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Editorial

After ten years of faithful service, Reg Luhman has stepped down as Editor of the journal. We want to extend our grateful thanks to him for the dedication, enthusiasm and skill with which he has fulfilled this role over these years. Our administrator, Alan Kerry, is standing in as Editor for this edition, which contains material from our 2015 Symposium ‘Dealing with Conflict – Christian Advances’. In a world of ongoing division and conflict, sometimes driven by religious differences, we heard how Christians are seeking to bring peace and reconciliation in various arenas. Once again we were pleased to present a wide range of voices on the subject; Millius Palayiwa, a lawyer and former director of the Fellowship of Reconciliation spoke about African conflicts, and the Chief Operating Officer for Christian Solidarity Worldwide spoke from a Middle Eastern perspective, Sheldon Thomas, founder of Gangsline and government advisor on gang violence spoke about what can be done to counter the malign influence of these groups on our youth, and Philip Orr, community worker and peace activist spoke about lessons learned from Northern Ireland.

We also have a paper concerning both new and old tablets that refer to the Babylonian flood, and a number of book reviews. We would remind readers that we welcome feedback on any of the matters raised, email to drapkerry@gmail.com or paper letters are both equally welcomed.

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- Essays of any length accepted (up to a maximum of 7000 words)
- The essay should be factual not (science) fiction
- It can be scientific, theological, philosophical or a mixture of one or more of these.
- Ethical issues should be addressed, e.g. What is the purpose of designer babies? Who would benefit from their creation? Would it herald a better 'brave new world'? What about human rights, individuality, and autonomy? How might potential misuses be avoided?
- Entries will be professionally refereed and if the referee considers that the prize should be shared between two entries the trustees decision will be final.

email your essay to Honorary Secretary: drapkerry@gmail.com or post to Dr Alan Kerry, 3 Dukes Place, 19 Watford Road, Croxley Green, Hertfordshire, WD3 3DP.

Christian Peace-Making in African Conflicts

Millius Palayiwa

(Millius Palayiwa, a lawyer by background, has just stepped down as the Director of the Fellowship of Reconciliation to go free-lance in the field of peacemaking, compassion, forgiveness and reconciliation. While working for International Alert he facilitated the talks between the Government of Sierra Leone and the rebel movement that culminated with the signing of the Abidjan Peace Accord in 1996.)

Christian Peace-Making in Africa is not different from Christian peace-making anywhere else.

May I start by mentioning the obvious, that is: Africa has no monopoly on conflict. Violent conflicts are not only confined to Africa. While there is no doubt that Africa has contained many violent countries and places, the same can be said of other regions of the world. In Europe, the breakup of the Soviet Union unleashed untold violent conflicts in Eastern Europe. Latin America has been on fire for a long time; Asia has the long conflict between India and Pakistan, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, East Timor, Burma, West Papua etc.

And what can one say about the Middle East today? Words fail me.

We entered the 21st century full of hope following the end of the cold war. It however soon became clear that we had moved from cold war into very hot peace, in deed a “peace from hell!”

Similarly, we entered 2011 full of hope of the “Arab spring,” that has turned out to be a very cold “Arab winter.”

But we are here to discuss how Christians should deal with conflict. In this war torn world of ours, what Christians should do to bear witness to the God of peace, the God who created humanity in his own image?

The Sermon on the Mount is the starting point as it is the key gathering of ethical teachings of Jesus.

As we know, the Church and all Christians were pacifists until A.D.313. Christians would not take part or play any role in war.

The militarisation of Christianity came with Constantine the Great. In 312 AD, Constantine was waiting at the Milvan Bridge during his invasion of Italy to capture Rome from Emperor Maxentius. While he was praying, he had a vision, and in that vision he saw a Cross bearing the inscription, CONQUER BY THIS. Thus came about the combination of the cross and the sword!

There is evidence that throughout Christian history, from the apostolic age to the present, there have always been Christians who strongly believed in pacifism and nonviolence.

Erasmus (1460 – 1535: France & Switzerland) wrote “They who defend war must defend the dispositions which lead to war, and these dispositions are absolutely forbidden by the gospel. Since the time that Jesus Christ said, Put up thy sword into its sheath, Christians ought not to go to war.”

Today, there are a least 18 Christian churches that still practise pacifism; the well-known ones of course, being the historic peace churches, - the Quakers, Mennonites and the Brethren; and organisations such as the Fellowship of Reconciliation.

“The message of Jesus, as I understand it, is contained in the Sermon of the Mount It is that Sermon which has endeared Jesus to me” says Ghandi.

He goes on to say that “The message, to my mind has suffered distortion in the West... Much of what passes as Christianity today is the negation of the Sermon on the Mount.”

“The only people on earth who do not see Christ and his teachings as nonviolent are Christians.”
“I like your Christ; I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ.”
[Ghandi]

Karl Marx asked of Christians: “Does not your practical life continually give the lie to your theory? Do you turn your right cheek to someone who slaps you on the left, or don’t you rather file suit and battery? But the gospel forbids it.”

Too often the world has seen Christian witness that bears little resemblance to the Christ they claim to follow.

BUT Christians are called to be peace makers – hence the “Blessed are the peace makers for they shall be called children of God”. Christians are called to be reconcilers, as it says, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come. All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5, V17& 18)

How do we deal with conflict? It is not all conflicts that Christians should oppose. Conflict is not necessarily a bad thing; conflict is not evil by its nature. This is because sometimes the absence of conflict may mask gross injustices, discrimination, exploitation and oppression. In such a situation, avoiding conflict and maintaining the status quo can mask and exacerbate these conditions of injustice. What would have happened had there never been conflict in South Africa, Rhodesia and indeed all the colonial countries that rose up in conflict in order to gain independence? What would have happened if the black American had not risen in civil disobedience to fight for justice and equality?

In such situations, conflict is necessary and indeed welcome. In his *Letter from Birmingham Jail*, Martin Luther King responded to criticisms by white clergy, and some white Christians, by saying:

“Actually, we who engage in nonviolent direct action are not the creators of tension. We merely bring to the surface the hidden tension that is already alive. We bring it out in the open, where it can be seen and dealt with. Like a boil that can never be cured so long as it is covered up but must be opened with all its ugliness to the natural medicines of air and light, injustice must be exposed, with all the tension its exposure creates, to the light of human conscience and the air of national opinion before it can be cured.”

It is violent conflict that we as Christians must oppose and seek to resolve. But even then as Christians we should seek to resolve such conflicts through nonviolent action, forgiveness and reconciliation. “Nonviolence” can sometimes be seen as a negative and somewhat misleading term. It can be understood to mean a passive refusal to engage in violent activity. But the way it is used in progressive and positive peace-making, conflict resolution and reconciliation, nonviolence refers to actions taken to engage in conflict and violent struggles without **doing violence** to persons or, in most cases, property. Nonviolence has been defined by Gene Sharp, as “a technique used to control, combat and destroy the opponent’s power by nonviolent means of wielding power.” In Latin America they use the phrase **“firmeza permanente”** –meaning “relentless persistence” in order to avoid the negative or passive connotations of nonviolence.

Is there any evidence that nonviolence and pacifism are biblical, or that their roots are to be found in the bible? YES. More so in the Sermon on the Mount. Was Jesus politically aware? How would he have reacted to the wars of today? What would he be saying about the situation in the Middle East, ISIS, Afghanistan, Liberia, Northern Uganda, Sierra Leone, and Zimbabwe etc.? Christians disagree on what Jesus would say. Indeed in such debates there have been great attempts, often with robust theological sophistication, to try and “sanitize” Jesus and make him safe, so that the status quo is maintained, and not be scandalized by Jesus’ teachings and standards of justice, peace and righteousness that he sets out.

But taken at face value, the teaching in the Sermon on the Mount can appear to be an impractical ideal at best, and dangerously naïve at worst. Loving your enemy does not seem to make practical sense in a world of violent dictators. Telling the Jews in the concentration camps, the Ugandans under Idi Amin, black people in apartheid South Africa to turn the other cheek could be seen as begging belief and another fetter for their suffering and bondage. Praying for your persecutors, does not remove land mines, chemical weapons, bombs, nor does it stop suicide bombers.

So what was Jesus talking about; naivety, inexperience of the real violent world or sheer ignorance of reality?

Not so. Jesus lived under a violent and oppressive Empire. That Empire was the Roman Empire. Roman military might dictated every aspect of life and ruthlessly enforced the “*Pax Romana*” – a “peace on Roman terms and under Roman law.” Those who opposed the power of Rome could be dealt with ruthlessly and swiftly by crucifixion. The Roman Empire with its might is no more, but we have new super powers rising and dictatorships causing havoc throughout the world. Their actions and policies can cause conflict far and wide.

