

UK initiatives

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SUMMER 2007

'Miracles' behind Northern Ireland's peace settlement



DAVID CHANNER

Jim Lynn (left) and Dr Roddy Evans

'The miracle of Belfast' headlined *The Independent*, London, on 9 May, while the *The Irish Independent*, Dublin, declared, 'Happy are the peacemakers'. It was the day after the Rev Ian Paisley of the Democratic Unionist Party and Martin McGuinness of Sinn Féin formed an historic power-sharing government in Northern Ireland, putting to an end 40 years of civil war that cost 3,700 lives.

The same day, two Belfast peacemakers brought a message of faith and hope to the Initiatives of Change centre in London. Dr Roddy Evans, with a background in the Protestant Ascendancy, and Jim Lynn, a Roman Catholic born and brought up on the Falls Road, spoke about some of the behind-the-scenes 'miracles' which played a part in the peace process:

- Catholics and Protestants meeting together in regular Bible studies at the Clonard Redemptorist Monastery in Belfast, described by a Belfast journalist as 'the cradle of the peace process', and the support they received from Rev John Austin Baker. As Chaplain to the Speaker of the House of Commons he had given a powerful sermon, reported in the Irish press, acknowledging the sins of the English in Ireland. Later, as Bishop of Salisbury, he was the first Church of England bishop to preach in the monastery and in Armagh Catholic Cathedral.

- The comment of Sinn Féin leader Gerry Adams which changed the focus of their work. On seeing the film *Belfast Report*, in the mid 1970s, which documented MRA's trust-building work between Catholics and Protestants, he said that it was one of the best presentations of its kind he had seen but that it missed out the fundamental issue: the relationship between the two nations, Ireland and England.

Ireland. This was widely reported in the Irish media—and led to him being initially ostracized in his own circles.

- Clonard priest Fr Alec Reid CSsR meeting with Dr Martin Mansergh, advisor to the Irish Taoiseach, Charles Haughey. Dr Mansergh, an Oxford historian from an Anglo-Irish family, became the principal link between the Irish government, the North and successive British governments.
- The commitment throughout their 10 years in office of Taoiseach Bertie Ahern and Prime Minister Tony Blair, who has become known in the province as Tony 'stickability' Blair, for his determination to reach a settlement.
- The intervention of US President Bill Clinton, including his appointment of Senator George Mitchell to oversee the peace process and his granting of a visa to Gerry Adams to visit the USA, against the wishes of the British government. This had helped to break the impasse in the stalled relations between all the sides involved in the peace process.

Roddy Evans, a surgeon, and Jim Lynn, a watchmaker, have been unlikely partners in the peace process. 'Roddy and I have nothing in common whatsoever,' said Lynn. Yet he sensed the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing them and others together through the Clonard Bible studies under the supervision of Fr Christopher McCarthy. Lynn paid tribute to two other Belfast Protestants, Bill Porter and Eric Turpin—'two of the most wonderful men I've ever met'—as well as the Presbyterian Dr George Dallas and London accountant Leslie Fox, all of whom had taken part in the Bible studies.

Evans and Lynn both declared that England and Ireland should now work together towards offering a message of peace for other conflict situations around the world. 'It is my hope that what we have experienced will be used in the world, including in the Middle East,' Lynn said. 'Can England and Ireland do something for the world? The answer is yes.' Sinn Féin leaders and the Redemptorist priest Fr Alec Reid already had links with the Spanish government and the Basque separatists, while Sinn Féin had also met the Sri Lankan Prime Minister and the Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas.



