend to the blind, then babysitter and day labourer, and ends up becoming the town's slave and scapegoat. All of the community's fears and sins are thrust upon her, and she is subject to enormous cruelty, which she bears with an almost superhuman degree of strength.

Sound familiar? Grace for most of the film fits the mould of a Christ-like figure, despised for her virtue, a sacrificial lamb for a fallen humanity. But there's a twist to von Trier's story. The mobsters come back in the end, and we learn that the boss (James Caan) is also Grace's father. Father and daughter have a pow-wow in the back of his limousine, and a memorable exchange ensues over the classic questions of justice and forgiveness, suffering and healing, life and death. Her father says at one point that people are like dogs, and she replies that dogs act according to their nature and that we must understand and forgive them. And her father replies: 'Dogs can be taught a lot of good things, but not if we forgive them every time they follow their nature.' Her father gives Grace a choice: to spare Dogville, or seek revenge for all the harm they've done to her. Grace is human, not a saviour, and cannot resist vengeance, and the mobsters are given the order to wipe out the town.

The film ends with real life images of farmers and drifters, reminding us that those despicable characters who spitefully used Grace are not just Americans, but us, all of us. I learned more about my solidarity with those who called for Christ's crucifixion at this moment than the actual scene in *the Passion*. Von Trier leaves us there, in the emptiness and starkness of the vision. The nihilism burns, and is viscerally unsatisfying. For some, it will be a highly disappointing finish, but I think it fits the thrust of the narrative. Von Trier's film is a negative gospel: he gives us the bleakness of our situation, as to put a mirror in front of us, and dispel the high romantic notions of a pure and limitless horizon to our humanity. It is a hyperbolic picture, but it works, and in such a fashion that violence does not become a form of rhetoric, or the arc of the story. Answers to the questions the final scenes pose are not thrust upon us. We are left to wrestle with them.

And what are those questions? I came away asking: Is humanity worth saving? What does it mean to even think of a wager like this? Did God think in terms of a wager when he sent his Son? Where does justice end and mercy begin? How am I complicit in Christ's suffering? And how is it that Christ still opens His arms to a wretch like me? It is not often a film raises such profound questions. When a film does, it is worth celebrating.

JOHN KIESS is a former Research Assistant with ECONI and is currently undertaking a Masters Degree at Peterhouse College, Cambridge.

DREW GIBSON

blessed are the peacemakers?

IN IRELAND we have been used to thinking about peacemaking in relation to the Troubles, but we need to think more broadly about conflict and peacemaking. We live in a society in which there is conflict within schools and families, a society that refuses to let ethnic minorities, homosexuals and others live in peace. In this first study in a series of three, Rev Drew Gibson, Associate Minister at Bloomfield Presbyterian Church helps us to think about the opportunities and costs of being peacemakers.

Let's have a look at Luke 4:16-30

In this passage Jesus comes with a message of good news, freedom, sight and release. Initially people are very pleased, but suddenly they turn against him and try to kill him. Why should this be?

As Christians, we must have something to say to situations of conflict. But there is a problem: 'we should not be surprised that the practice of forgiveness and reconciliation will produce new enemies of the Christian church.'¹ Let me make some suggestions about the four groups of people whom Jesus mentions in v18 and following verses.

The poor.

Everybody in Jesus' community was relatively poor economically, but these people are the poorest of the poor, the destitute. They represent the outsiders, the marginalized in our society, the people whom we would rather not have around and whom we don't like to think about. They have been called many things including non-persons, scum, animals, 'them'. You certainly wouldn't want any living next door. In contemporary terms, these may include people who sleep rough and travellers, but may extend to social outcasts of all sorts.

- Can you think of four groups of people who might fall into this category in Belfast today?

To these very people Jesus brings good news about a God who accepts all people, who is building a socially inclusive community in which all people may be accepted, loved and valued. It's not difficult to see how a message like this would make some people, the insiders, the 'non-poor', feel uneasy.

