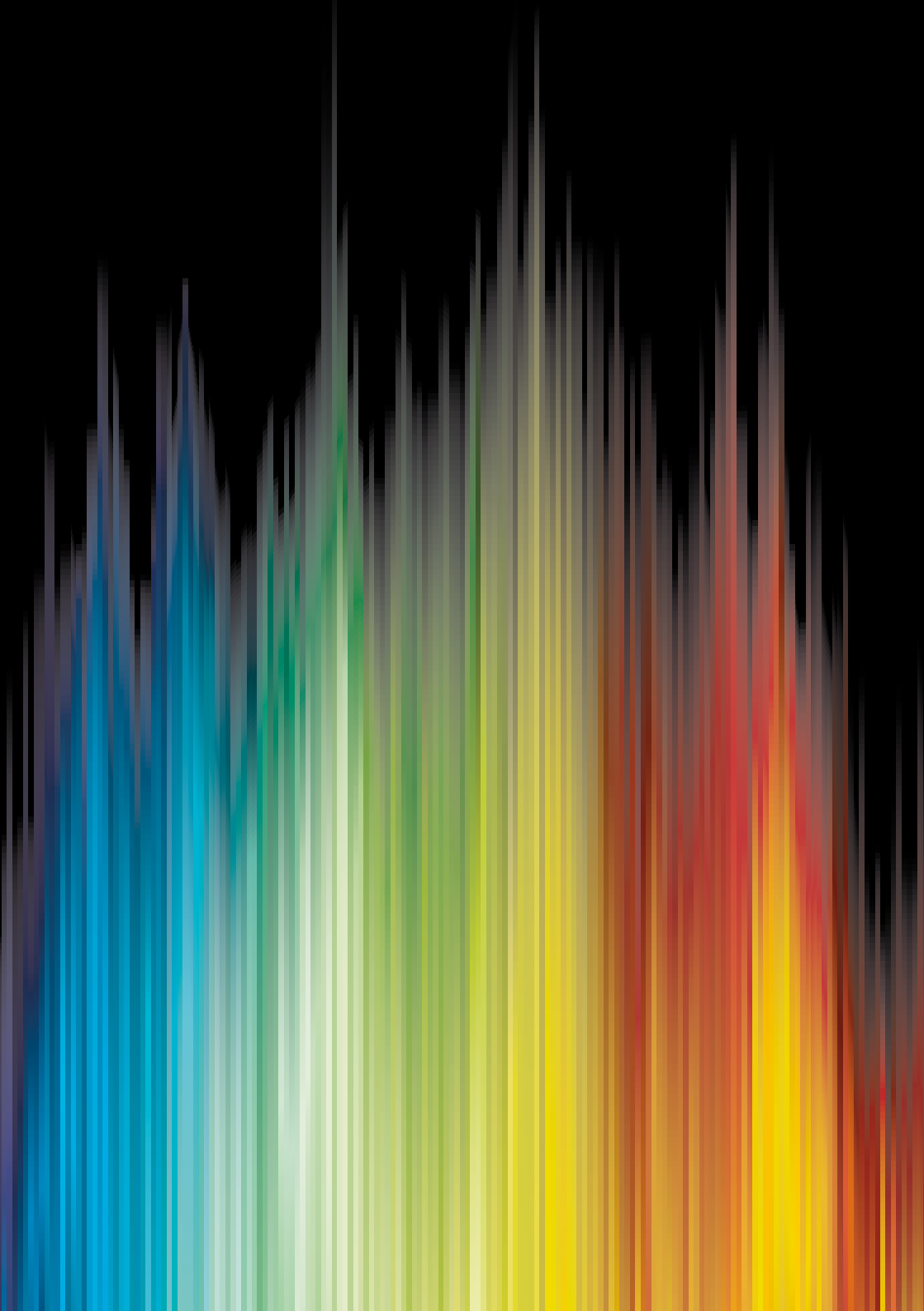
WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT

THE STRANGER

BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES ON RACISM, MIGRATION, ASYLUM AND CROSS-COMMUNITY ISSUES

Second Edition, Revised and Expanded

Kieran J. O'Mahony OSA



WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT

THE STRANGER

BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES ON RACISM, MIGRATION, ASYLUM AND CROSS-COMMUNITY ISSUES

Second Edition, Revised and Expanded

Kieran J. O'Mahony OSA

For my parents who know how to welcome

2nd edition, 2009
ISBN 978-0-9562795-0-7

[ISBN of First Edition: 0 905911 28 8]

Published by the Irish Inter-Church Meeting

Produced by AICCMR, the All-Ireland Churches' Consultative Meeting on Racism, which comes under the aegis of the Irish Inter-Church Meeting, 48 Elmwood Avenue, Belfast BT9 6AZ, phone 028 (048 from Republic) - 90 66 31 45, e-mail info@irishchurches.org and website www.irishchurches.org

We are grateful to the following who helped fund this publication: Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice, Jesuit Refugee Service, Trócaire, Christian Aid, PA Foundation.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CELTIC BLESSING FOR HOSPITALITY

I saw a stranger yestreen,
I put food in the eating place
drink in the drinking place
music in the listening place
and in the sacred name of the Triune
He blessed myself and my house
my cattle and my dear ones
and the lark said in her song
often, often, often
goes the Christ in the stranger's guise

PREFACE

The world has recently marked the sixtieth anniversary of the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights**, which dates from 10 December 1948. The importance of this document has not decreased in the sixty years since it was written. On the contrary, its importance has grown, and its full significance has yet to be realised. As we become more and more conscious of being one world, we are increasingly aware of our common humanity. We are moved by the vision of a common ideal and by the desire for common standards for all persons irrespective of race, religion or jurisdiction. The **Universal Declaration of Human Rights** expresses this in its very first two articles.

