



*Newsletter*

*No 8, October 2004*

*Centre for Theology and  
Public Issues*



*20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary  
1984 - 2004*

## Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Speaks at CTPI Conference



Pictured outside the recent CTPI civil society conference venue in Belfast, from left to right: Canon Kenneth Kearon (Director, ISE), the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the Rt Hon. Paul Murphy, MP and Professor William Storrar (Director, CTPI)

2004 marks the 20th anniversary of the Centre for Theology and Public Issues at the University of Edinburgh. CTPI's founding vision in 1984 was to be a place where theologians and colleagues from the humanities and social sciences met with policy makers and practitioners, faith communities and people on the margins, to reflect together on public issues to which theology could make a constructive and timely contribution to the debate. That vision still shapes the Centre's work, twenty years on. The reports in this anniversary Newsletter on CTPI conferences, publications and events for 2004 – 2005, show the continuing fruitfulness of this method of working in the Centre's current research programme on local-global citizenship.

### **A Place for All? Comparing Civil Societies in Scotland and Northern Ireland**

In September, the Centre held the first of two conferences on *Local and Global Civil Society* in collaboration with the Irish School of Ecumenics, Trinity College Dublin. Among the conference speakers was the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Rt Hon Paul Murphy MP. **Gillian Wylie**, a lecturer in International Peace Studies at the Irish School of Ecumenics and a member of the collaborative CTPI-ISE team on the civil society project, has provided the following report of that first conference in Belfast, comparing local civil societies in Scotland and Northern Ireland. She writes:

**Scotland and Northern Ireland** have gone through much political change in recent years. Accompanying the creation of devolved institutions and the election of assemblies in both places has been the establishment of Civic Forums. The thinking behind these forums being that civil society should have a recognised place in the new political order, giving citizens a means to check and balance those in authority. So what role has civil society exercised in keeping the peace or ensuring democracy in these two contexts? This was the question addressed at a recent conference, *A Place for All? Comparing Civil Societies in Northern Ireland and Scotland*. Held in Belfast from the 7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> of September, the conference was jointly organised by the Irish School of Ecumenics and the Centre for Theology and Public Issues at the University of Edinburgh. The aim of the conference was to bring together academics and civil society activists from Scotland and Northern Ireland in order to discuss the general theme. Moreover, given the organisers, a concern of more specific interest was to discern the role that public theology and churches can or should play in the flourishing of civil society.

Inevitably, dispute around how we define civil society was an on-going feature of the conference. Yet, there was some consensus that civil society is the sphere between the private life of family and the official sphere of politics. Thus it incorporates, amongst others, non-governmental organisations, trade unions, employers' groups, media, social movements and religious bodies. While the conference agreed that it was important not to idealise this sphere, by assuming that civil society activism was always for the common good, there was acknowledgement that a flourishing democracy requires the existence of civil society. It is within civil society that people have one means to practice their citizenship and organise to pressurise the state or hold it accountable.

Opening the conference, Monica McWilliams and Joyce McMillan painted portraits of civil society in Northern Ireland and Scotland. Monica McWilliams had been one of the prime movers behind the establishment of the Civic Forum as part of the Belfast Agreement. She reminded the audience of the vitality of civil society in Northern Ireland, which today embodies around 5000 civil and

voluntary organisations. In her view, the conflict would have been much worse without the seeds sown by all this civil activity. Yet, she was concerned that Northern Ireland's civil organisations are, even to this day, more characterised by 'bonding than bridging', with people forming organisations which reflect community divides. She noted too that the Civic Forum had always been treated with suspicion by the North's politicians and was thus now in a state of limbo. Joyce McMillan, as convener of the Scottish Civic Forum, was able to reflect on Scotland's long history of civil society. The 1707 Act of Union left Scotland's law, church, education and culture intact, thus forming the basis for a distinctly Scottish civil society to emerge. Acting out of this strong historical legacy, many Scottish civil society actors mobilised energetically in the campaign for devolution. After devolution this role was acknowledged with the establishment of the Civic Forum to shadow the new Scottish Executive. Yet McMillan worried that this pedigree sometimes makes Scotland's civil society 'self-righteous', assuming it is always an expression of the common good. Whereas the reality is that there are always sectors of society who suffer exclusion or discrimination from the mainstream. Moreover, Scotland's Civic Forum remains almost entirely dependent for its continuation on funding from the Scottish Executive, raising issues about the separation between political and civil societies.