- How would you bring the good news to a drug dealer in a local school?

The prisoner.

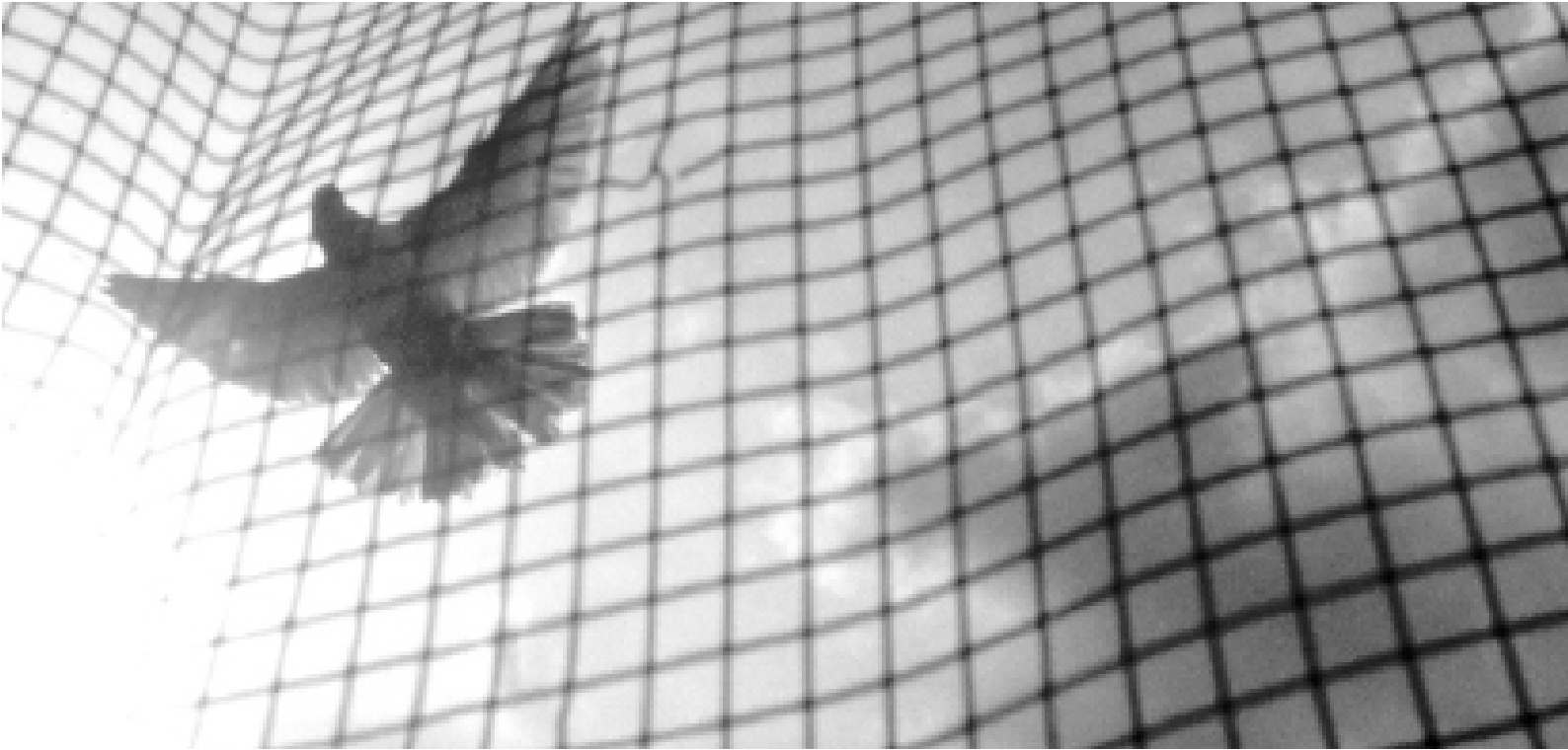
There are many types of imprisonment. We may be imprisoned by our past, by a habit, by things we have done or that have been done to us that we can't forget or we may be fettered by the expectations of our family that weigh heavily on us. There are also more subtle types of imprisonment. We may be held captive to a mindset that ties social harmony to a certain type of political arrangement or to the assumption that a higher level of physical comfort will bring about peace of mind. Such spiritual imprisonment results from the belief that a change in outward circumstances is necessary in order to bring about spiritual peace. The belief that an improvement in someone else's outward circumstances is a threat to my spiritual peace can be equally limiting and destructive. Jesus' early release programme for prisoners was offensive to many people because they themselves were prisoners of another sort.