Article 1
All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

Article 2
Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty.

Religion continues to be a powerful persuader in our societies. This is increasingly recognised in our post-modern world. One of the tasks of believers is to look to their foundational texts and see how the urgent human and ethical questions of the day are reflected in them. In the case of the Christian churches, our classic text is the Bible, which, significantly for our theme, is itself multi-cultural, both Jewish and Christian, in origin. The very collection itself is "trans-national", in a manner of speaking.

What *does* the Bible have to say about the way foreigners and refugees are treated? What does the Bible have to say about cross-cultural and cross-community issues? Given that the Bible is both a reflection of human experience (static fact) and a resource for profound change (dynamic ideal), we find in the Bible both the *fact* of discrimination and ethical *ideals* which challenge and eventually undermine any abuse of other human beings on the grounds of race, religion, gender and so forth. Thus we may find for today material in the Bible which helps us to recognise discrimination and arms us in the struggle against it. Since the first edition of this study guide ten years ago, the urgency of the issues addressed has grown.

For our Irish context, where discrimination on the basis of religion has not been unknown, it seems important to add that, while here we are dealing primarily with racism, immigration and asylum seeking and therefore, in the first instance, with foreigners who come to our shores, cross-community issues are not at all to be excluded. It is often the case that the near neighbour is a greater stranger than the (safely) distant foreigner.

The sections below follow the standard divisions of the Bible. The approach here is to allow the different experiences and voices to be heard in their literary and historical settings, with all their individuality. The sheer variety permits us to see the issue in an enriching kaleidoscope of perspectives.

Since this study guide was first published, much has changed on the island of Ireland. Then we were at the beginnings of a great wave of immigration into the country, reversing the trend of almost two centuries. The prescience of those who commissioned the guide meant its publication was timely. Just now, the economic boom has waned and resentment against foreigners "taking our jobs" is once more likely to make itself felt. In changed circumstances, I hope this project proves timely once again. I would like to acknowledge the generous help of the committee which oversaw the new edition of this study guide: Sr Joan Roddy, who oversaw the project, Ms Stella Obe, Rev Katherine Meyer (who wrote the prayers at the end of each section), Pastor Kunle Daniel and Rob Fairmichael (who provided the dramatisation descriptions as well as the exercises at the end). In the original edition Rev John Byrne OSA provided the pointers

for reflections, which have been brought up to date. Very special thanks to Dr Carmel McCarthy RSM who kindly proofread the final text.

Note on the Translation of the Bible Used

This study guide uses the **New Revised Standard Version**, which is an ecumenical translation. Occasionally, reference has been made to the so-called "Apocryphal/ Deuterocanonical" books, used by the Anglican, Catholic and Orthodox Churches, but not by the Reformed Churches. Readers who do not regard these books as authoritative are invited to treat them as further echoes, within the *Jewish* tradition, of themes found in the Hebrew Bible. Once or twice, the reader will notice the name of God from the Hebrew Bible - YHWH - but it is left without vowels, respecting Jewish tradition.

SOME TERMS EXPLAINED

Apocrypha is the name given to those biblical books not written or handed down in Hebrew, which were regarded by many at the Reformation to lack the authority of the books written in that language. In churches that accept them, the term Deuterocanonical, meaning the second canon, is used in recognition of their origin in the Greek Old Testament (the Septuagint).

BCE and **CE** stand for "before the common era" and "the common era". These terms are sometimes used instead of BC and AD in recognition of religious traditions other than the Christian one.

Exile within the biblical narrative refers most obviously to the Babylonian Exile (587-539 BCE), even though there were other deportations and exiles.

Hebrew Bible is often used nowadays for the Old Testament, recognising that this is the Bible of the Jewish people. The reference does not include the Apocryphal / Deuterocanonical books.

Henotheism is the conviction that our God is one, whatever about the god(s) of other peoples and tribes. See monotheism.

Jubilee Year refers to a provision in the Hebrew Bible for the cancellation of debts every fifty years, giving people a regular opportunity to start afresh. It is a development of the agricultural sabbatical year. However, it is not known how much it was every practised.

Monotheism is the conviction that our God is the only God. Adjective: monotheistic. See henotheism.

Myth in the popular use means something not true. In the world of religious studies, a myth is a symbolic story, which helps us engage more deeply with reality. For example, the Garden of Eden is a myth or mythical story because it names realities with which we have to deal in life.