In these portraits the consensus that civil society is vital to democracy was reinforced. But so too was the realisation that civil society is a complex entity, cut through by community divides or inequalities of resources and influence. This sense of vast complexity was compounded by the conference's keynote speakers. The first of these, Professor John Keane of the Centre for the Study of Democracy at the University of Westminster, London, offered a history of the concept of civil society. Tracing its history from the Enlightenment, he noted that civil society has always been a value-laden concept. Besides simply describing public space, the concept has long association with expectations of polite behaviour and the establishment of the common good. Yet Keane warned against this tendency to romanticise and the failure to recognise incivility, even violence, in actual civil societies.

Professor Gary Simpson, Luther Theological Seminary, Minnesota, gave the second keynote lecture on "God in Civil Society: Theological Imagination and Ecclesial Strategies. He used reflection on Isaiah and the biblical wisdom tradition to argue that Christians and their congregations are theologically required to emerge from privatised family and religious life to engagement in civil society as 'public companions'. Moreover, such engagement needs to be imaginative and based on a theology of solidarity. In responding, Johnston McMaster concurred that this call to imagination and solidarity was one that churches in Northern Ireland should heed. An example that showed that this is a possibility for churches was displayed in the evening dialogue visits made by conference participants. One such visit was to Cookstown, where members of the local churches spoke movingly of their work to bridge rather than bond in a divided community. The revitalising possibilities for congregations which lie in civic engagement were also conjured up in Professor William Storrar's paper on

churches and civil society in Scotland, which contained stories of churches meeting the challenge of engagement with their disenfranchised neighbours, both asylum seekers and the urban poor.

Engagement in civil society, at its best, is about those kinds of practices and the conference closed by reflecting on how such citizenship can be enhanced through education for democracy and participation. Ian Martin, Reader in Community Education at the School of Education of Edinburgh University, presented a model for learning democracy which envisaged communities becoming 'dialectical spaces' in which discussions about justice and truth occur, enabling citizens to develop their own understanding of civil society. **Gillian Wylie**

**William Storrar adds:** The conference was a hallmark CTPI event for its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary year, in which many different voices were heard and where policy-makers in government and practitioners at the grass roots reflected together with theologians and researchers on whether civil society in Scotland and Northern Ireland truly offered 'a place for all'. We heard Paul Murphy, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, en route to the latest round of party political negotiations at Leeds Castle to restore devolved government at Stormont, affirm the continuing vital contribution of the churches and civil society to the peace process. This view from a Cabinet minister mixed in our thinking with the personal stories of local Belfast women's groups working against domestic violence, and an American Lutheran theologian's call for the contemporary relevance of the wisdom of the Book of Proverbs for civic engagement. The joint publication of the conference papers by CTPI and ISE in 2005 will bring this remarkable blend of perspectives to a wider audience; adding significantly to the series of CTPI conferences and publications on Northern Ireland since the 1980s.

Full details of the second conference, on global civil society, in the next Newsletter, or from Karoline McLean at CTPI: [K.McLean@ed.ac.uk](mailto:K.McLean@ed.ac.uk) tel. 0131 650 7991.

## **A World for All?** *the ethics of Global Civil Society*

an international, inter-disciplinary conference  
for researchers, policy-makers and practitioners

**organisers: CTPI & ISE**  
**venue: University of Edinburgh**  
**dates: 4-7 September 2005**

**Keynote Speakers include:**

**John Keane**, Director, Centre for the Study of  
Democracy, London  
**Vandana Shiva**, Director, Centre for Science,  
Technology and Ecology, New Delhi  
**Max Stackhouse**, Director, Abraham Kuyper Centre  
for public theology, Princeton

**Programme will include global NGO workshops  
and visits to local Scottish civil society projects.**

## CTPI 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Events this Autumn

### Annual Public Lecture at New College

The Centre's annual public lecture, the **John Baillie Memorial Lecture**, will be given on Monday 15th November at 5.30pm in the Martin Hall, New College. The Baillie Lecturer for 2004 is the **Rev Dr John Atherton**, until recently Canon Theologian of Manchester Cathedral and author of several major books on theology and public issues: including, *Christianity and the Market* (1992), *Public Theology for Changing Times* (2000), and *Marginalisation* (2003).