Initiatives of Change

UK Initiatives is published three times a year by Initiatives of Change to catch you up on what IoFC is doing in and from the UK. We hope these four pages will give you information and inspiration—and a chance to share your own news of how you are making a difference. Please write to us at UK Initiatives, 24 Greencoat Place, London SW1P 1RD or email: newsletter@uk.iofc.org

Liverpool sculptor completes 'reconciliation triangle'

Five thousand people gathered in downtown Richmond, Virginia, for the unveiling of a reconciliation statue, 30 March, at the site of a former slave market. The statue, by Liverpool sculptor Stephen Broadbent, is seen as a symbol of healing, giving hope for a new future. It marks a place of horror where 300,000 kidnapped Africans and their descendants were torn from their families and 'sold down the river' to Southern plantations.

The delegation of 15 from Liverpool was led by Kim Johnson, Cultural Diversity Manager, on behalf of Liverpool City Council. The group included Broadbent and historian Eric Lynch, who helped to introduce 'slavery walking tours' in Liverpool. Those from Richmond at the unveiling included Virginia State Governor Timothy Kaine, the Mayor, city councillors and legislators, and four African ambassadors.

The Ambassador of Benin called it 'a blessed completion' of a triangle of new relationships between Benin in West Africa, Richmond and Liverpool, which had profited hugely from the traffic in human beings.

The statue of two figures in a close embrace is one of three identical monuments by Broadbent, now in place at each point of the Reconciliation Triangle. It stands at the heart of the Richmond business district in a specially designed plaza. Water from a cascading fountain flows over a map of the slave triangle. An inscription on the base of the sculpture, composed by Richmond school students, reads: 'Acknowledge the past, embrace the present, shape a future of reconciliation and justice.' It describes the suffering of the millions of Africans who were transported from their homeland and concludes, 'Their forced labour laid the economic foundations of this nation.'

Johnson presented a framed copy of Liverpool City Council's 1999 apology for the city's leading role in the slave trade. She called for an open and honest dialogue: 'Only by taking personal responsibility will we bring about lasting change.'

Governor Kaine told the crowd that the resolution of 'profound regret' by the State's General Assembly in February was appropriate since Virginia had 'promoted... defended... and fought to preserve' slavery. In his keynote address, Dr John Kinney, Dean of the School of Theology at Virginia Union University, said that racial reconciliation, like surgery, carries a degree of risk. But it also offers the prospect of eliminating the pain of past and present generations and opening the way to a new future. He challenged the crowd: 'Today is not a conclusion. Today is a day of commitment.'

Delores McQuinn, Vice-President of Richmond City Council, and Chair of the Slave Trail Commission, recalled her enslaved great-grandfather. When his son asked to see the records of his family, the plantation owner burned them before his eyes. 'If I stand here today, I cannot be a hypocrite,' said McQuinn. 'I too must extend forgiveness from the depth of my heart and soul.'



KAREN ELLIOT GRIESDORF

Under the front-page headline 'A monument to reconciliation', the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* remarked that, 'thanks to the sacrifice of slaves, Richmond was born', a sentiment which also has relevance to Liverpool's history and development.

Ten years of coordinated teams in Richmond and Liverpool, including IofC's Hope in the Cities initiative, working with both city governments, have played an essential role in facilitating the Reconciliation Triangle project. This has included visits to Benin.

The Liverpool group included representatives from secondary schools, Liverpool Hope University, and community and voluntary organizations. They were briefed on Richmond's slave history and taken on the Richmond Slave Trail walk, following the route where many thousands of slaves, taken from the ships in chains, were led to the slave markets to be sold.

PLAN FOR SCHOOLS LINK

The group spent several days in Richmond following the unveiling ceremony, to exchange experiences of 'honest conversation' as a tool for trust building in communities. They met with educators in Richmond's public and private schools. They hope that by linking students with their peers in Benin and Liverpool, the Triangle can help to overcome one of slavery's legacies—the racial disadvantage and economic separation in some schools and communities. They explored the possibility of linking schools in Liverpool, Richmond and Benin to work together to make a film on the life of Olaudah Equiano, the freed slave who was active in the Abolitionist movement.

Students from Richmond's Thomas Jefferson High School took part in a video conference with students in Liverpool's Broadgreen High School.