New Testament is the second half of the Christian Bible, a collection of Gospels, letters and others writings, produced by the early church.

Old Testament is a Christian term for the Jewish Bible. At the time of Jesus it was simply "the Bible", as the New Testament had yet to be written. The Old Testament has always been used in Christian worship.

Pentateuch refers to the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, from Genesis to Deuteronomy.

Resident alien is the translation of a Hebrew expression, meaning sojourner, that is, someone living outside his/her own country, an immigrant. The ancient Israelites were reminded in the Bible to respect the immigrant, because they too had been immigrants. The law reminded the Israelites to protect the rights of the sojourner in their midst because they were always to remember that they too had been sojourners in Egypt (Exod 22:21; cf. Deut 10:18–19; 24:17–22).

Second Isaiah is used to refer to Isaiah 40-55, a section thought by many scholars to have been written later and added to the original Isaiah.

Septuagint is the name given to the Greek translation and expansion of the Hebrew Bible, which took place in Alexandria (Egypt) around 200 BCE. The number of books taken from the Septuagint varies from church to church, with the Orthodox taking more and the Catholics taking fewer. The symbol LXX is shorthand for the Septuagint, which means literally seventy.

Wisdom Literature or **Wisdom Books** is a term for certain books of the Bible, with a special interest in universal human experiences. In the Hebrew Bible these are: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes (Qoheleth), Job and many Psalms. In the Greek Old Testament (the LXX) these are: the Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach (Ecclesiasticus) and the book of Tobit.

INTRODUCTION: THE TOWER OF BABEL

Expressions such as discrimination and racism are not found in the Bible. Although these modern "-isms" and "-tions" were unthought of and perhaps unthinkable in antiquity, the realities to which they refer and the ethical questions raised by them are very much present in the Bible.

In ancient times, people were not unaware that there were differences between nations. Colour, language, religion, tribe and territory all play their part in the biblical view of the outsider, called in some modern versions of the Bible, the "alien". For example, one of the most memorable *tableaux* of the Hebrew Bible reflects on the puzzle of the variety of languages. The story of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9) belongs to a category in ancient writings known as an etiological tale. This means a tale which is used to explain some puzzling aspect of life. For instance, why is there pain in childbirth (Genesis 3:16)? Why do Hebrews not eat the sinew on the hip (Genesis 32:32)? In the story of the Tower of Babel, why are there so many mutually incomprehensible languages?

The story ends with the common experience: confusion of tongues, as anybody who has tried to learn a foreign language or been abroad experiences. But the story starts with the human race originally sharing one common language. This idealised picture of perfect mutual comprehension had never been experienced by anyone, except in miniature within one's own culture. So, what happened to bring about the change? According to the story, the humans became very confident of themselves and wanted to build a tower right up to heaven. In *mythological terms*, this makes the deity sufficiently anxious for "God" to put a stop to their co-operative efforts by the simple and effective device of introducing a variety of tongues. Co-operation is no longer possible and the project has to be abandoned. In *psychological terms*, human pride has led to a state of affairs where people no longer understand each other and can no longer work together. In a story used to explain the origin of diverse languages, we stumble across an observation which is as true today as ever it was: a distorted sense of our own importance creates mutual incomprehension and renders co-operation impossible. "Not speaking the same language" can be taken literally (a linguistic fact) or metaphorically (a mutual incomprehension). We read in Psalm 114,

> "When Israel went out from Egypt,
> the house of Jacob *from a people of strange language*,
> Judah became God's sanctuary,
> Israel his dominion." (Ps 114:1-2)

The phrase in italics reflects not just the fact of being abroad but, more pointedly, the pain of alienation. Those of us blessed with a sense of been at home may not appreciate the suffering of those who have being obliged to move home and life. Often, the person who has changed culture experiences a double alienation, like the Irish who are at home neither in Britain nor in Ireland. Even worse, the new context of unfamiliarity and foreignness ("not the same language") can foster suspicion and allow fear to flourish.

The story of the Shibboleth

Linguistic awareness is often the first sign of the stranger and the refugee. Even a slightly different intonation can tell the native speaker much. A rather terrifying reflection of this everyday experience may be found in a story from the book of Judges 12:1-6.

"The men of Ephraim were called to arms, and they crossed to Zaphon and said to Jephthah, "Why did you cross over to fight against the Ammonites, and did not call us to go with you? We will burn your house down over you!" Jephthah said to them, "My people and I were engaged in conflict with the Ammonites who oppressed us severely. But when I called you, you did not deliver me from their hand. When I saw that you would not deliver me, I took my life in my hand, and crossed over against the Ammonites, and the LORD gave them into my hand. Why then have you come up to me this day, to fight against me?" Then Jephthah gathered all the men of Gilead and fought with Ephraim; and the men of Gilead defeated Ephraim, because they said, "You are fugitives from Ephraim, you Gileadites - in the heart of Ephraim and Manasseh." Then the Gileadites took the fords of the Jordan against the Ephraimites. Whenever one of the fugitives of Ephraim said, "Let me go over," the men of Gilead would say to him, "Are you an Ephraimite?" When he said, "No," they said to him, "Then say Shibboleth," and he said, "Sibboleth," for he could not pronounce it right. Then they seized him and killed him at the fords of the Jordan. Forty-two thousand of the Ephraimites fell at that time." (Judg 12:1-6)

In a tale which echoes Judges 8:1-3, the Ephraimites challenge Jephthah, because he did not call on them for help. In the ensuing battle, the Ephraimites were roundly defeated and the ethnicity of the survivors is betrayed because they cannot pronounce the word *shibboleth* properly. Those identified are slaughtered. As is said of Peter in the Gospel, "your accent betrays you" (Matthew 26:73).