Christians in Africa, like Religious people everywhere, have at different times, taken different stances and shown different attitudes to conflict; from supporting conflict to actively opposing it.

That is nothing new. That was the situation in Jesus’ time.

Responding to violence

When powerless people are subjected to violence and oppression, there are five ways in which they can respond to that violence as demonstrated in the Holy Land during the Roman occupation and in Jesus’ time. African Christians have done the same.

Firstly one can **counter violence with violence**, including self-defense, guerilla war fare, insurgency, revolution and terrorism. This is how the Zealots reacted to the Roman Empire in Jesus’ time. For the Palestinian Jews, the Zealots were seen as “freedom fighters”, while seen by the Romans as “terrorist.” Such was the Zealots’ determination that, when Titus captured Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple in 70 AD, about a thousand Zealots committed suicide at Masada rather surrender to the Romans. Many an African Christian did support the struggles for independence, aligning themselves with the nationalist freedom movements and guerilla war fare. That was the case in Kenya, (the Mau Mau) in Zimbabwe (Zimbabwe People’s Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA) and Zimbabwe People’s National Liberation Army (ZANLA) and in South Africa (Umkonto We Sizwe). Christianity in Africa had always plaid an important role in education and therefore liberation. Let us not forget the missionaries started schools all over Africa and that almost all the Nationalists who became leaders, Presidents and Prime Ministers, were mission educated. For example, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Abu-Bakr Tafawabalewa of Nigeria, Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, Kenyatta, Khama of Botswana, Robert Mugabe, Joshua Nkomo and Sithole of Zimbabwe, and Mandela etc.

The second method of response is “**accommodation.**” This is when some of the oppressed chose to align themselves with the oppressors, and make a deal with the oppressive power in order to maximize their own benefit and get protection from the oppressor. That was what the Sadducees

and Herodian Kings did during Jesus' time. They became victims and victimizers of their own people.

In modern Africa you have Bishops and priests who have supported dictators and gone along with the oppression of the masses.

The third response is "**withdrawal.**" This can either be a physical or psychological withdrawal from society. It is the ostrich example or syndrome. The Essens and mystics responded by withdrawing from society. Examples of today's withdrawal would be people in our society choosing to talk sports, cinema, music, anything but to engage in "real politics."

There are churches like that today in Africa, that have completely disengaged from politics

Fourthly, there is the "**religious option.**" This was the route taken by the Pharisees in Jesus' days. They focused on careful and exact piety. This was fancy and elaborate religiosity that did not engage with the sufferings and struggles of those around them. It was disengaged piety, super spirituality, and religiosity that had nothing to do whatsoever with the pains of those suffering under the yoke of Rome. We know many Christians and Church establishments like that even today.

But there is a fifth way: the "**Jesus way.**" This is where the Sermon on the Mount comes in. Jesus rejected the four responses above and instead asked his followers to choose a fifth way. Glen Stassen, in his book *Just Peacemaking*, calls Jesus' actions in response to violence, "**transforming initiatives.**" This is what I am calling the "Jesus way." In most oppressor/oppressed scenarios, all the initiatives often rest with the oppressor and the oppressed simply choose how to respond to the violence. Daniel Buttry in his book *Christian Peace making* says of the transforming initiatives:

"Jesus ... calls upon his followers – who are perceived as powerless by the world's standards – to take the initiative themselves. They are not to respond to the oppressive situation by following a script acceptable and understandable to the dominant power. They are to act, to initiate a new set of events to which the dominant one must respond. The initiatives are transforming because the relationships and the context are jolted out of the expected patterns where victim and victimizer know their roles and act them out without much thought of what they are doing or why they are doing it. The transformed relationship and context opens up new possibilities in which repentance; reconciliation, justice, and peace can take place."

It is with this concept of the transforming initiatives or the Jesus way at the back of our minds that we can begin to make sense of and understand where Jesus is coming from in the Sermon on the Mount. In the sermon, at verse 9 of Matthew 5, he says "Blessed are the peace makers for they shall be called children of God. Because he was talking about peacemaking, he places that into the arena of conflict resolution through nonviolence, as expressed through the transforming initiatives, the Jesus way. Having said that the peace makers will be called the children of God, he goes on at verses 38 – 41, to elaborate on how nonviolent peace making should work in practice.

"You have heard that it was said, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." But I say to you, Do not resist an evil doer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if

anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile.”

In Africa today we see a great move by Church leaders and ordinary Christians to engage in nonviolent peace-making, forgiveness compassion and reconciliation. There is a move to go back to the bible and a belief in the power of Love and Reconciliation to transform unjust political, economic and social structures. There are branches of the Fellowship of Reconciliation all over Africa, Quakers in great numbers (East Africa having the second largest number of Quakers after the USA); various *Kairos* groups; and main stream churches of all denominations getting involved in dealing with conflicts. They want “positive peace” instead of “negative peace.” Negative peace is merely the absence of war while positive peace is the absence of structural violence, addressing the systemic and root causes of conflict, which are injustice, discrimination, poverty, corruption, inequality, denial of human rights, decesses etc., and the list goes on.

In Africa today, the quest is for African solutions to African problems. To that end the African Christians are today involved in organizing and running conferences, seminars and workshops on peacemaking, nonviolent conflict resolution, forgiveness and reconciliation. They are addressing issues of trauma healing, gang violence and gender based violence. They are involved in interfaith work on peace. They address issues of climate change and engage with international organisations such as the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) because some of the policies emanating from these International Organisations are responsible for some of the conflicts we see in Africa today.

To that end, Church leaders have been involved in facilitating peace talks, in mediation and reconciliation work and in Truth and Reconciliation Commissions as in South Africa, Kenya, Sierra Leone, Uganda etc. Christian NGOs and grassroots movements in peacemaking, trauma healing and reconciliation in their countries and across borders.

The church has as it were, been converted. It is trying to get back to the biblical roots of dealing with conflicts. The Gospel of modern men and women today is the old Gospel of peace, the gospel of loving your neighbor as yourself; the Gospel of the Sermon on the Mount!

In 1993, Desmond Tutu in observing this conversion said:

“We are helping to make a song and dance about human rights....It is beginning to happen. Consider the role played by the Churches of Kenya in the face of a hostile regime, or the witness of the Roman Catholic bishops in Malawi. A similar stand has been taken in Zaire. When an honest broker was needed in Benin to facilitate the transitional process, the political parties looked to the Church. This constitutes a new opportunity for the Church to regain its integrity and to promote the cause of justice and peace on this continent in a manner that has not been done since the beginning of the African independence process. The Church is not true to itself if it keeps silent when people are exploited or abused. To violate the rights of people is to violate God whose image dwells in them. To neglect or abuse people is to neglect or abuse Christ himself. Whatever we do to others, we do to him. It is as simple as that”.

Conflict, refugees & religious freedom in the Middle East

Anon

(At the time of the Symposium, the speaker was the Chief Operating Officer & Deputy Chief Executive of Christian Solidarity Worldwide.)

Genesis 1:27 ‘So God created human beings in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them’

Revelation 21:1-4 ‘Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband, And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying ‘Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people and he will dwell with them. They will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away’

As we consider the situation in the Middle East today, it is important to see the book ends of the Bible. God created the earth, and finally that was not the end of the story because the new heaven and earth came to pass. What an exciting glimpse of what there is to come.

Jesus quoted Isaiah 61 in Luke 4:18 and revealed his purpose and what his manifesto was. In that context, there is a role for Christians today as we continue to sow seeds of peace and reconciliation in our world.

Our journey of work and faith has taken us to live in various countries including Afghanistan. Bringing up a family in a worn torn context has been an enormous privilege. In the last decade we have been based in the UK, leading organisations focused on vulnerable children and those persecuted for their faith.

Today, we face pressures from unresolved conflicts, the rise of factional terrorism, corruption and the restrictions on freedom. An extract from an email received today: Only a few weeks ago, Ethiopians, Eritreans and Egyptians were executed on beaches in north Africa by Da’esh. These individuals have families left behind. Churches destroyed, whole communities forced to convert, pay jizyah taxes or face execution.

An interesting and influential man – President Bashar Hafez al-Assad of Syria, a man who led a stable country. He is a close ally of Russia with imperialistic intentions, suppressed by low current oil prices and he remains in power.