An Anglican priest and theologian, Dr Atherton served in inner city ministry in Aberdeen, the Gorbals in Glasgow and Manchester before becoming Director of the William Temple Foundation, Manchester, and lecturing at Manchester University. He was awarded an honorary doctorate by the University of Uppsala for his contribution to Christian ethics and political economy. John Atherton is therefore a most appropriate and distinguished guest to give the Baillie Lecture in CTPI's 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary year. He will speak on an equally appropriate topic for the occasion:

### **Globalisation and the Future of Capitalism: agendas for public theology in Britain today**

Following the lecture, chaired by **Morag Mylne**, Convener of the Church of Scotland's Church and Nation Committee, there will be a Reception in the Martin Hall to mark CTPI's 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary, at which the principal speaker will be **Cardinal Keith O'Brien**, an honorary Patron of CTPI. All friends and supporters of CTPI are warmly invited to this milestone celebration in the life of the Centre

### **CTPI Reception & Launch at the Scottish Parliament**

On the 10<sup>th</sup> of November the Centre will also be hosting a reception in the new Scottish Parliament building at Holyrood to mark its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary and the launch of its latest book, *Netting Citizens: exploring citizenship in the internet age*, edited by Johnston McKay (see backpage).

*Netting Citizens* is the fruit of a major CTPI conference on that theme held in November 2002, supported by the Baird Trust. Speakers at the launch will include the editor Johnston R. McKay, and two leading contributors: the journalist Neal Ascherson and our own CTPI colleague, Alison Elliot, in her present office as Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. As a CTPI and Baird research fellow in 2002, Neal Ascherson conducted the first study of e-democracy in the Scottish Parliament, now published in the new book. Among the other contributors to *Netting Citizens* are Barry Wellman, one of the world's leading researchers on the sociology of the internet, and Professor Elaine Graham, a practical theologian writing on the relationship between the new technologies and human identity in the image of God.

**\* Places at this special event are limited and Holyrood requires that all guests reply to CTPI by the deadline on the enclosed invitation card for this event.**

## 2004-5: Retrospect and Prospect



Lord Plant of Highfield (centre) launching *Public Theology for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, essays in honour of Duncan Forrester, at New College in March, with the book's co-editors, CTPI director William Storrar (left) and former Associate Director Andrew Morton (right).

### **2004: Honouring Children & Honouring Forrester**

The Spring of 2004 saw a full Centre programme:

On 11-13 March, the British Academy funded a CTPI **colloquium on the Scottish Enlightenment and Civil Society**, co-sponsored by the Center of Theological Inquiry, Princeton, and attended by leading scholars from Scotland and America. It will be followed by a second colloquium in 2005 at Princeton. On 16-17 March, we held a **conference for practitioners and policy-makers in the field of children's rights**, sharing the findings of a CTPI research project by child lawyer Kathleen Marshall and theologian Paul Parvis on this topic. Their book, *Honouring Children: the rights of the child in Christian perspective*, and its accompanying study guide for churches, *Rights in Christian and Family Life*, were launched at the conference. On 22 March, CTPI also marked the scholarly contribution of its founding director, **Duncan Forrester**, when the eminent political philosopher **Raymond Plant** launched a book of essays in Duncan's honour, *Public Theology for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*.

### **2005: Globalisation and Global Public Issues**

In 2005, CTPI will address a range of local and global public issues (full details in the next Newsletter):

#### **Seminar Series: Scotland in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

In the Spring Semester, 2005, CTPI will hold a series of university seminars offering fresh ideas on the future of Scottish cultural and economic life in a global era. Entitled *Blue Sky Thinking*, it starts in January with Pat Kane, author of *The Play Ethic* (Routledge, 2004).