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

Language remains a potent symbol of both mutual incomprehension and mutual enrichment. It is always more than just the words - a culture, a society and a way of looking at the world are all encapsulated in a language.

(1) What has my own experience of being a foreigner been? How did I feel? What helped me to cope?

(2) When has another person's language made communication difficult for me? How did I cope? It is not just the language as such: there can also be issues of professional jargon, the generation gap, gender differences?

(3) Language is only one example of blocked communication. What about other obstacles, for instance, racial background, economic statue, sexual orientation or religious affiliation? How have I myself experienced these challenges and coped with them?

(4) Difference of culture and experience is, at the same time, an enhancement. When has the difference of others been a source of enrichment and joy for me?

(5) What has helped me personally to set aside suspicion and be more open to people who are different?

PRAYER *(Genesis 11)*

God, who speaks and whose sudden word creates our lives,
your name is unpronounceable
and yet spoken in many tongues.

And so we pray:
Whoever we are,
and by whatever name you have called us,
teach us to speak with fluency the language of praise,
so that we may hear,
and recognise one another at last.

1: THE PENTATEUCH

The first five books of the Bible (the Torah according to Jewish tradition or in Christian tradition the Pentateuch) contain material which seems to be in tension with itself. At a surface level, we have a national epic with three broad elements: the nomadic life of the tribes (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob), the Egyptian period (Joseph and succeeding generations), the period of the Exodus and the possession of the Promised Land (Moses, Aaron and Joshua). The latter stages of the national epic recount a great deal of invasion, battle and extermination. At another level, an ethical concern emerges, in particular towards the defenceless and the exiled (the orphan and the widow, the resident alien). Part of the motivation of this ethical concern comes from the recollection of having been yourself in exile, of having suffered yourself. Going through the same experience yourself can promote understanding and compassion.

In the early period of the patriarchs, the family of Abraham is nomadic. They live with their flocks and by their wits. To capture something of the flavour of their life, one could read Genesis 12 and 13. In the end, after experiencing deep family division and later severe famine, the family of Jacob joins his son Joseph in the safety and relative prosperity of Egypt. It turns out that Joseph, the immigrant, is a source of blessing not only for his own family, but for the host country as well. By means of Joseph's gifts as a far-seeing administrator, Egypt prepares well in seven years of plenty for another seven years of famine to follow (Genesis 41). A long time after Jacob's family first arrived in Egypt, a king arose who "did not know Joseph" (Exodus 1:8), a phrase with an ominous ring to it. This Pharaoh began a systematic extermination of the Hebrews, apparently on the all too familiar grounds that these foreigners were becoming "too many" (Exodus 1-2). Although frustrated by the Hebrew midwives in his wish to kill all male children at birth, this Pharaoh did make life miserable for the Hebrews, forcing them to make more bricks while simultaneously withholding the materials necessary. Exclusion from a means of livelihood has often been the experience of the exile and the refugee.

Eventually, in the book of Exodus, God expresses concern in the pregnant words "I know". God is speaking to Moses and calls on him to be the instrument of liberation. God is portrayed as a God who feels and notices suffering, whose desire is for his people to be free, who holds out to them a different future in a land to which he will bring them (Exodus 3). After various vicissitudes, the Hebrews eventually manage to escape across the Red Sea, although it will be another forty years before they actually enter the land. (It is during this wandering in the desert that the Ten Commandments and much of the ethical material are described.)

The violent entry into the land is described with a forthrightness that leaves little doubt about the lack of sympathy for those who always lived there. They are to be destroyed. It even says that their destruction will be an acting-out of God's will (Exodus 23:20-33).

Fortunately, this very violent expression is in contrast with a much more accepting attitude elsewhere in the very same Bible. The word of God also teaches compassion and understanding towards the immigrant. As we might expect, this more ethical teaching is based on the memory of having been an alien. Time and time again in the Pentateuch we are reminded that the Israelites were aliens themselves. Abraham, the great forefather, had been a "wandering Aramean" (Genesis 12; Deuteronomy 26:5). "You were once aliens and slaves yourselves" (Deuteronomy 10:19-22; 24:17-22; Exodus 22:21-24; 23:6-9; Leviticus 19:33-34). On the basis of that painful memory, "you are to be merciful to the stranger in your midst". In particular the resident alien is accorded certain religious and political rights, as well as duties. The alien is entitled to a day of refreshment in the week (Exodus 23:12) and may keep the Passover (Leviticus 19:34). A special consideration is recommended when harvesting, in that aliens with no means of support are to be left the gleanings (Leviticus 23:22; Deuteronomy 24:19; Ruth 2). Even slaves have rights (Exodus 21:1-11).