Our perception of the Middle East is of a homogenous unit with a single culture and language, but the reality is very different. Also, of major influence on the Middle East is that of oil as an economic engine which shows that the most influential players are Saudi Arabia as producers and the USA as consumers. Turkey is a key nation, at the gateway of the Silk Road trade routes.

I spent time in Najaf in Iraq in 2010, welcomed by Shia clerics. In a conversation with one of the four most senior Grand Ayatullahs in Shia Islam, Al Najafi, he asked me why Christians weren't concerned about the disturbances in Syria. It was hardly in the news at the time, and yet it did not pass his attention as he studied his books and talked with pilgrims and fellow observers. He was greatly concerned that Christians around the world seemed oblivious to the breakdown of society and protection of the marginalised in Syria. In subsequent years, there has also been a dramatic rise of anti-western feeling but if our military and politicians had taken time to listen and understand perhaps the crises we see today would look very differently.

His Excellence Grand Ayatollah Bashir Al Najafi in Najaf, Iraq, 2010

In Lebanon there was civil war from 1975-1990, established in 1948. A nation critically located, responding the influx of refugees from Syria and Iraq. Between 2000-2002, the UK received 301,600 asylum applications (Enabling Christians to Serve Refugees, 2003). That was the highest figure of all industrialised countries coming from Iraq, Afghanistan and Zimbabwe. Today, the numbers are much higher and more complex. The routes of movement in



addition to the sea, asylum seekers continue to move through the ancient trade roots along the Silk Road through Iran, Turkey and into the Middle East, North Africa as well as Europe.

Returning to Iran and Afghanistan, through its turbulent history the tensions within Islam have caused huge problems, oil again has been a powerful influencer. The Persian traditions of remembering history, and adapting to the rulers and influencers but never giving in to imperialist intentions.

Islamic fundamentalism has had significant influence. In Afghanistan in the early 1990s, the Mujahadin who were responsible for ousting the Soviets, moved to a more fundamentalist movement which then became corrupted which was again cleansed by the rise of the Taliban. Considering the impact and thinking of such groups remains painfully lacking as foreign military forces have embarked on regime change. And yet, time after time very little time and effort has been taken to understand the local culture, religion and practices before the attacks start. The question remains unanswered, has it been worth it?

Back in 654 when Prophet Mohammed died, the succession debate ensued and war began within Islam. This has continued and diversified throughout history. This has exhibited in engagement with other faiths also, and yet the majority of destruction in countries such as Pakistan is one Islamic group attacking another. Shrines have been destroyed as well as churches.

Considering the extent of the problem of lack of religious freedom in our world today from data sourced from the Pew Research Religion & Public Life Project, Jan 2014 <http://www.pewforum.org/2014/01/14/religious-hostilities-reach-six-year-high/>

- 84% of the world's population is affiliated with a religion
- 5.1 billion people live in countries with high or very high restriction of religious freedom
- 31% of the world's countries have people imprisoned for their religion-related activities
- It is estimated that more than 200 million Christians are 'persecuted' for their faith

Staggering numbers which highlight the reality of isolation, discrimination, harassment, imprisonment, violence and torture today, exhibited as follows:

- *Afghanistan*, targeted killings
- *North Korea*, sent to a labour camp to die
- *Nigeria*, churches burnt to the ground, children kidnapped
- *Eritrea*, imprisoned in a shipping container
- *Mexico, Colombia & Cuba*, church leaders kidnapped
- *China*, lengthy prison sentences
- *Iran*, falsely accused of crimes against the State
- *Pakistan*, riots, murder or death penalty
- *Sudan*, lashes & death sentence
- *Iraq*, mass forced migration and abuse

Religious Freedom:

The Christian view of the human being includes that we are created as free beings, called to respond to God in devotion and worship (John 4:23, Rom 12:1, 1 Cor 10:31). The freedom to be able to worship God is thus intrinsic to humanity. In addition, assent to religious truth is a matter of free will and faith and cannot be secured through force. Jesus invited people to follow him by choice.

Justice for people of all faiths:

In the Christian view, justice is integrally related to love. Jesus called his followers to love God and love their neighbour (Mark 12:28-31), defined by Jesus in a radically inclusive manner in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). Jesus' ministry was marked by his love and compassion for all people, of whatever faith or background.

Christians are called to model unity and have a special responsibility to one another (Rom 12:5, 1 Cor 10:17 & 12:12). The suffering of members of the body of Christ must be attended to by others in the body. 'If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it' (1 Cor 12:26)

Christians are called especially to do good to those within the church community. 'Let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers' (Gal 6:10)

Approach to Human Rights:

The basic affirmations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNDHR) were drawn substantially from and are compatible with, Christian ethics, including the “recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family” and the principles that, “ all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights” and “everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind”. The UNDHR and subsequent universal human rights instruments constitute vital tools in today's world for the pursuit of a just society in accordance with a Christian vision.

Hope for the future:

The reality of this broken world is that a society characterised by perfect justice will never be achieved before the end times, when all things will be made new and suffering will be brought to an end (Rev 21:1-5)

However, the Christian view of hope allows our vision of God's future to affect our present experience. Those who live in hope will never accept given evils as their last word. The Church as a community living in hope must exist as a “*constant disturbance in human society*” (*Jorgen Moltmann*) to fight evil, fuelled by a hope filled vision of the promises of God. In the words of *Bonhoeffer* in his writings Letters and Papers from Prison he said: “*It may be that the day of judgement will dawn tomorrow; in that case, we will gladly stop working for a better tomorrow. But not before*”.



Buttermere, Lake District, 2014 – consider the beautiful scene, and then notice the barbed wire and its restriction

Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; He will never leave you nor forsake you. (*Deuteronomy 31:6*)

Ending Gang Violence

Sheldon Thomas

(Sheldon Thomas is founder of Gangsline and advisor to the Home Office on gang culture)

(This paper is a lightly-edited transcript of the talk as given on the day)

Thank you for inviting me, I'm one of the advisors to the Home Office on Gangs across the UK. We go into various Local Authorities and look at their gang strategy as a whole – i.e. what the local authorities are doing to tackle gang violence in their area. I also run my own organization called 'Gangsline' which was set up in 2007 following several murders that occurred in one weekend in London. London is not alone in this; Birmingham, Nottingham, Sheffield, Leeds, Manchester, Liverpool and parts of Wales and Scotland have gang problems as well. Scotland has a serious heroin use problem – the highest rate in the western hemisphere. So across the whole of the UK we have a drugs, gangs, guns and knife problem.

Why am I here? I am a former gang member, I started my first gang in 1976 aged 12 years old. The reason I started was a completely different reason to that for many young men joining gangs today. We were dealing with racism, meaning we were being targeted by police officers and the National Front – part of the British National Party, which grew out of the Teddy Boy era. We were called many names; 'coon', 'sambo', 'jungle bunny', 'go back and swing in the trees', by police officers on a daily basis. After a while, being human, there is only so much pressure a young person can take from racist police officers, while at the same time being attacked by 19 and 20 year olds with steel-capped boots from the National Front. When we got home, our parents did not understand what we were going through and did not take our sides. This meant that many black men of my age-group felt alone, we felt we had no alternative but to form gangs to protect ourselves, because we weren't getting the love and respect at home or on the streets of Britain. So for us, gangs started as a social response to the abuse we received from racist police officers and the National Front.

Many of us were locked up, and felt we weren't being heard, so most of us turned to criminality, in other words we started selling drugs. To put it into some context, we thought the only way we could get back at Britain for slavery, colonialism and the way we were being treated as black men, was to commit crimes. This is to give some context of where we are today, how gangs in some neighborhoods started. I am not saying that gangs are exclusive to young black men, they are not. In Liverpool, Croxteth, Norris Green, Salford etc the gangs are white not black. The difference between the gangs in the north is that most of them are generational – the mum, dad, grandad etc are all involved in criminality in those particular societies.

I have been witness to several murders and been involved in several serious incidents. The last was a young man who had his head blow off next to me and I was covered in his blood. I think this was the point at which I felt God saying 'what road are you going to take – the road of self-destruction or the road of salvation, moving and changing your lifestyle'. I felt that when the four gunmen came in it could have been me, I was standing just inches away. So that was my turning point.