- Think how we might proclaim release to someone who is imprisoned by their hatred of a rogue who hurt them badly some years ago but who has now become a Christian.

The blind.

It is true that there are none so blind as those who will not see, so it is not difficult to link blindness to bigotry and sectarian hatred (feel free to write your own sermon from here on). But of course blindness is different from simply closing one's eyes. Blindness is an inability to see rather than an unwillingness to see. The blind know that they are blind, and know at least something of what they are missing. They find ways of coping and compensating, making life as good as it can be within the limits imposed on them by their blindness. But the healing of blindness may pose a threat to those surrounding the blind. 'He may not love me when he sees that I am not pretty.' 'She may not want to live here when she sees how awful it is.' 'She may not need me if she can do things for herself.' 'At least his blindness gives me a bit of protection against his violence.'

When metaphorical blindness is healed it can be even more threatening. 'If they know their wage rights my profits will be hit.' 'If there's an enquiry, they will see my dark deeds.' 'If they can get access to our markets then our jobs will be under threat'. 'If they know how to take control of their own resources then our shareholders will not get a decent dividend.'



From the individual to the international level, recovery of sight to the blind may be a real threat to those around them.

- What problems might arise if a middle-aged middle class woman becomes aware that her life is being greatly constrained by her husband's thoughtlessness?

The oppressed.

A couple of years ago it was claimed that Northern Ireland had become a 'cold place' for Protestants. It is certainly true that in many Loyalist areas people feel isolated, under threat and unloved. It is curious that these feelings have resulted, at least in part, in reaction to efforts to make Nationalists feel at ease after decades of feeling oppressed. Undoubtedly any effort to put Loyalist minds at rest will run the risk of being understood as oppressive to Nationalists. The same problem exists globally. If 'third world' nations are to develop materially then the exploitative trade practices under which they have suffered will need to be dismantled. This is very likely to result in farmers, manufacturers and many others in the 'West' feeling hard done by or oppressed. It is no wonder we in the six counties see our situation as a 'zero-sum game'; no wonder that politicians and many others want trade tariffs to remain in place. Offering release to the oppressed may well meet significant resistance from those who benefit from the other's oppression.

- Consider the pros and cons of committing yourself to buying the 'fair trade' option whenever possible.

Jesus came to proclaim the 'year of the Lord's favour.' We can paraphrase this phrase as 'the time when God wants to do great things for anyone who will accept what he has to give.' The people in Nazareth did not see themselves as poor, as prisoners, blind or oppressed so they could not ask for God's help. Instead they felt jealous and threatened. In contrast, in 7:1-10, especially v9, and 10:25-37, especially v33, Luke records that Jesus was impressed with the faith of non-Jews, the outsiders. The church has always needed courage to take the good news to the outsiders and, in doing so, to risk the wrath of those on the inside.