#### **Day Conference: Changing Face of British Religion**

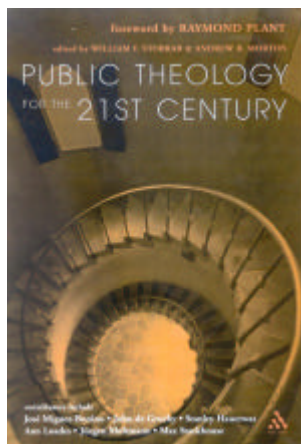
Linda Woodhead and Paul Heelas from the University of Lancaster publish this month a major empirical study of the changing face of religion in contemporary Britain, *The Spiritual Revolution: why religion is giving way to spirituality* (Blackwell, October 2004). They will present their research findings at a CTPI day conference of special interest to clergy, chaplains and RE teachers on Friday 15 April 2005, 10am – 4pm, at New College.

#### **International Conference: A World for All?**

Leading scholars and NGO practitioners will debate the ethics of global civil society, 4-7 September.

## RECENT PUBLICATIONS FROM THE CENTRE FOR THEOLOGY AND PUBLIC ISSUES

For more information on these or other CTPI publications, contact: K.McLean@ed.ac.uk



2004

*The Centre's recent conferences, research projects and colloquia, have resulted in three major publications this year:*

In **March of 2004**, the Centre launched a landmark collection of essays in the field of theology and public issues by leading scholars, first given at a CTPI colloquium in 2002. *Public Theology for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (T&T Clark International) is edited by William Storrar and Andrew Morton. Contributors include Jose Miguez-Bonino, John de Gruchy, Stanley Hauerwas, Ann Loades, Jurgen Moltmann, Max Stackhouse. In his Foreword, Professor Raymond Plant called this volume :

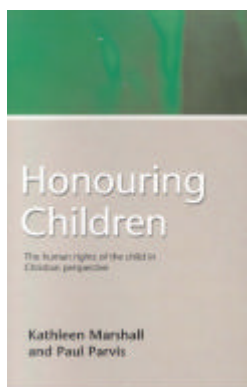
*'... a very significant moment in the history of public theology over the past fifty years or so, taking stock of and renewing a sense of social vision in theology.'*



2004

In 2003, CTPI launched a new series of books on **Public Concerns**, in partnership with the Saint Andrew Press. William Storrar and Alison Elliot are the series editors. The latest volume in the series is *Netting Citizens: exploring citizenship in the internet age*, edited by Johnston R. McKay. **Published in October 2004**, the book brings together papers given at a CTPI conference on this theme held in Edinburgh in late 2002. Professor Keith Culver, Canada, called the event:

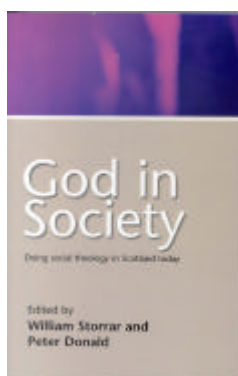
*'... the freest discussion I have encountered in examination of e-democracy and the place of cultural difference and other grounds of disagreement in democratic societies.'*



2004

**March 2004** also saw the launch of the second volume in the *Public Concerns* series: *Honouring Children: the human rights of the child in Christian perspective*. Written by the child lawyer Kathleen Marshall, now Children's Commissioner for Scotland, and the New College theologian Paul Parvis, this unique study of the churches and children's rights is the outcome of a CTPI research project on this topic. It is accompanied by a Study Guide for churches, *Rights in Christian and Family Life*. Professor Pamela Couture, a leading American theologian of child welfare, called the book:

*'A must-read for all persons involved in advocacy for children.'*



2003

The first volume published in the CTPI *Public Concerns* series was, *God in Society: doing social theology in Scotland today*, edited by William Storrar and Peter Donald (Saint Andrew Press, 2003). The essays are written mainly by the members of the Centre's Theological Panel as the outcome of a CTPI research project on how different Scottish theological traditions and churches - Reformed, Catholic, Evangelical, Feminist and Ecumenical - relate the Gospel to public issues in Scotland, especially in the new political context of devolution. Dr Robert Song, Durham University, has called this CTPI study:

*'... a compelling account of social theology that will be of considerable interest in Britain and beyond.'*