I was then very fortunate to meet an MP – Bernie Grant, who took me to America to meet another man – Jesse Jackson, who was a Christian. It was at that meeting that I really began to realise that we were all put here for a purpose. Up until then I felt lonely, emotionally wrecked, lost, confused, because we weren't getting the love at home from mum and dad, and I wasn't getting love from society. It was when I met Jesse Jackson that I began to understand that there was a God. For better or worse, many of us had thought that God was punishing us, or doing anything for us, we had mixed views. It was when he explained what God had done for them in America in the civil rights movement, it was then I began to realise that not all white people were racist, and not all black people are nice. Jesse Jackson began to show me that this is what God was showing him, that for the civil rights movement to move forward you had to take a God-perspective. And he showed me that in order for me to move forward, I needed to take a God-perspective, rather than what society was telling me, that you're a 'sambo' etc and my mum just telling me to put up with it. So when I came back from America I began to work with gangs in the UK.

Now, we are dealing with the Christian Advances to conflict. Some of what I might say may be controversial. I am not saying that Christians aren't doing anything, nor do I want people to think that I'm speaking about all single-mothers in a negative way. I am speaking about local communities, you will hear me say that Christians are not doing enough, but this does not mean every Christian. I mean that a majority of us are not focusing on what Jesus has called us to do – which to me is the community.

As you can see, the challenges are quite severe, street gangs and gang violence, drug use and distribution, female sexual exploitation within gangs, grooming of children. Young men aged 10 are now selling drugs in our communities, maybe not in all areas, but in deprived areas you will find young men selling drugs on behalf of older people. Whilst I'm not suggesting that all young people are involved in this lifestyle, nevertheless the minority that are involved, influence the majority of young people. What I mean is that on an estate, say in Liverpool, say there are 300 gang members, and maybe 600-900 not involved in gangs. These remaining 600-900 young people will be in fear of the gang members, will be intimidated by them and what will happen is that even though they are not involved, they will then find weapons to take with them to keep themselves 'safe'. Most parents do not understand the life of a child in an inner-city estate – and most churches don't too. They will take a knife to protect them from being recruited by the gangs – this is what non-gang members have told me. So a majority of knife incidents are not directly gang-related, but indirectly they are because they took the knife with them because of fear of the gangs.

So we have a serious problem in the UK. As church leaders, what are we doing about it, in terms of challenging what these young people are up to?

(Video 1) – So you can see there is much that has not changed from my time in the 70s. What he said is 'there is no safety in London', that young man is about 24 years old and he's saying to us that he does not feel safe. Who has the authority over how young people are made to feel safe? Is it the role of the parent, the police or the role of the church? My research suggests to me it is not the role of the police. It is the role of the parent and the church. When we first came to this country, the church and the community were more interactive, what has happened over two or

three decades is that the church has fallen away from the community, and the community do not see them as part of them anymore. In Croxteth, white kids tell me they don't want anything to do with the church. This was not the situation in the 60s and 70s. What has happened is that the white underclass have lost faith in the church totally. So whether Anglican, Pentecostal, Evangelical, they have no faith in the church.

For black kids, over the same period, they too have fallen away from the church. The Pentecostal evangelical churches that held the communities together are no longer doing so, they have become insular. So the message of Jesus Christ, showing the love of the church to the community, has been decimated. So when you have a young person saying they don't feel safe, they are speaking to us 'you have failed us, I don't feel safe...I have no father figure'

He also said 'every day someone's getting 'mash-up'' – meaning shot or stabbed, every day – this is his world. We walk about in our world, but there is a parallel world alongside us, and in this world, every day someone is getting shot or stabbed. He's become desensitized to violence, because every day somebody is getting stabbed or shot. And those who have spiritual authority over these areas are not involved, because we've moved away. We should be praying and interceding on behalf of our community to keep it safe – we're not doing that.

He said 'I'm feeling neglected' – this is how I felt in 1976, he feels it now. What does he mean? Well he has no father, I had a father but there was no love coming to me from my household. So he looks to a gang member and feels that that's where he's going to get the love from. Remember we're not just talking about black kids, you'll hear the same in Croxteth and Scotland.

The other thing he talked about 'you don't want to be socially excluded' – he doesn't want to be excluded from his estate. You either fit in or the chances are you'll be killed for not fitting in. Can you imagine growing up in an environment like this? That is what it's like in certain areas of England – Brixton, Croxteth, Toxteth, parts of Glasgow – that's what it's like. Let's ask ourselves individually and as a church, what can we do, what should we be doing, are why aren't we doing it?

Let's look at gang mentality – most gang members are suffering from emotional trauma. Mostly there is no father-figure, or the man is beating up the woman. So they grow up seeing domestic violence from age four or five onwards, so in his head, that's how you treat a woman. Rejection, loneliness, people see gangs together and think they can't be lonely, but they are. The church used to run a youth-club, there is no youth-club now, nowhere where a young man could come into a church and do youth stuff. Anger – the same anger I had, these guys have. Anger can drive you to do so many crazy things. We need to understand who has the authority of dealing with this? I don't believe it is a police problem, I believe it is a home and church problem. We have the spiritual and moral authority to pray against that. We have young men who hate each other, confused, disillusioned, and with personality disorders. These are the effects – violence, criminality, kidnap, torture, rape – rape is a major problem. Last year alone there were over 6000 gang-rapes. Far more go unreported, because young women do not trust anyone any more, the church, parents, no-one. Often they don't even believe it is rape, the videos they watch make them believe a guy should mistreat you, they believe they should wear hardly any clothes because

that's what the videos show. Their mum was a teenager when she had them, so the mum was in no way able to raise them properly as they were a child themselves.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs – I know this isn't really a Christian approach but it's one we can look at and think through. When we get a young person, most services expect a gang member or young person from a bad background to start 'achieving'. What they don't understand is that they cannot achieve if their basic needs have never been met. That's why we have 37-year-old gang members still on the street, their mind is still like a 15-year-old. You can't fix this with 'interventions' it can only be fixed spiritually. Something needs to click in the head and heart of a gang member for change to happen. This is why I say the church has the authority in this matter. 30 year olds on the street have not been told they are loved. The simple word love can overcome many obstacles, but many of these young people will never hear that. They will only experience the affection of a family from gang members, who themselves are warped in their thinking. So unless the basic needs are met, they will still feel like a 15-year-old, they won't grow. Safety needs have not been met, basic needs have not been met, and we expect our children to suddenly mature overnight.

According to government statistics, 71% of gangs are from black community, 50% from African communities. In the 60s and 70s most gangs were West Indian. Now 50% of gangs are African – the countries they are from have all suffered civil unrest in recent years. 69% are from 'Christian households'. We claim to have the gospel of Jesus Christ, but yet 69% of gang members actually come from households where the parent is a practicing Christian. The reason why, is because we haven't really grasped the message of Jesus which starts in the home, before attending church. 61% of black families have no fathers, 20% of white families have no father. We are in crisis, but these are moral issues, for the church to deal with as we have the spiritual and moral authority which the government does not have. The government can only build new houses, we as Christians, have the spiritual and moral authority which change the heart and mind of man, so that when put in new housing they can make a new life.

A recent report commissioned by the Westminster Joint Health and Wellbeing Board, sampled 100 gang members and found 86% had personality disorders, 67% suffered from alcohol dependency, 59% suffered from anxiety disorder, and 57% suffered from drug dependency. 34% had attempted suicide – these are gang members who are supposed to be hard-nuts, with guns and knives, yet 34% attempted suicide. 25% showed signs of psychosis, 20% suffered from depression.

Some emerging trends – grooming initiation, child exploitation, female exploitation, witchcraft. Witchcraft relates to the high proportion of gang members from African backgrounds. I'm not stereotyping, the facts are that we have gangs in London, Birmingham, Manchester and Liverpool, who use witchcraft to intimidate other gangs. Why? because 50% are from Africa, Congo, Rwanda, Uganda. Regardless of political correctness, we as Christians know this is a major problem. When young kids are using witchcraft to intimidate other gang members this is a problem - use of black magic, facial distortion, reptiles and coloured jewelry – we can have a spiritual eye to recognize these things. Gang members do not call it 'witchcraft' they use the term 'juju'

(Video 2) As you can see in that video, there were certain key words used. Gang members no longer look like they used to – they are learning to be smart, so they appear non-threatening. Then if a parent looks out the window and sees three or four older guys with little kids, they think nothing of it, but they are subtly grooming the kids to select those from troubled backgrounds without a father figure. Then they will buy them expensive trainers, and new clothes, the kid doesn't know he is being bought, he thinks this is love, as they have no understanding of what this is having never experienced it before. He then says 'drop this thing for me' – the kid finally realizes he's been manipulated, eventually he's earning £20-£50 a day (aged 10 or 11 years old) – significantly more than the parent is earning. The mum is not going to report this to the police, she takes half of the earnings, as she has no job. This is how it works in their world.