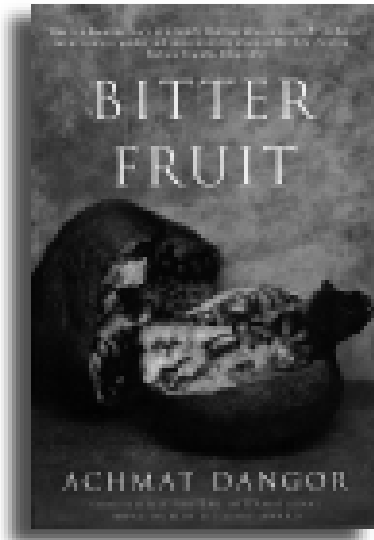
1 Peskett and Ramachandra, *The Message of Mission*: 167

'Jesus comes with a message of good news, freedom, sight and release. Initially people are very pleased, but suddenly they turn against him and try to kill him. Why should this be?'

review:

Bitter Fruit

REVIEWED BY DAVID BUCKLEY



BITTER FRUIT leaves the reader unsettled. Is the Ali family, struggling to survive in post-apartheid South Africa, doomed to remain the bitter product of the emancipation struggle they shaped? Or is there hope that, in spite of the horrors the family has endured, their bitter fruit may one day ripen? Among the greatest strengths of Achmat Dangor's Booker Prize Shortlisted novel is its refusal to grant simple answers to these painful questions.

Although set amid the political turbulence of post-apartheid South Africa, this is novel of family more than politics. Silas, a former leader of the underground resistance and current official in Mandela's government, struggles to find the energy to save his family from its past. Lydia, his wife, staggers under the weight of a violation that she can neither ignore nor confront. Their son Mikey, both brilliant and frighteningly determined, senses his parents' pain, but cannot heal their deep wounds.

The bitterness of their story is unmistakable from the novel's beginning. While Silas is a respected public official, his private strength to support his family is drained. This resolve has never recovered from the central event of the novel: Lydia's rape at the hands of government police during the resistance. He has devoted his life to fighting for freedom, yet when it comes to comforting his wife, finds himself 'drained of all his enthusiasm for the struggle this would demand.'

More horrible still, Lydia remains convinced that Mikey is the child of her rape. She pours her love into him to save him from the genes of his rapist father, but senses that she will never be up to the task. Dangor's portrait of Lydia throughout the story is incredibly moving, a woman 'reduced to waiting for the voices of people she has grown tired of, a husband she no longer loves and a son she loves too much.' Her fruit is surely the most bitter, and yet she finds no one to help her bear her pain.

Mikey grows into the most ambiguous character of the story. The reader pities his uncertainty about his lineage, and admires his intellect and beauty. At the same time, throughout the novel he grows into a cold man

who uses both sexuality and violence to exact vengeance on the world. He acts to confront the past, but can only do so in a way that brings even more pain and fear to his family.

Both father and son are ultimately consumed by the past, Silas for his inaction and Mikey for his vengeance. Dangor portrays their tragic ends with an admirable combination of compassion and judgment. Lydia is left alone again, and speeds from Johannesburg. It is in her departure that the reader is challenged to find hope. She arrives in Cape Town on Christmas Eve, searching for a new birth of joy after what has been a terribly bitter time.

DAVID BUCKLEY is Research Assistant with the Centre for Contemporary Christianity in Ireland.

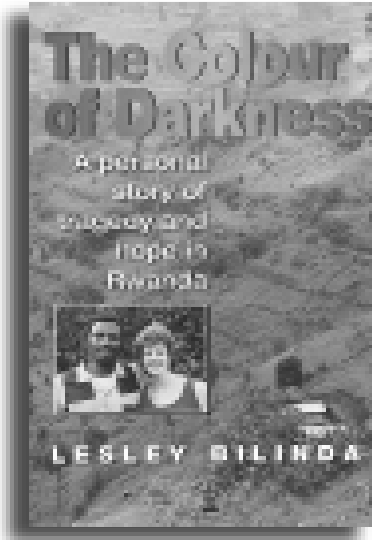
BITTER FRUIT

Achmat Dangor

Published by
Atlantic Books
London, 2004.

The Colour of Darkness, A personal story of tragedy and hope in Rwanda.