Gerald Henderson, Liverpool

In the Press

The Liverpool Post, 2 April, reported the visit of Liverpool citizens to Richmond, Virginia, for the unveiling of a reconciliation statue by Liverpool sculptor Steven Broadbent. The paper wrote: 'The ongoing process of Liverpool acknowledging its role in the Atlantic slave trade continued... when representatives of Liverpool Culture Company, academic institutions and black historians from the city took part in a public ceremony.... The final part of a global triangle of reconciliation that began almost a decade ago, it has seen four-metre high bronze statues sited in Liverpool, Cotonou in the West African republic of Benin, and now Richmond.'

The Church Times, 23 March, reviewed Garth Lean's book *God's Politician: William Wilberforce's struggle*, recently reissued by Darton, Longman & Todd. Michael Wheeler's reviews of three books about the life of the anti-slavery champion gave pride of place to Lean's book. 'As Lean reminds us, he needed all the charm he could muster during the 20-year campaign to bring in the anti-slavery legislation for which he is best known... Lean retells the story with tact and concision, bringing out its human side quite successfully, as when he cites Boswell's saying of the diminutive Wilberforce delivering a key speech, "the shrimp swelled into a whale".'

The May edition of *Reform*, the magazine of the United Reformed Church, also reviewed *God's Politician*, describing it as 'probably the best light introduction to the life of William Wilberforce'.

Following his visit to Jamaica in March, Mike Smith's report on the Walkerswood community appeared in *Guardian Weekly*, the international edition of *The Guardian*, 27 April. 'Walkerswood's self-help projects aim to be a model for rural development, countering the drift to the big cities in search of jobs that plagues many developing economies,' he wrote. The article highlighted the relationship of trust built between local Jamaican activists and a white land-owning family that had been members of the privileged 'plantocracy'. The article quoted Walkerswood food company chairman Roddy Edwards as saying: 'The best way for people of European descent to be involved in reparations is to engage in sustainable, fair businesses.'

Greencoat Forums IofC centre London



Baroness Howells

'The history of the British Empire has slavery running through it like writing through a stick of Blackpool rock,' declared Baroness Howells, addressing a Greencoat Forum on 15 March. New industries had been created in Britain through the transportation of humans during the slave trade and many Caucasians had the blood of slaves in them without knowing it. A master/slave mentality between the West and Africa—the cradle of civilization—still persisted and only by being honest about the past could a constructive future be created. A descendent of an enslaved African, Baroness Howells of St David's, OBE, campaigns for the rights of all, especially ethnic minorities. She is an adviser to the Home Secretary on matters of race and community relations and has served as Deputy High Commissioner of her native Grenada. 'We cannot comprehend the scale of the slave trade,' she said, 'but what is not disputed is the savage cruelty.' Slaves were selected for their genetic strengths and no consideration was given to tribal identities. Men and women were brutally separated from their families and that separation still affected the African population. Health issues such as schizophrenia, family breakdown and the drug culture within the black community stemmed from the effects of enforced human trafficking. Africa gave the West 'a vehicle by which to be inhumane and then find its humanity'. But Africa continued to provide Britain with a sense of being a missionary and crusader nation. While Britain's modern music icons conducted huge campaigns such as Live Aid, Africa sat back passively and accepted aid. Now there was a new scramble to grab Africa's resources. 'While Western journalists have been wringing their hands impotently about the genocide being perpetrated in Darfur, the Chinese government has done a deal with the Sudanese government to exploit that country's oilfields. That says it all. While Britons indulge our Victorian urge to give alms to the Africans, Beijing is pumping black gold.' *Pam Jenner*