For a young person living in these areas there are clear territories where they can and cannot go. So when mum sends her son on a chore to another area, she doesn't understand that this is dangerous for him, he is trapped and refuses to go.

We have allowed this to continue, because we haven't stepped in spiritually and morally, we haven't challenged absent fathers, we haven't challenged society about the moral breakdown, we have become less concerned with the moral fibre and more concerned with what we are doing as Christians amongst ourselves. This is not every Christian, but a majority are not doing enough. That is the life of these young people. We can walk freely anywhere, but children under the age of 18 or 21 cannot walk about so freely in their own area.

This is a spiritual battle – abandonment causes fear, bitterness causes anger and violence, rebellion causes self-will. We can tackle this problem through prayer, intercession and supporting organisations that are on the ground working to fight this problem.

The high rates of mental illness are often related to drug use. Rape is an increasing problem. Previously the black community regarded rape as a white-person thing. There are now more rapes by black men than ever before, because of videos that promote sexually explicit lyrics, promoting violence against women.

So how do we approach this spiritual battle? This is what I believe Christians should be doing.

- Evangelism – we don't even go on the estates any more.
- Intercessory prayer – we don't have enough churches praying against the spirit of violence, the spirit of young people being drawn into this lifestyle. 50% of these young people are unemployed – do we pray against it?
- Training churches – this is where I come in. I've written to 200 churches, asking them to let me come in to train youth pastors, youth groups to help them understand gangs. None have responded. We can only get to grips with the problem if we understand it.
- Cell groups
- Create employment and support
- Reintegration into education
- Challenge the music industry
- Challenging absent fathers

This is what I think we can do, we have the spiritual and moral authority to do these things. In many cases, the government does not have the authority to do this, but we, the church, do.

Northern Ireland – Christianity and the post-conflict realities

Philip Orr

(Philip Orr is a community activist and peace-worker from Belfast)

The civil conflict in Northern Ireland is - hopefully - the final episode of an Anglo-Irish conflict that may be considered one of the longest-running disputes in European history. It has roots in the Middle Ages but the Elizabethan Wars in Ireland during the late 16th century were a period when England sought new dominance. These wars were followed by the Plantation of Ulster during which Protestant settlers were exported to Ireland's troublesome northern-most province in order to quell native Catholic insurrection. They proved to be a bulwark for Britain on a potentially seditious neighbouring island during the subsequent heyday of global empire.

By the mid-20th century, while the south of Ireland sought and gained national freedom and while Britain was altering into a post-imperial, secularising, multi-cultural state, the tiny, provincial state of Northern Ireland was left in the hands of a fearful Protestant elite who were clinging to firm and unchanging notions of Britishness whilst the Catholic minority in the same society was experiencing disenfranchisement and resentment.

Attempts to introduce reform in the progressive decade of the 1960s met stiff opposition. By 1970, a fierce sectarian conflict was under way and the guerrilla organisation known as the Irish Republican Army was beginning a sustained and at times ferocious campaign against all those personnel and institutions that epitomised the British presence on the island of Ireland. Only in the mid-1990s were sustained ceasefires brokered and only in 1998 was a peace settlement achieved, involving amnesties for political prisoners, power-sharing government, reforms in policing and justice and a substantial involvement of the Irish Republic in Northern Ireland's everyday governance.

Not surprisingly, given the way that religious difference was at the core of the Anglo-Irish dispute for many centuries, the civil conflict in Northern Ireland had a heavily religious dimension to it. The Plantation of Ulster had been a British Protestant project in Catholic Ireland. When Northern Ireland was set up in 1922, not surprisingly it mirrored this arrangement. One Northern Irish premier described the local legislature as a 'Protestant parliament for a Protestant people.' The strongly Unionist identity of the descendants of the 17th century British Plantation was conceived - as precarious identities often are - in deeply religious terms. For Northern Ireland's minority, who were descended from the 'indigenous' peoples of the island, strong allegiance to the Catholic church was their badge of belonging and a source of wounded pride. Northern Catholics were living in a regime that did not acknowledge their cultural values or provide for their economic welfare.

Thus, one major challenge for sincere and committed followers of Jesus Christ who live in Northern Ireland today is to thoughtfully traverse this historic narrative in which politics, identity, enmity and injustice have been embroiled with religious affiliation and to ask serious questions about the uses made of Scripture and of the Christian tradition in order to meet political expediency, thereby fostering antagonism in one of Europe's most notorious conflict zones.

Amongst the organisations which have promoted an agenda of spiritual questioning and debate is the one known currently as the Centre for Contemporary Christianity in Ireland. Formerly known as the Evangelical Contribution on Northern Ireland, this body has sought to interrogate the Unionist watchword 'For God and Ulster' and suggest instead a purer, Reformation-influenced watchword, 'For God and His glory alone.'

Motivated by shame for the rhetorical stridency often manifested in the past by Unionist political clerics such as the Reverend Ian Paisley, members of the Contemporary Christianity network have sought to build bridges with Catholic laypersons and clergy, linking with those of the Catholic faith who clearly exhibit a devotion to reconciliation and a willingness to share ideas. The Centre for Contemporary Christianity has endeavoured to offer a platform for all kinds of voices and to hear and respond to stories of wrongdoing perpetrated against the Catholic community in the past by forces and institutions of the British state in Ireland. This was a state that Protestants and Evangelicals uncritically supported and indeed too often they proudly endorsed it. Also, there has to be room for people on all sides to speak openly of deep wrongs done by paramilitary groupings, especially those hurts inflicted by the Irish Republican Army, whose para-military campaign was often brutal in its methods and heart-breaking in its impact.

Amongst those community projects which have been inspired by a Christian conviction and which have sought to tackle the brokenness of the Ulster community is Corrymeela. This is an organisation which was founded in 1965 by the Reverend Ray Davey who had been a POW in Germany during the Second World War and who had witnessed the bombing of Dresden, one of the ghastly raids which occurred during the Allied aerial campaign which targeted German cities and left hundreds of thousands of civilians dead.

Ray Davey founded Corrymeela as a response to what he had witnessed. He had seen 'Christian' Europe devouring its own children during the middle years of the 20th century. The Corrymeela community was situated on Northern Ireland's beautiful northern coastline and came to be a refuge for many people who had been bereaved and distressed by the local conflict. But it also functioned as a place where perpetrator and victim could meet one another and where the beginnings of a fragile peace process could be advanced.

Amongst other remarkable ventures inspired by men and women of Christian conviction is the recently founded Four Corners Festival in Belfast. Established by a Presbyterian minister and a Catholic priest, the festival strives to hold events in various parts of a still-divided city, which involve performers and audiences moving around the fractured urban map and meeting and greeting people they would not otherwise encounter. There is a legacy of fear that goes back to the worst days of the violence. In a sense the fear is also much more deeply linked to the centuries-

long animosity that had characterised rival inhabitants of these islands and will soon - hopefully - receding into the mists of the past.

Unquestionably the New Testament model of spiritual encounter, in which Christ engages in a personal and intimate way with troubled individuals, offers a powerful and divine example of the rich potential that exists in honest, painful human contact. Much of the best work undertaken by Christian churches and Christian institutions in Northern Ireland today is simply focused on introducing people of differing views to one another in a way that subverts the norms of distrust, pride and certainty that lead to de-humanisation of 'the other'. It may be argued that a similar project of painful integration faced the Apostle Paul as he sought to establish infant churches where Jew and Gentile, male and female could co-exist and where all who met were now counted one in the love and redemptive unity of Christ Jesus.

So, what are the everyday challenges of living by Christian principles in a post-conflict society? I shall mention three. Firstly, there is the issue of how we speak of conversion. With its strong Evangelical traditions, Northern Ireland contains many people who will speak of having been 'saved' at some stage in their life, usually an early one. Sunday School attendance was almost universal in Protestant communities not so long ago and the teachers who laboured earnestly in this environment were sincere and valuable members of the Christian church. However, there is a whole generation of pro-British paramilitaries who would have been steeped in Evangelical religion but who, by their late teenage years, were engaging in militancy, paralleling those from a pious Catholic background who were now fighting with the IRA.

The question may be asked whether the simple, dramatic conversion experience that was advocated for young children by ardent Sunday School teachers was in any way effective in introducing to many of these boys and girls the Christian imperative that love of one's neighbour, irrespective of his or her allegiances, is the best demonstration of an altered life and a regenerated heart. However it would be utterly wrong to demonise those who did take up the gun. This is an attitude of blame that is all too easy to adopt by those who live in more settled and fortunate circumstances.