This combination of religious tolerance and economic assistance comes to a climax in the arrangements for the Jubilee Year. This is the year when debts are cancelled and slaves are to be set free. This merciful attitude is highly ethical and the basis for it is made plain in three texts in the Torah, which are themselves arresting:

> "You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. You shall fear the Lord your God; him alone you shall worship; to him you shall hold fast, and by his name you shall swear. He is your praise; he is your God, who has done for you these great and awesome things that your own eyes have seen. Your ancestors went down to Egypt seventy persons; and now the Lord your God has made you as numerous as the stars in heaven." (Deut 10:19-22)

> "The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God." (Lev 19:34)

> "For both the native among the Israelites and the alien residing among them-you shall have the same law for anyone who acts in error. But whoever acts high-handedly, whether a native or an alien, affronts the Lord, and shall be cut off from among the people." (Num 15:29-30)

The ancient Israelites are commanded to love God, to love their neighbours as themselves, and even to love the stranger to the same extent. The ancient Israelites are not only reminded that they too (in their ancestors) had been aliens, but they are related to the Edomites (traditional enemies-Deuteronomy 23:7) and even the Egyptians are to be treated well-in spite of everything! The practical expression of this love is equality before the law (Deuteronomy 27:19). The alien, as much as the native, can expect to receive fair treatment and justice. How much the jubilee year was practiced is not known. At the very least, it articulates values and represents an ideal.

Another institution in ancient Israel has a bearing on the question of justice: the city of refuge. The guiding texts here are Exodus 21:12-14 and Deuteronomy 19:1-13. This was a system whereby those guilty of accidental homicide could seek legitimate asylum in a certain number of named cities. In this way, the perpetrators of what we would call "manslaughter" are protected from the full rigour of vengeance for a murder. That sense that there are places where one might escape injustice is a striking part of the covenantal relationship within Israel. A place of refuge and asylum is envisaged, even if only in special circumstances.

The Pentateuch itself then contains apparently contradictory traditions. The narrative tradition recounts violent escape from Egypt and the violent invasion of Canaan. Mercy is not to be shown, except in well-advertised cases such as Rahab and her family. On the other hand, an ethical tradition is clearly present, one which, to our ears, comes close to the present-day language of human rights. How both traditions come to be side by side in the same set of texts may be a matter of time and politics. The great national story takes us back to somewhere in the thirteenth century BCE. The actual writing down of the story in the form we now have it is usually dated to the Exile (587 BCE) or even later. Thus a long period of maturation and a sharper, more recent experience of exile has tempered the imperialism of the early account. And by now, the Israelites, once again, are no longer in control of their own territory. Even the return from exile itself this time was permitted by Cyrus, "the Lord's anointed", literally "messiah" who was a Persian. It would have been a shock to have heard such a person hailed as "the Christ", as Christians would put it! This double tradition means that we see in the tradition's unvarnished imperialism, a kind of racism, alongside a moral reflection, which speaks with a much more nuanced, compassionate and ethical voice. The Bible exhibits a robust realism and is not afraid to portray the dark side of the human experience. The double tradition constitutes an invitation to recognise "ambivalent reality" but not to be bound by it.

The Story of Esau and Jacob

As an example of the double tradition, the wonderful story of Esau and Jacob can inspire us today. Putting it mildly, the gripping saga told in Genesis 25-33 recounts the experiences of a markedly dysfunctional family. Esau and Jacob are destined, from the womb, to be in conflict. To make the family relationships clear: Isaac and Rebecca have two sons, Esau and Jacob. Isaac prefers Esau and Rebecca prefers Jacob and even helps him against her husband and other son. As the story unfolds, Jacob robs Esau twice and once he deceives Isaac, his blind father. In turn, Isaac prefers Esau and Jacob is the favourite of Rebecca. Laban - uncle of Jacob and brother of Rebecca - treats his daughters abominably. In turn, Rachel deceives her own father, but not before Jacob had yet again cheated his uncle and father-in-law, Laban. In the course of this saga, Jacob, having alienated himself thoroughly from his brother Esau, becomes himself an alien, living abroad. It is not a very uplifting story - except perhaps for two outstanding moments. In Genesis 32:13-32, Jacob undergoes a deep spiritual experience, confronting both God and his own darkness. The marked changed is completed when he meets his brother, a brother from whom he can expect the worst. In the course of this potentially fraught encounter, Esau has the grace to release his brother from his previous misdeeds:

"But Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept. When Esau looked up and saw the women and children, he said, "Who are these with you?" Jacob said, "The children whom God has graciously given your servant." Then the maids drew near, they and their children, and bowed down; Leah likewise and her children drew near and bowed down; and finally Joseph and Rachel drew near, and they bowed down. Esau said, "What do you mean by all this company that I met?" Jacob answered, "To find favour with my lord." But Esau said, "I have enough, my brother; keep what you have for yourself." Jacob said, "No, please; if I find favour with you, then accept my present from my hand; *for truly to see your face is like seeing the face of God* - since you have received me with such favour. Please accept my gift that is brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me, and because I have everything I want." So he urged him, and he took it." (Gen 33:4-11)

Jacob, the insider, recognised the face of God, the grace of God, in Esau, the outsider. The words capture this tremendous moment. It could have been a disaster but Esau turns out to be a gift, gracious and forgiving.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

(1) Within my own experience, can I name nationalities that have come to Ireland for economic or political reasons? What word would describe the quality of my own interaction with immigrants, including people seeking asylum?