REVIEWED BY JACQUI LIVINGSTONE



THE COLOUR OF DARKNESS by Lesley Bilinda tells the harrowing story of the genocide which took place in Rwanda between April and June 1994. It is the personal story of Lesley Bilinda who was living and working for Tear Fund in Rwanda and who lost her husband and many friends during the civil war when approximately one million Rwandans were killed.

The twelve chapters of the book take the reader through the journey of Lesley Bilinda arriving in Gahini in 1989 as a health worker through to her marriage to Rwandan Pastor, Charles Bilinda in December 1992 and on to the genocide of 1994, which started at a time when Lesley was on holiday with her sister in Kenya.

The author includes personal entries from her diary during the genocide and the many agonising weeks which followed when the whereabouts of her husband Charles, was unknown. Through these extracts she describes the anguish and uncertainty of not knowing whether her husband was alive or dead for many months, and the pain of hearing the news of friends and colleagues slaughtered during the 100-day genocide.

A detailed account is given of the months following the killings and the death of Charles, including the tragic scenes of loss and destruction which the author saw on return to Rwanda during a one month visit in October 1994. The author's account of what she witnessed on returning to the country where she had lived for five years was difficult to read because the depth and scale of destruction was so immense. Families had been wiped out, homes looted and burnt out and in certain areas the smell of dead bodies left rotting in rivers and on hillsides was a lingering reminder of what had taken place. In reading the book ten years on from the genocide I felt guilty at the realisation that I had never fully grasped the seriousness of what was happening in Rwanda in 1994. This feeling was heightened by the fact that as I was reading the book the awful news of the tsunami disaster and the ever increasing death toll was being broadcast. It brought home to me that although we often

see news coverage of terrible events, both natural and man-made, affecting thousands of lives, our attention to such events can be shallow and short-lived.

The conversational way in which the book is written makes the book very accessible. The inclusion of personal diary entries made me aware that the author was sharing some of her deepest thoughts and I felt privileged as a reader to share these experiences. Obviously given the nature of the book some of the text is difficult to read because the existence of such hatred among communities is hard to fathom and the numbers of people killed is difficult to comprehend. However the book also tells amazing stories of peoples' miraculous escapes through God's love and protection. What struck me was that even when the author was at rock bottom, she held on to God and her faith. She recognised that it was only the love of God that could give her the strength to go on and the peace she needed. This book tells the miraculous story of how God can work in the most tragic of circumstances and is a book which everyone should read.

JACQUI LIVINGSTONE is PA to the Director and Personnel Co-ordinator with the Centre for Contemporary Christianity in Ireland.

THE COLOUR OF DARKNESS
A personal story of tragedy and hope
in Rwanda

Lesley Bilinda

Published by
Hodder & Stoughton
London, 1996.

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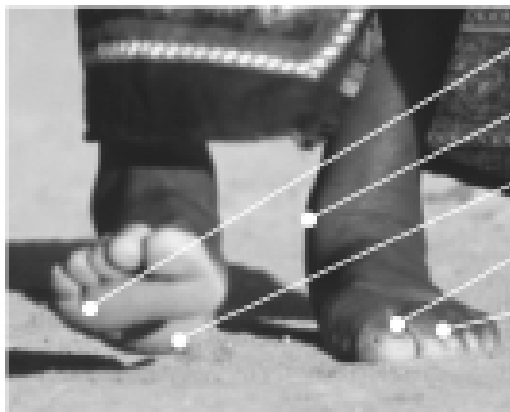
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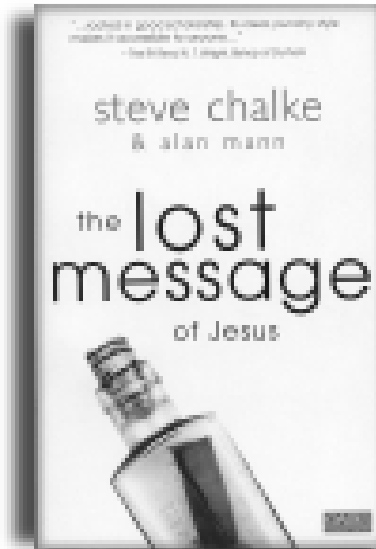


CHRISTIAN ACTION WITH THE WORLD'S POOR

review:

The Lost message of Jesus

REVIEWED BY BEN WALKER



JUDGING FROM the critical aftermath, this is one of the more controversial books to come out in recent times. But, to be honest, all controversy aside, I found the book frustrating.