The malign influence of political preachers who acted as motivators of pro-British para-militarism is a carefully recorded and well-known fact and these clerics may be a more appropriate target for blame, given the insight and foresight that men of the cloth ought to possess. Attuned to respect devout teachers who had spoken to them as children of the need of Evangelical conversion, young working class men in towns such as Belfast were prone to heed these political preachers who also spoke to them of the need to eradicate the 'terrorist' threat in their midst and to regard the 'Church of Rome' – and by implication, its followers – as Satanic. It is important that this sad era of distorted Christian gospel is understood for the harm it caused.

On another, social basis, it is surely important in a post-conflict society to note that religious conversion at a personal level, while vital, is simply not enough if a society itself is to be reborn. New attitudes need to be fostered, new civic institutions need to be built and pervasive injustices need to be investigated and ultimately dealt with. The way in which the Jewish scriptures envisage religion as a force which permeates the whole of society needs to be amply stressed. The way in

which the Jewish prophets called for renewal, integrity and repentance must also be remembered each Sunday in Northern Ireland's many churches.

The imperative to forgive is clearly an aspect of Christian living that matters in a society such as Northern Ireland. What is especially challenging is the fact that those who committed acts of violence against a loved one may not feel they have done wrong. In a political conflict involving guerrilla warfare and 'terrorism', the combatants are often sustained by a sense that their cause is just, that its rectitude in the face of oppression has been centuries in the making and that the representatives of the state such as policemen and judges were deeply implicated in injustice and deserved to be targeted. How does one mingle mercy and forgiveness with justice and punishment in a post-conflict situation? Challenges abound.

Opening the doors of a church to ex-combatants may mean that someone who was from a police family and who lost a loved one to 'terrorism' may find themselves seated next to the perpetrator of that deed or at least seated next to an ex-combatant colleague of that perpetrator. What is more, that perpetrator may be genuinely sad about the suffering he or she caused but still feel that the killing was necessary in the interests of their particular cause. They may struggle ever to feel otherwise, unless of course a Christian conversion occurs, with its revolutionary potential. But surely the church should be open for all to attend and mingle, regenerate and unregenerate alike? Or is it simply too much to ask someone wounded by a killing to accept the killer as a fellow human who is warmly welcomed into church services? This is one of many dilemmas that a church may face on the road to practising the forms and shapes of hospitality prior even to the act of facilitating or enabling acts of forgiveness.

Finally, there is the vexed matter of hermeneutics. Preachers of political violence in Northern Ireland had no difficulty finding texts to divinely justify and sanction aggressive behaviour. As we all know there are some very bloody scriptures in the Bible, both in the books which deal with the children of Israel's treatment of the pagan peoples with whom they had to share the land and also in the Psalms, where the writer sometimes hurls murderous imprecations at those whom he regards as his enemies.

Of course we know that it is the strength of the Jewish and Christian scriptures that they present the human condition in all its sinful perversity, with its history of ethnic strife and murderous hatred. However it would be a grave weakness not to recognise that good hermeneutics are always required in which there is a clear understanding that Christ's message of love and non-violence is the lens through which we must examine the violence which is luridly present in the earlier Jewish scriptures. Living in a post-conflict society in which those who professed to be Christian too often played a divisive role, there is an obligation for today's church members and teachers to be scrupulous about how the Bible is interpreted – and I believe that this caution is not to be shied away from in any shape or form.

The Babylonian Flood Story – A New Tablet and an Old One Misrepresented

Alan Millard

A New Tablet of the Babylonian Flood Story

Ever since 1872 when George Smith announced his discovery of the Babylonian Flood Story comparisons have been made between it and the Hebrew account. The Babylonian cuneiform tablets lay smashed in the ruins of Assyrian palaces at Nineveh sacked by the Babylonians and Medes in 612 B.C. It describes how the gods were annoyed by the din people made, so eventually decided to destroy them with a flood. Enki or Ea, god who had had the idea of creating human beings had a special devotee, Ut-napishtim, also known as Atrahasis, and warned him to build a vessel in which he could escape with his family and animals. The flood came and 'all mankind was turned to clay'. After a week of storms, the vessel grounded on a mountain and Ut-napishtim offered sacrifices to which the gods swarmed like flies, having been deprived of their accustomed offerings by the flood. Enki then decreed that each person should bear the punishment for their own sin and Ut-napishtim and his wife were given immortality. The many similarities have led to the widespread view that the Genesis narrative is derived from the Babylonian. In the century following Smith's publication, additional fragments of the Epic of Gilgamesh, Tablet 11, which tells the story of the Flood, have been identified, filling some gaps in the text. None of them is older than the first millennium B.C. However, pieces of tablets containing another Babylonian account of the Flood came to light over the same period, the Epic of Atrahasis. The publications the late Wilfred Lambert and I made in 1965 (*Cuneiform Texts* 46, British Museum Press) and 1969 (*Atrahasis. The Babylonian Story of the Flood*, Oxford: Clarendon Press) restored the greater part of that poem, revealing the reason for the Flood, its progress and its aftermath. The major tablets were written in the 17th century B.C., so give a version of the story current one thousand years earlier than the Gilgamesh tablets. Parts of the Epic of Atrahasis are still missing, although several new fragments have been edited in the past half century – a new edition is needed. Now another tablet has come to light which deserves attention.

In 1985 a gentleman brought some Babylonian objects, including cuneiform tablets, to the British Museum for identification. They were shown to Irving Finkel, one of the Museum's Assyriologists, with the information that the owner's father had collected them in Iraq after the Second World War. Finkel quickly and excitedly recognised one of the tablets as part of the Babylonian Flood story, in handwriting of the 18th or 17th century B.C. However, the owner would not leave his tablet for study, much to Finkel's frustration. It was not until 2009 that a chance encounter between the two men at an exhibition in the Museum resulted in the tablet being left on deposit for examination. Some facts about its contents were released to the press in 2010 and Finkel published an extensive exploration of its significance, with a translation and technical notes in 2014, as *The Ark before Noah; decoding the Story of the Flood* (London: Hodder and Stoughton).

The tablet is inscribed portrait style, one column on each face, the reverse being extensively damaged. Its handwriting is cursive, typical of the Old Babylonian period, c. 1,900-1,600 B.C. There is no colophon to name the scribe or give a date.

The text opens with a speech known from the Atrahasis and Gilgamesh Epics to be given by the god Enki to his devotee Atrahasis. As those texts show, Enki gives him a dream in which he instructs him to pull down his reed hut and build a boat. Atrahasis is not addressed directly because the gods had sworn not to reveal the destruction they planned, so Enki spoke his initial words to the house. The new tablet opens with these words: “Wall, wall, reed wall, reed wall, Atrahasis, pay attention to my advice”. Then the instructions bring a surprise, “Draw out the boat that you will make on a circular plan, let her length and breadth be equal”. There follow details about palm fibre ropes. The text then switches, without introduction to Atrahasis who relates his obedient actions: “I set in place thirty ribs,” followed by detailed measurements of parts of the structure and the materials used. Aided by a mathematician, Finkel concludes the vessel was an enormous coracle entirely made of reeds, a circular craft 222 feet (almost 70m, 230 yards) in diameter, with walls about 20 feet (6 m.) high and a floor area 14,400 cubits square, a figure reproduced in the Gilgamesh version. Noah’s Ark was to be about 450 feet long, 75 feet wide and 45 feet high (300 cubits x 50 x 30, or 140m. x 23 m. x 13.5m.) with a base about 15,000 cubits square, remarkably close to the Babylonian figure. The whole was coated with bitumen of various kinds within and without, including the ‘cabins’ inside. The damaged reverse of the tablet tells of Atrahasis’ anxiety, then the arrival of wild animals, which, here's another surprise, entered the vessel ‘two by two’! The tablet ends with him ordering the workmen, “When I have gone into the boat, caulk, that is, ‘seal’, its door”.

Why the tablet was written we do not know and never shall! Perhaps it was a script for a dramatic presentation or a recitation, perhaps it was a student exercise involving advanced mathematical calculations. It is clearly only a part of the story. Whatever its purpose, it offers improvements to the known text of the Atrahasis Epic. Finkel is able to show, with a high degree of certainty, that the Epic described a circular vessel and had some animals entering in pairs. Inevitably, he compares the Babylonian accounts with Genesis. Assuming the traditional source analysis of the Hebrew text (the documents J and E) he creates a scenario of Judaeans exiles in Babylon who were taught the cuneiform script and the Babylonian language, like Daniel and his friends, adapting the Flood Story for themselves. In Babylonia, too, he suggests, the exiles met the concept of a single god, Marduk, who incorporated all the other gods, which sharpened their faith in one God alone. This is not the place to discuss all the matters he introduces.