(2) What do I know about the status of newcomers in the law, especially in regard to residence and the right to work? Have I met people who experience legal restrictions as they try to build their lives here? What do I believe their standing in the law ought to be?

(3) Look again at the texts that remind the Israelites of their own history of having been aliens. Many nations have experienced expropriation and emigration. What are the parallels with your own national history?

(4) Look again at the surprising biblical tradition of equal economic and religious rights accorded to strangers? Is there a challenge here to our attitudes and our practice?

(5) Take biblical accounts of the cities of refuge (Exod 21:13; Num 35:9-15; Deut 4:41-43; 19:1-13; Joshua 20; and 1 Chronicles 6). As an image of asylum, what does this provision say to us today?

(6) The stranger can be a source of blessing and grace. In what ways has it been my experience that the stranger, precisely as alien, can be a source of healing and grace?

PRAYER *(Genesis 25-33)*

God, whose hands are always open,
it is from you that we receive
every familiar and unexpected gift.

And so we pray:
Give to us also the gift of Esau's non-anxious sight,
so that recognising when we have everything we need,
we may turn from ourselves,
and discover that to meet the eye of another
is to see your face and live.

2: THE HISTORY OF ISRAEL AND THE PROPHETS

Teachings of any kind cannot be grasped without some idea of the context from which they came. This chapter begins with a brief overview of Israelite history as presented in the Bible and in the light of the surrounding cultures. The alternating experiences of power and disempowerment, which marked Israelite history, may go some way to explaining the variety of attitudes we find towards other nations in these foundational texts.

As Christian readers of the Bible will know, at the time of Jesus, Palestine was under Roman imperial control. A Roman functionary, Pontius Pilate, pronounced the fate of Jesus. Scholars use the death of Herod the Great (4 BCE) to date the birth of Jesus. However, at that time, Roman rule was a relatively recent phenomenon. Because of its geographical location, Palestine has always been a kind of international crossroads. Before the Romans there was a short period of national independence under the Maccabees. This took place during the Hellenistic period, initiated by Alexander the Great. The Persians had preceded the Greeks, and these, in turn, had been preceded by the Neo-Babylonian Empire and by the Neo-Assyrian Empire. David and Solomon ruled over an independent Israel in a short-lived united monarchy. *Looked at from the outside*, not having control of one's destiny was more typical for the Hebrews, even in the Promised Land.

Looked at from the inside, from within their national and religious consciousness, the Israelites had a national epic of origins which took in the Abraham, Isaac and Jacob stories and later, in Egypt, the story of the Exodus, as we saw in Chapter 1. The entry into the land under Joshua is told with unrelieved aggression towards the natives. At least in its story-telling, this is Israel in imperialist mode. The people of Israel is able, once at least, to direct its own destiny, but apparently unable to act in a way different from its own experience of being oppressed.

Given that the nature of the conquest is difficult to reconstruct, we must wait until the time of David for anything we would recognise as history and chronicle. The united monarchy under Saul, David and Solomon (c.1020-931 BCE) divided into two kingdoms, Israel and Judah (931-721 BCE). Under pressure from the revived Neo-Assyrian Empire, the northern kingdom collapsed with the capture of Samaria in 721. External pressure and internal weakness led to the demise of the Assyrians (610-609 BCE) but the vacuum was filled by the Neo-Babylonian Empire. It was during this period that the southern kingdom of Judah was itself overcome and the inhabitants deported to Babylon.

From that period come the despondent words of Psalm 137:

> "By the rivers of Babylon - there we sat down and there we wept when we remembered Zion." (Ps 137:1)

This lament ends in the bitter, if understandable, words,

> "O daughter Babylon, you devastator! Happy shall they be who pay you back what you have done to us! Happy shall they be who take your little ones and dash them against the rock!" (Ps 137:8-9)

Although the Exodus stands out in the Pentateuch as the event which initiated the history of Israel proper, the most formative period for the actual text of the Bible was the Exile (587-537 BCE). Instead of collapsing passively under the inevitable, the Israelites in effect created their religious system: they began the process of the final writing down and editing of the traditions, the creation of the legal code, the drawing up of the distinctive dietary laws and the establishment of the synagogue. Under threat of extinction, this people responded by a powerful re-imagining and re-statement of their identity. It is highly significant that this great period of writing and reflection took place under oppression and in exile. This experience very probably accounts for that notable empathy with the outsider we find in Jewish law.