Without doubt, it brings into the open many important challenges. The troubling conclusion of the conversations and experiences that the authors relate is that many have become disillusioned with the Church and its message.

Tragically, the authors claim, this is because we have lost the message that Jesus preached. They feel that the church has too often proclaimed a narrow, exclusive, hell-obsessed, condemning gospel of an angry God, whereas the message of Jesus, centred on the fact that "God is love", is inclusive, radical, relevant, challenging and attractive. It is good news! It means liberation not bondage; inclusion not rejection; concern for the oppressed, not dogmatic oppression. It has radical social implications of love for enemies and non-violent resistance against evil that Christians all too often fail to demonstrate.

The book is written with the excitement of people who have discovered this lost message for themselves, who have been changed by it and have a passion to impart it both to those who have not heard it and those who fail to preach it.

As such, many will rightly find provocative, refreshing and liberating truth in this appeal to re-focus on the holistic message of God's love as well as the challenge to see Jesus not as a "safe, sanitized, twenty-first century saviour" but as "the most challenging and controversial figure of all human history" (p. 70). However, some may feel that the authors are merely finding their way into a radical understanding of the gospel that others have been promoting for quite some time.

But – and this is the bit that frustrates me – what are evidently some important and challenging conclusions about the nature of the gospel are mixed with arguments that display naive biblical interpretation and rely too heavily on caricatures, generalisations from experience and pithy sayings that have only an air of profundity.

For example, a key verse for the whole book is 1 John 4:8: 'God is love', which is undeniably a 'mind-bending, brain-stretching, worldview-shaping soundbite' (p45). It is surely vital to our very understanding of God that he chooses to define himself as love (p55). And yet, it is used in a sweepingly axiomatic fashion with little regard for context. We are told that 'The Bible never defines God as anger, power or judgement – in fact it never defines him as anything other than love' (p 63). But in the very same letter John tells us, 'This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light. . . .' (1 John 1:5). This goes unmentioned, as does 1 John 4:10, which is crucial both to understanding God's love and to thinking through the atonement – a subject taken up in the final chapter and at the heart of the ensuing debate.

This last chapter – possibly not as central to the book as the later debates might suggest – typifies this flimsy approach. The authors caricature a view of the cross as 'cosmic child abuse' (p. 182). They oppose it with this undefined notion, robbed of its context, that 'God is love'. And they throw in the simplistic premise of a modern sociologist for which they offer no evidence, aside from the assertion that it is 'profound'. This just will not do as a contribution to such an important discussion.

So I was frustrated that, for want of more robust and faithful reasoning, we've ended up with a book that has some passionately communicated and stimulating conclusions which are undermined by some ill thought through and highly incautious ones. In seeking the lost message of Jesus, there is potential here to lose the message of Jesus.

But as the debate has raged, I've been even more frustrated that the Church typically produces either passionate communicators with a gracious understanding of God's love for people, or fine biblical scholars with a deep understanding of God's truth for people, but so often struggles to marry the two.

BEN WALKER is Research Co-ordinator at the Centre for Contemporary Christianity in Ireland.