Attempting to strengthen his case for dependence, Finkel presents a Babylonian tablet of the late sixth century B.C. concerning boats. Between two occurrences of the normal word for ‘boat’ (*eleppu*), it mentions something called *tu-bu-ú*. He assumes it means a boat of some sort and tries to equate it with the Hebrew word for Noah’s vessel, *tēbā*, which has a different initial consonant. He thinks that ‘the Judaeans encountered the Akkadian boat word *tubbū* used for the Ark in the [Flood] story ... and Hebraised it as *tēvāh*. In this case the original consonants are less important ...’ [p. 148] In some Babylonian version of the Flood story no longer extant, he says, ‘the word *tubbū* must have occurred in place of *eleppu*, “boat”’. This is really far-fetched, explaining an obscure word by a more obscure Babylonian one! The Hebrew word is used in one other place in the Bible, for the container in which his mother placed baby Moses (Exodus 2: 3, 5). Linguists have long accepted that the Hebrew word was actually borrowed from Egyptian (*tb.t*) where it means a ‘box’. Equating Babylonian initial *ṭ* (the letter *ṭeth*) with Hebrew initial *t* (the letter *taw*)

demands stronger evidence; it would be an extremely rare occurrence. It is worth noting that the book of Genesis never designates Noah's Ark by any of the Hebrew words for 'ship, boat' (*'ōniyyâ*, *sepînâ*, *šî*), something the failure of artists and others have to understand has misled many of us since infancy! While a coracle might float and be steered along a river, the Flood was not a river and there was no point in steering the Ark!

Taking the oblong shape of Noah's wooden Ark as a development of the impractical cube-shaped boat in the seventh-century Gilgamesh version is part of Finkel's case. Yet he has to assume unknown variations to the existing Babylonian versions to explain other differences, so if there were any changes they could have occurred much earlier. Despite his arguments for the era of the Exile, the Babylonian texts are inconclusive. While the Babylonian compositions reflect the local situation, where reed vessels were normal, the Hebrew account does not tell of a reed vessel but a wooden one, which would be less appropriate in Babylonia where wood was scarce. The following sections of Genesis also indicate a region unlike Babylonia, for Noah planted a vineyard (9: 20), and people moved to the plain of Shinar (Babylonia), according to Genesis 11: 1. If we believe the Hebrew account is the original, we shall have to assume the oblong wooden ark, which was perhaps better suited to a different region of the Near East, was re-imagined as an enormous reed coracle in Babylonia with approximately the same floor area as Noah's Ark. The many agreements between the Babylonian and the Hebrew narratives have to be balanced against the many disagreements, as has often been done. The 'Ark Tablet' adds to both! It does not prove the Hebrews borrowed the Flood narrative from the Babylonians.

An Old Discovery Misrepresented

The publication of this new tablet further contradicts totally mistaken claims which are current. Following my brief appearance in a TV programme on Flood Stories at Christmas 2012, presented by Joanna Lumley, a lady sent me a pamphlet entitled *The Earliest Flood Tablet* by Bill Cooper, issued by the Creation Science Movement, Portsmouth, in 2011. It has been quite widely quoted and its conclusions reproduced on the Internet (e.g. by John Morris) because Cooper claims to present a fragment of a Flood Story from Babylonia copied about 2,100 B.C. 'soon after the Flood itself' (following Archbishop Ussher's chronology). Unlike the Gilgamesh Epic's account of the Flood, which has marked differences from Genesis, of this tablet Cooper states, '... the tablet is monotheistic. It contains not a word of the pagan babble so common in Gilgamesh and its rival, the Atram-hasis Epic ... There is no detail that differs from Genesis and nothing extra is added. ... This clear text stands as both a confirmation of Scripture and a condemnation of liberal "scholarship". It so clearly undermines the "critical" view that it never sees the light of day'. The tablet in question was unearthed at Nippur in southern Iraq by the University of Pennsylvania Expedition and made the subject of a monograph by the German-American Assyriologist Herrman Hilprecht in 1910, *The Earliest Version of the Babylonian Deluge Story*. Hilprecht gave the date about 2,100 to 2,000 B.C. for the fragment which now bears the registration number CBS 13532 in the Babylonian collection of the University of Pennsylvania Museum. Since 1910 Babylonian chronology has been revised, so that Hilprecht's dating should be reduced to about 1,800 B.C. and on palaeographic grounds the date of this piece should probably be lowered further, to about 1,400-1,300 B.C. It is, therefore, by no means the oldest copy of a Babylonian Flood story. The extant

copies of accounts of the Flood range from about 1,800 B.C. to A.D. 650. The worst part of Cooper's case is the assertion that 'by sleight of hand and deception' this fragment 'remains hidden today,' implying that scholars have deliberately ignored it because of the harm its supposed monotheism could inflict on the idea that Genesis depends on Babylonian texts. He alleges, 'The last scholar to mention it was Rogers way back in 1912, since which date the world of scholarship has kept a guilty silence' (Robert W. Rogers, *Cuneiform Parallels to the Old Testament*, pages 104-07). That is untrue! This text has not been hidden or ignored. The long standard work by Alexander Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels* (1st edition 1946) translates it on pages 105-06. Surprisingly, Cooper actually quotes part of Heidel's rendering in his book, *The Authenticity of the Book of Genesis* (2011), pages 394 and 396! The Lambert-Millard *Atrahasis* book of 1969 presents it in Babylonian and English on pages 126-27. It was translated by Ephraim A. Speiser for the standard work *Ancient Near Eastern Texts relating to the Old Testament*, edited by J. B. Pritchard (Princeton University Press, 1955), page 105, X, and more recently by Benjamin R. Foster in *Before the Muses, an Anthology of Akkadian Literature* (Bethesda, MD: CDL Press, 2005), page 254. The translation Cooper gives is not Hilprecht's original but a version augmented by Fritz Hommel who filled in missing lines. Later translations restore much less than Hommel and some of the phrases in Hilprecht's translation disappear, eg. 'creeping things'. As for the text being monotheistic that is certainly not the case. It is only a fragment of a tablet, bearing part of a speech of which it preserves neither the beginning nor end, nor does it name the speaker. His identity is known, because the fragment comes from the *Atrahasis* version of the Flood Story: he is Enki-Ea, who acts with other gods and goddesses. There is no hint of monotheism. What is deplorable and really inexcusable is the complete failure of the Creation Research Institute and its associates to check Cooper's work in any way and so to propagate his ignorance of progress in Assyriology over the past one hundred years and his denigration of scholarship. Cooper's book, *The Authenticity of the Book of Genesis* includes his presentation of the Hilprecht fragment and much else beside, most of it equally showing his ignorance of discoveries and the progress of research and the understanding of Babylonian texts during the 20th century, or his misrepresentation of it. Whether one sympathises with his aim to establish the credibility of the Bible, or not, this is no service to the Christian faith – rather the reverse! If any readers come across people publicizing this propaganda, they should impress upon them that it is wrong; it is false!

Continuing investigations in ancient sites and in museum collections, improving knowledge of ancient languages and of the world in which the books of the Bible were written enable us to interpret them more accurately and to appreciate them more fully.

Book Reviews

David Wilkinson *When I Pray What is God Doing?* Monarch Oxford 2015 222 pp. Pb. £8.99
ISBN 978 0 85721 604 5

At the beginning of the book David Wilkinson quotes the celebrated 20th. Century preacher ('the doctor') Martyn Lloyd-Jones that "Everything we do in the Christian life is easier than prayer." Wilkinson is the Principal of St.John's College in Durham and a scientist with a doctorate in astro-

physics. As a Christian he believes in the power of prayer and has experimented with different expressions of praying - standing, kneeling, raising hand - and varying experiences of praying including liturgical and charismatic. As a theologian and scientist he has wrestled with the questions most of us have encountered and this book is an attempt to come to grips with these by taking both the Bible and science seriously.

The questions he seeks to answer are:

If science shows us that God has created a faithful, orderly and predictable universe then how can God continually intervene to change things in answer to prayer? Isn't this making God into a repairman looking after faulty equipment or, alternatively, a patronising parent listening to children knowing that everything is already decided in advance?

Why would God answer prayers for trivial things, like finding a parking space, and not relieve excruciating pain? Why does God answer prayer by healing some and not others, especially when those not healed have been greatly used by God?