Dr Indarjit Singh

The faith communities need to work more closely together to tackle social ills, such as drug and alcohol abuse, said the broadcaster Indarjit Singh, addressing a Greencoat Forum on 24 April. 'We look at social problems from the wrong end of the telescope,' he said. Too much police time was spent on drug-related crime. 'The response? Let's decriminalise rather than question why the use of drugs has risen so dramatically.' Society's response to increasing alcohol abuse was: 'Let's extend or abolish licensing hours to spread the incidents of drunkenness and loutish behaviour.' Tackling such social ills emphasized 'the importance of religious communities working more closely together,' he said. The ethical teachings of religion could help to tackle the underlying issues in 'an all too callous society that consistently panders to greed and selfishness. We've neglected the basic ethical teachings of right, wrong and social responsibility.' The editor of the *Sikh Messenger* and the Director of the Network of Sikh Organisations, Dr Singh is renowned for his BBC Radio 4 'Thought for the Day' broadcasts. *Neil Mence*



Tony Burke

Tony Burke spoke on 22 May about his participation in the BBC TV series *The Monastery* two years ago. He was one of five men who spent 40 days with the monks of Worth Abbey, a Benedictine monastery in Sussex. His participation there followed 'some very unhappy events over the preceding two years'. His drinking had spiralled out of control and he had been arrested twice because of drink and drugs. He hit rock bottom as he sat with a litre of vodka in his parents' garage, 'rocking drunkenly on my heels with tears streaming down my face, seriously considering taking my own life'. He could have hanged himself with an electricity cable hanging from the roof beam. Instead, he blacked out. 'That was the turning point, because I haven't drunk since that hazy episode on that moment on 26 February 2004.' He spent several weeks detoxing in a rehabilitation clinic 'and thinking very seriously about how I was going to rebuild my life.' He pledged that he would never drink again. He joined the monastery, straight from a freelance job at a soft-porn TV channel, in order to 'finish my rehabilitation' and get a fresh perspective on life. 'God and the premise of faith was something I hadn't given a second thought to... The key moment came for me on day 38 of the 40. After much prayer and inward reflection, something shifted inside me and I had a profound experience with my mentor, Brother Francis. It was a feeling of light-headedness and paralysis—a surge of emotion which reduced me to tears and a knowledge that whatever I had been trying to access had replied or at least let me in.' At first Burke described this as an experience of the Christian God, though he told the forum that 'I still to this day do not know what hung in the air that night'. Faith and prayer 'are still very important to me. For me it is about being a good person, doing the right thing by people and being aware of where I'm going wrong. It's about that connection with something completely omnipotent... And when I feel myself slipping back I can step into a church and pray that things keep moving me in the right direction.' Whether or not he is praying to God or simply 'the god in me' remains a moot point for Burke. 'When I left the monastery I thought I had all the answers. Two years on I realise that I have none and my spiritual journey has only just begun.' *Michael Smith*

'THE IMAM AND THE PASTOR' GOES GLOBAL

Around 400 people thronged Abuja's International Conference Centre, Nigeria, for the launch of the film *The Imam and the Pastor* in the home country of the two protagonists on 22 February.

The film tells the remarkable story of Imam Muhammad Ashafa and Pastor James Wuye who moved from leading opposing armed militias to working together for peace and reconciliation between their respective communities.

After the screening, attended by nationally known dignitaries, the audience heard from Rev Dr Williams Okoye, Chaplain to Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo and his representative at the occasion. Okoye said that the President had viewed the film and was delighted and thankful for the work it shows.

Subsequent screenings were held in Plateau State, hosted by the Governor, and in Kaduna. Much of the peace-building work depicted in the film takes place in Plateau State, where tens of thousands have died in ethno-religious conflicts over the last decade.

The auditorium of the National Library in Ottawa was filled to capacity for the film's Canadian premiere on 26 February. Hosted by the Nigerian High Commissioner, it was attended by members of 12 diplomatic missions, including four ambassadors, and two members of parliament. The event was co-sponsored by Initiatives of Change and Muslim Presence Canada with support from the local chapter of the World Conference of Religions for Peace and Ottawa Muslim-Christian Dialogue. On 1 April about 1,000 people attended a screening of the film in Toronto, in a special event to mark the birthday of the Prophet Mohammed (Mawlid an-Nabi). The occasion was organized by the International Muslims Organization of Toronto.