THE LOST MESSAGE OF JESUS:

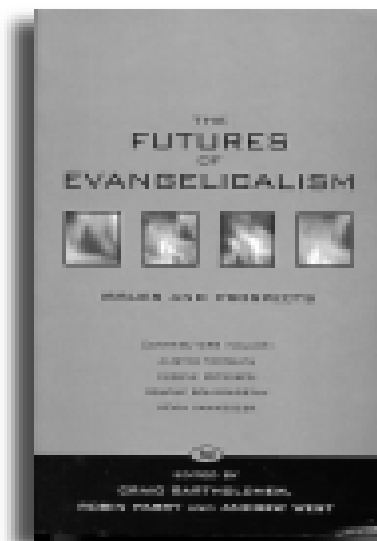
Steve Chalke & Alan Mann

Published by
Zondervan
Grand Rapids 2003.

review:

The Futures of Evangelicalism: Issues and prospects.

REVIEWED BY DAVID J MONTGOMERY



IN THE SPACE of eleven chapters, the editors have brought together the reflections of several major evangelical authors or statesmen such as Alister McGrath, Kevin Vanhoozer, Howard Marshall, and Eugene Peterson. The collection has an international, if totally Western, flavour (Australia, Lausanne as well as UK/USA). Some of the less familiar contributors, including the editors, come from the University of Gloucester, where the project appears to have had its genesis.

The ground covered is impressive and refreshingly comprehensive, including essays on Evangelicalism, Ethics, Spirituality, Politics, and Philosophy, as well as Ecclesiology, Hermeneutics and Systematics.

There are however notable omissions. Theologically, no reference is made to the challenge presented by recent developing diversity on previously accepted evangelical non-negotiables such as substitutionary atonement. Similarly, little enough space is actually given to the driving force behind the etymology of the movement, namely, evangelism. Mission in its broadest sense is covered in several articles, but Chris Wright's 'Future Trends in Mission' is global in its scope and an all too brief examination from, significantly, a Western voice. This bypassing of Developing World theologians is as disappointing as the absence of any female writers. This is not a plea for tokenism, rather it is an acknowledgment that the contribution made by women to the Movement has been as significant as the debate that arisen as a result of that contribution.

Nigel Scotland's piece on Charismaticism is mainly historical and descriptive, with only superficial analysis towards the end. Regretably he never really deals with the subject of charismatics and scriptural authority – the main reason many traditional evangelicals still struggle to admit charismatics into the evangelical fold.

Howard Marshall deals honestly and lucidly with the problems faced by any evangelical Christian who wants to take the Bible seriously and yet has to grapple with difficult life situations. He does not shy away from pointing

out the reality of controversial hermeneutical issues; 'when does diversity become contradiction?' or how these issues affect key doctrines. The reader looking for a definite position to be taken on these issues, will be disappointed. Marshall instead outlines the principles that all who seek the truth must employ if they are to be true to Scripture's self-understanding.

Lazarus's contribution on Evangelicalism and Politics is worth noting. It is written from, and to, the American situation, and probably adds little to the conversation this side of the Atlantic that hasn't been said before in evangelical academic and theoretical quarters with regard to faith and politics. Nevertheless, the ongoing realities of Northern Ireland religious life and the increased Americanisation of aspects of British evangelicalism means that Lazarus's 'Fourth Way' of doing politics as Christians needs to be heard all the more urgently. Eschewing pietistic withdrawal, triumphalistic dominance and apathetic non-involvement, he sounds a much needed rallying call for all evangelical communities to be involved corporately in establishing justice in the public square.

The book suffers from the problems of its genre as a collection of essays at the end of which, one is no clearer about the future(s) of evangelicalism. The clever use of the plural in the title signals that there is no narrow pre-conceived agenda here, but the lack of a concluding chapter to seek to make sense of the whole, is a significant weakness.

The collection is a veritable curate's egg, but worth purchasing for two or three of the strongest essays alone. At a time when it is too easy to be cynical about evangelicalism, the fact that this is written 'not from those who in despair have left evangelicalism, but from those who remain within and passionately so.'

Oh – and did John Wimber really help to form 'The Righteous Brothers'? (p286). You learn something new every day!