One chapter is devoted to exposing the everyday myths about prayer such as the following:

- (1) Prayers are not answered if one does not have enough faith, doesn't spend time with God (quiet times) or is not persistent – casino model – the more you put in the greater the chances of getting rewarded. This reduces God to a slot machine who is arbitrary.
- (2) God will always reward with wealth and health faithful disciples who pray – this reduces God to an indulgent parent who always gives the child what he or she wants provided they behave.
- (3) Some argue that we should always expect God to work in 'signs and wonders' in answer to prayer or alternatively that miracles will not occur and it is pointless to pray because everything has been predetermined. The problem is that we cannot argue from the orderliness of the universe to the existence of God and equally claim that miracles constantly occur.
- (4) Answers to prayer can be tested and proved scientifically, for instance with patients in hospital. This assumes that God will ignore those not prayed for and that we can put God to the test, which Jesus said we shouldn't do.

In developing his thesis Wilkinson examines what the Bible actually says about prayer, the nature of faith and its relationship to science. Faith is not just positive thinking but a relationship. We are not guaranteed answers simply by praying louder or more frequently. He quotes Hudson Taylor that the issue is not greater faith but faith in a great God. Faith recognises the centrality of the will of God and the fact that some prayers do not get answered in the way we expect.

The author spends considerable space in discussing miracles, which are central to the Bible but seem to undermine the scientific belief in a predictable universe governed by laws. After rejecting theories that seek to resolve the problem by putting limitations on God's omnipotence Wilkinson turns to Quantum and Chaos theories which challenge the old Newtonian view of a totally predictable universe. Although he feels that these can help us to understand how God could work

within the universe without breaking any 'laws'. He is not totally convinced that this solves all the problems. He does, however, incline towards the 'open theology' view of Clark Pinnock, which teaches that God self-limits his acts within the universe and allows considerable freedom to his creation and allows the future to be open rather than predetermined.

Does the book answer the question posed in the title? What is God doing when we pray? Wilkinson suggests five things (1) He is sustaining the structures and laws of the universe (2) He is transforming creation into a new creation (3) He transforms the person who prays to collaborate in building the Kingdom of God (4) God could be answering some prayers by working in the hidden areas of chaos systems and the quantum world (5) God sometimes works by transcending the normal for specific ends. The book is not intended to give a definitive answer to the question but to encourage Christian readers to engage on a journey of faith. The closing sentence summarises the author's intention. "When I pray, what does God do?" is not an easy question, but it is one I have found in my own life leads me deeper into knowing God and an excitement with the experience of prayer.'

I would highly recommend this book.

Reviewed by Reg. Luhman

Big Bang, Small Voice (Reconciling Genesis and Modern Science) 2nd Edition, P. G. Nelson, Botanic Christian Books / Hull, 2014. ISBN 978-0-9928256-0-7, £5-50

Before commenting on the content of this book, I need to point out a flaw in its production. This is a second edition, but the author has put the updates for each chapter, listed under the chapters, in an appendix at the back. Why did he not simply add these to the chapters, in the appropriate places? If prepared on a word processor, this would have automatically adjusted the footnote numbering. It appears that the whole book has been set up manually, since, on page 84, footnote 1 reappears in full between 6 and 7! This could have been numbered in sequence, with "*Monot et al.*, op. cit." in the footnote.

The book does what it says in the subtitle. First, the author gives the 'scientific account of origins', noting different points of view, then the 'Biblical account of origins', again noting different points of view. He then explores if the Biblical account can be reconciled with the scientific account (with a whole chapter on evidence for the Flood), then if the scientific one can be reconciled with the Biblical. His final conclusion is that they can be reconciled either way, so Christians should not fall out over the topic. Who can disagree with that?!

Like Nelson, I used to work in Chemistry. It therefore surprised me that he makes no reference to Entropy. Irrespective of evidence for or against a 'big bang', does not the Second Law of Thermodynamics suggest the universe is moving from an initial state to an end? This universal 'bondage to decay' is recognised by Paul, in Romans 8:21, a passage to which Nelson makes passing reference, without recognising all its implications.

If Adam's creation was within this universe, then he must have been created subject to entropy. Nelson says, 'Some commentators argue that there must have been physical death before the Fall because, without it, the earth would have become overpopulated.' But the main reason for this point of view is not 'overpopulation' but the fact he notes himself that '... the day Adam sinned, God denied him access to the tree that would have given him immortality ([Genesis] 3:22-24)' and if immortality was still to come to him, he must have been created mortal. In his 'Update' to this chapter, he observes that John Walton makes this point, but thinks he answers it by saying that 'God's intention was that he should be immortal' because we are not told anything barred Adam from the tree of life before his disobedience. But this still does not answer the point that Adam was plainly not constituted immortal. This view of Adam's disobedience as a 'falling short' (Romans 3:23) rather than a 'fall' was held by early theologians such as Irenaeus and Tatian and is much easier to reconcile with modern scientific theories of human origins.

Nelson answers the argument that scientific observation shows the universe was in bondage to decay before humanity appeared, by saying that God recreated everything, after Adam's disobedience, to look as if it had always been that way. This view, that makes our present universe a huge divine hoax, is unanswerable, but is it morally acceptable? Could it then be said that God's power and nature 'have been clearly seen' (Romans 1:20)?

I would have expected some reference to John Calvin's commentary on Genesis, which pioneered the view that God accommodated his revelation to the way the 'unlearned and rude' see the world. (See Calvin's comments on 1:16.)

I am also surprised that he does not mention Teilhard de Chardin. While most Evangelicals would, like me, disagree with Teilhard's theology, it has been very influential, so I would expect any survey of this field to refer to him, if only to refute him.

So, a book of this overall pattern is to be welcomed, but it fails to be as comprehensive as it aspires to be, in spite of an impressively full Bibliography and Supplement.

Reviewed by Bob Allaway, Baptist Minister and former research Chemist.

Raymond Tallis, *Aping Mankind*, Acumen Durham, 2011, 388pp. ISBN 978-1-84465-273-0, £21.99

The author is an atheist and this book is decidedly not a defence of Christian dualism. Nevertheless, I believe it is a very important work that deserves our attention. As is often the case with Tallis, it is clearer what he is arguing *against* rather than *for* and once again the target is woolly-headed overly-scientistic claims to understanding human nature and consciousness. He identifies two areas which have become accepted as an orthodoxy, with an explanatory power which is not deserved. Firstly, the over-reach of modern neuroscience, especially the simplistic belief that 'we are our brains'. Tallis calls this 'neuromania', fuelled in part by the successes of functional MRI scanning. He methodically sets about to demonstrate the nonsense in claims that

complex human behaviours (for instance ‘love’ or ‘mortgage-buying’) reside in one part or another of our cerebral cortex and can be explained in terms of neural functioning alone.

The second fallacy he terms ‘Darwinitis’; the over-reach of evolutionary theory to lay claim to understanding humans as simply biological products. He demonstrates that, while we undoubtedly share common biological ancestry, the nature of humanity is profoundly different from the nature of other members of the animal kingdom. An understanding of human-ness must encompass our history, the arts, etc and recognise that we live in a collectively created space ‘the theatre of our freedom...as persons rather than as organisms’. He warns that without this subtlety of understanding, we run the risk of believing that our social problems can be solved by biological, neuroscientific approaches.

So if human consciousness is not explainable in merely biological terms, what should replace it? Tallis is honest enough to admit that he does not know, ‘I have often been accused of harbouring a hidden religious agenda...I am an atheist humanist; but this does not oblige me to deny what is staring me in the face – namely, that we are different from other animals and that we are not just pieces of matter’. To the Christian reader, it is highly tempting to seize on this and fill the gaps of understanding with theism. Yes, we say, we are more than bodies and brains, we are made in God’s image, but Tallis rejects this as superstition – ‘(it) does not mean...that something such as a God...must exist as an explanation of consciousness’. The book should certainly not, in itself, be used as an argument *for* theism, but it does usefully clear the ground of two commonly held false beliefs which opens the way for deeper interpretations of what it means to be human.

As an aside, a brief note about author responsiveness. In the book Tallis repeatedly uses the term ‘Thatter’ to refer to the stuff of shared human experience, the world we live in. This is a difficult concept and I emailed the author about it via his personal website – he very kindly responded within a matter of hours with some helpful pointers. This kind of ‘author-reader’ interaction is to be encouraged. In summary, this is an excellent book, argued with passion, intelligence, deep scholarship and often with coruscating wit. It is hugely readable and I recommend it highly.

Reviewed by Alan Kerry