The threat of loss of identity continued in the Greek period (333-63 BCE) with the conquest of Alexander the Great. It led to a time when pressure to assimilate and abandon cultural distinctiveness was very great. Inevitably, there was a political response, in the form of the Maccabean revolt. The First and Second Books of Maccabees tell of religious intolerance and persecution. These stories may very well be the first example in history of persecution for the sake of religion alone because, ordinarily, paganism is tolerant of pluralism. Stories of martyrs for religion, never too distinct from nationality, are first recounted in 1 Maccabees 2 and 2 Maccabees 7. Already by this time, Rome was beginning to stir and in 63 BCE, Jerusalem and its Temple came under Roman control. The national question was never far from people's minds and the cry arose, "How long, O LORD?"

This necessarily very brief account of external international events and internal national reaction over a thousand-year period must serve as a backdrop to two sections in our reflection: the Prophets and the Wisdom Literature. We turn first to the prophets.

The experience of freedom and oppression, independence and imperialism, occurred in a time of intense instability, political and religious. Nevertheless, it was also the time

of those great preachers and writers, the classical prophets, from the eighth to the 6th century BCE. It was, in terms of religious ideas, yet again a truly fertile and creative time, during which religious thought moved beyond the confines of nationalism, both theological and political. It became clear slowly that God is one and that all creation belongs to God and that this one Creator God is also God of all the nations.

The Story of Naaman the Syrian

Even in times of tremendous upheaval, stories were preserved that kept open the awareness that God was not just God of Israelites. An arresting example is the story of Naaman the Syrian in 2 Kings 5. The historical context is hard to pin down - perhaps the eighth century BCE, or perhaps it reflects the time after the Exile, when the conversion of powerful foreigners was appreciated (Daniel 2:46-47; 3:28; 4:34-37; 6:25-27). The literary context is the ministry of Elisha, the successor of Elijah. Elisha reputedly is given a *double* share of his mentor's spirit; nevertheless, the Elisha stories can disturb for their evidently legendary character. Sometimes the stories are "amoral", showing the irascible character of the prophet.

A signal feature of the Elisha stories, however, is the way in which people cross state boundaries. Elisha tells Hazael that he should be king of Aram (2 Kings 8:13). Conversely, a king of Israel brings a request to Baal-zebub, the God of Ekron (2 Kings 1). The most celebrated of these stories, packed with incident and human interest, is that of Naaman, both a foreigner and a leper. The story rises above the surrounding tales because of the condition of the patient, the political aspect of Naaman's pilgrimage, and the unworthy behaviour of Elisha's servant. Naaman is sent with appropriate diplomatic gifts to the land of Israel. The arrival and request unnerve the king of Israel, who thinks this is a set-up to pick a quarrel! The prophet makes a simple recommendation - to wash seven times in the Jordan - an action Naaman eventually performs. His physical cure triggers a conversion: "Now I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel" (2 Kings 5:15). The story shows that people who were not Israelites can also enjoy the blessing of the God of Israel. The corresponding story in the New Testament must surely be that of Jesus and the Canaanite woman (Mark 7:24-30), which we will see later on.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

(1) The kind of person I am depends very much on my background. How have I been shaped by the convictions and practices of the society and community in which I live?

(2) What are the factors that have shaped our society and given us our identity as a country? How do these factors shape our attitudes to people from backgrounds different to our own?

(3) We could reflect on the growing insight in the Bible that God is not just our God, and even more, God is not the enemy of our enemies. The good news is that God loves me. The really good news is that God loves all of us equally as well.

PRAYER *(2 Kings 5)*

God, who even in distant lands finds a home,
this whole crazily inhabited earth is yours.

And so we pray:
In our distress,
teach us also that unembarrassed dignity
which will allow us, like Naaman, to risk the possibility
that another culture's wisdom may come to heal us,
and that their brokenness may be no greater than our own.

3: THE ONE GOD OF ALL CREATION

It might seem, to the casual reader, that in the Bible we find a consistent, monotheistic faith in God. Is this the case?

The faith of Israel receives classic formulation in the *Shema Yisrael* ("Hear, O Israel"), still an essential part of daily prayer for Jews:

> "Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates." (Deut 6:4-9 *NRSV* slightly adjusted)

To our modern ears, long accustomed to monotheism, it sounds as if this is a statement of monotheistic faith, that is, a belief in only one God. We hear it too somehow in the light of the first chapter of Genesis:

> "In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters." (Gen 1:1-2)

But, just as the God of Abraham was originally Abraham's God, likewise, the *Shema Yisrael* represents an originally national, "ethnic" faith, that is, "We have only the one God, whatever about other nations". How and when did Israel make the journey from having only one God of Israel to believing that this God was also Lord of all creation and of all peoples?

The journey from this relative monotheism ("henotheism" is the technical term) to an absolute monotheism was made only gradually in the consciousness of Israel. It is only by the time of Second Isaiah (an anonymous prophet, not to be confused with the eighth-century BCE Isaiah who wrote Isaiah 1-39) that we encounter a clear monotheism. The journey from the earlier relative monotheism is facilitated by three factors:

- Israel's traditional worship of only one, imageless, God.
- The growing unease with idols and false gods.
- The gradual awareness that YHWH, Israel's God, is the creator of all that exists.