REV DAVID MONTGOMERY is Associate Minister at Knock Presbyterian Church.

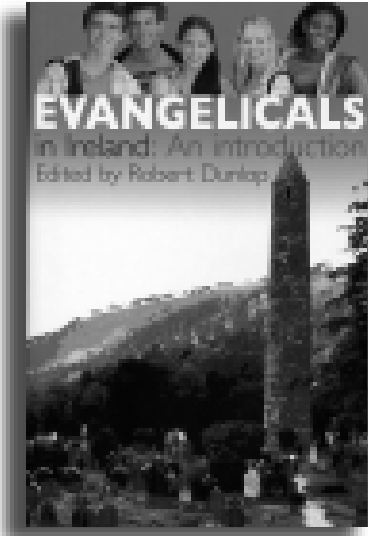
*THE FUTURES OF EVANGELICALISM :
Issues and Prospects.*

Eds. Craig Bartholomew, Robin Parry
& Andrew West.

Published by
IVP:
Leicester, 2003.

Evangelicals in Ireland: An introduction

REVIEWED BY STEPHEN CAVE



IT MIGHT be tempting to judge this collection of essays for what it never claims to be! It is undoubtedly an introduction to what is an intriguing subject and during the reading I found myself wanting it to say more, to be clearer, to go into more detail on some issues that were raised and left hanging. Accordingly, whilst tempting, it would be unfair to treat it as anything more than an introduction. It does seem to suffer from not having an overall coherence and one gets the impression that the writers were perhaps not given the clearest of briefs, evidenced by the fact that they have viewed Ireland in different ways – some as just the South and some as the whole island.

Nevertheless, for those interested in the history and diversity of the development of evangelicalism across the island this will prove to be a more than useful sketch. A broad range of contributors from within the evangelical family paints the picture and there was even the bravery to ask for an opinion from well without, even though Malachi O'Doherty's contribution may be classed somewhat harsh at times!

The history of evangelicalism in Ireland is dealt with in several ways; Fergus Ryan describes the impact of the 'Christian Celts' and the subsequent developments in Ireland's religious history right up to 'Post-modern Ireland'; Crawford Gribben challenges Ireland's evangelicals to learn from the history of the 'Irish Reformation'; a combined essay by Drew Gibson, Deborah Ford and Lynn Stanfield highlights the contribution of Irish evangelicals across the globe; and there is a fascinating chapter of mini-biographies on a broad range of characters from the past who have helped shape the evangelical community in Ireland.

Add to that Warren Nelson's attempt to highlight the core theology of evangelicals, an intriguing challenge from Tony Walsh under the title 'Evangelical Experience and the Potential for Human Growth', Patrick Mitchel's efforts to address some of the prickly issues of diversity and two very personal contributions from Ken Clarke and Moya Brennan and we have a rich, if somewhat unco-ordinated,

collection – not unlike the evangelicals whose story the book seeks to tell!

Perhaps the key message of the book rests in the final chapter by Sean Mullan – 'The Way Ahead'. He endeavours to see what the future could look like for evangelicals in a rapidly changing Ireland and the contribution they can make to that future. His conclusions warrant more than fleeting attention!

He argues for an evangelicalism that will impact Ireland, will be personal, in the sense of a living faith existing even as the institutions of church fail; a communal life with the focus on 'welcoming outsiders in without requiring conformity as a condition of acceptance'; non-judgemental, whilst at the same time presenting a way of living that is ethical; offering hope, not just in eternity but for the present to a society with frightening rates of depression and suicide; life affirming, not repressing natural desires but seeing life and pleasure as gifts of God, fulfilled in living by God's guidelines; and a realistic approach to human nature, which seeks to present an evangelical 'perspective truthfully with fidelity to their own beliefs while at the same time reaching out to serve those who do not share their beliefs.'

One suspects many of us would add an 'Amen' to that!

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An Introduction*

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