Over 50 people gathered in the lofC centre in The Hague for the first official showing of the film in The Netherlands. The occasion was hosted jointly by lofC, Islam and Dialogue (a foundation of mostly young

Muslims) and Trialoog, a foundation whose aim is to bring together people of the Jewish, Christian and Muslim faiths. Trialoog paid half of the costs of producing the version with Dutch subtitles.

In Britain there have been public showings in Crewe, Brighton, Arundel, Oxford and London. They have produced animated discussion about the situation in Nigeria and the relevance of the film for Britain. Musa Aliyu, one of its production consultants, has taken part in most of these occasions. Musa, a journalist by training and currently studying for a PhD in London, comes from Jos in central Nigeria and has personal experience of the context of the film. He is working on contacting groups and organisations in the UK who may be interested in the film. He is ready to consider requests to be present at any showing and can be contacted through [FLTfilms](http://FLTfilms.org).

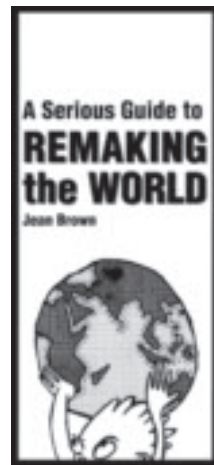
About 1,000 DVDs of the film have been sold worldwide. Other language versions, including French and Arabic, are being prepared.

• Imam Ashafa was involved in a car accident near Kaduna on 13 March. He suffered serious spinal injuries which required specialist treatment not available in Nigeria. Thanks to the generosity of an anonymous donor, Imam Ashafa and his wife Fatima were flown to London, where he underwent an operation on the vertebrae in his neck on 3 April. He has made a remarkable recovery and was able to take part in the launch of a Somali Initiative for Dialogue and Democracy, held at the lofC centre in London in May. He returned to Nigeria later in the month.

FLTfilms is now co-run by Alan Channer, Imad Karam and Geoffrey Craig, carrying forward the legacy pioneered by the late David Channer.

The Imam and the Pastor (40 minutes) DVD available from [FLTfilms](http://FLTfilms.org), 24 Greencoat Place, London SW1P 1RD. Price for individuals: £15.99 incl postage. For institutional and educational use, please apply to [FLTfilms](http://FLTfilms.org). email: info@fltfilms.org.uk www.fltfilms.org.uk

New booklet



A new 24-page booklet by Jean Brown has just been published by Caux Books.

A serious guide to *remaking the world* is taken from her series of Reflections articles first published in *For A Change* magazine.

She looks at four steps to 'remaking the world': Starting with yourself; engaging others;

creating answers; giving hope to humanity. The booklet is designed and illustrated with cartoons by Nigel Heywood.

Available at £1.30 each including postage from Books, 24 Greencoat Place, London SW1P 1RD.

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'Pilgrims Way' available on CD

A slide presentation has been compiled and written by Alan Faunce, following his participation in a pilgrimage from Canterbury to Iona. This was to commemorate the coming of St Augustine to Canterbury in 597 and the death of St Columba in Iona that same year. A CD with a PowerPoint presentation, including a script file, is available from: Blair Cummock, Wester Cottage, Mainhill, St Boswells, Melrose TD6 0HG. Price £5 + £1p&p (UK)

William Wilberforce and the anti-slavery campaigners by William Cameron Johnson now available on DVD

Created originally as a slide show for use in schools, this new DVD was launched on 19 May at an event in London arranged by Friends of Westminster Productions. The 40-minute DVD, illustrated by Cameron Johnson's fine watercolours, is available from: [FLTfilms](http://FLTfilms.org), 24 Greencoat Place, London SW1P 1RD, price £12.99 inc p&p.

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