In brief, we see a movement from *our* protecting deity to *the* transcendent creator, that is, from a kind of tribal faith (God is *ours*) to a universal teaching (there is a God, the creator of everything and everyone). It is clear from the earliest traditions that Israel's own God is one and that there are to be no images. He is already unlike anything we could produce. On the contrary, he creates us in his image (Genesis 1:26). Creation in all its complexity and paradox comes from him (Job 38-39). This God holds everything in being, as we read in Psalms 115 or 139.

> "Our God is in the heavens; he does whatever he pleases. They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see. They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell." (Ps 115:3, 5-6)

God is in heaven, incomparable. The Israelites need to be reminded of this frequently, as we see in Hosea or even more clearly in Jeremiah 10:1-5 ("Their idols are like scarecrows in a cucumber field, and they cannot speak; they have to be carried, for they cannot walk. Do not be afraid of them, for they cannot do evil, nor is it in them to do good." [Jer 10:5]); 51:15-19 ("It is he who made the earth by his power, who established the world by his wisdom, and by his understanding stretched out the heavens." [Jer 51:15]). In a word,

> "There is none like you, O Lord; you are great, and your name is great in might." (Jer 10:6)

The sense that in reality only one God exists, who is the creator of all, comes to clear and complete expression for the first time in Second Isaiah. See, for example:

> "I, I am the Lord, and besides me there is no saviour." (Isa 43:11)

> "Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god." (Isa 44:6)

> "I am the Lord, and there is no other; besides me there is no god. I arm you, though you do not know me," (Isa 45:5)

The reader could also take a look at Isa 41:21; 42:8; 43:8-13; 44:6-8; 45:16, 20; 46:5-7. (The later development of these ideas can be found in Wisdom 13:11-15 and Baruch 6.)

A logical consequence of this higher understanding of God as the only transcendent creator of all things and all beings is that he concerns himself not only with Israel but with all the nations. This widening of salvation to include the nations is found precisely where we would expect to find it. Second Isaiah, the clearest monotheist, is likewise a theologian of God as saviour of all the nations.

The Story of Psalm 67

The Israelite prayer book, the Psalter, can be quite nationalistic, territorial (literally!) and narrow. But every so often we come across a prayer, which lifts us beyond the ethnocentricity of national piety and we see God as the God of all the nations. A really fine example is Psalm 67. This psalm has a response: "Let the people praise you, O God, let all the peoples praise you". The psalm starts with a very traditional blessing, the Blessing of Aaron "The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace." (Numbers 6:24-26) The nations are called upon to praise God for this blessing in v. 3 and in the repetition, the writer insists that *all* the people should praise God. The second strophe (v. 4) illustrates God's government of the nations by his justice and guidance given to all the nations on earth. The mention of earth is taken up in the final strophe (v. 6), which in a quite modern way acknowledges that we all share and depend upon the earth, which yields its "increase". At the point where we expect the third repetition of the response, the text varies to become even more universal: "let all the ends of the earth revere him" (v. 7).

Within the Psalter, Pss 65 and 66 enjoy a similarly universal outlook. Psalm 67 has a literary structure, at the centre of which lies a confession of God's rule over all (v. 4, perhaps framed by the response in vv. 3 and 5). A keen reader will notice that word "nations/peoples" occurs eight times, perhaps seven plus one, a number beyond perfection, twice qualified by "all". Earth is mentioned four times, again a number suggesting universality. By these techniques the writer manages the move from Israelite blessing to universal thanksgiving.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

(1) The experience of faith begins with family and community; in other words in quite specific and concrete contexts. Have I been able to see that God is the God of all races and nations, peoples and languages? How?

(2) There is only one God, but this God is the God of all, who cares equally for all and is no "respecter of persons". What are the consequences for my treatment of peoples of different national and religious backgrounds?

PRAYER *(Psalm 67)*

God, who shaped the dry land and contained the seas,
it is also by your hand that we ourselves
were created from the fertile soil, to till and to keep it well.

And so we pray:
May our voices of fearful busyness and blame
not drown out the singing of creation,
but be silenced by its beauty,
so that in the end, and by the work of our hands
the whole earth may live to praise you.

4: THE ONE GOD OF ALL NATIONS

As a counterpoint to the national histories produced and published by the various chroniclers, the voices of the prophets add a distinct, sometimes discordant, tune. They are, of course, voices of the classical tradition, trying to bring people back to fidelity to the covenant as found in the Pentateuch. But, even though they are national figures, they are not confined to national issues. The prophetic writings promote an awareness of others that includes other nations as part of God's plan of salvation. This is a surprising development, which takes place under the rubric of two discoveries. As we just saw above, the first discovery is that YHWH is not the God of the Israelites only (henotheism) but the one God of all creation (monotheism). The second discovery is that the salvation he offers to the Israelites is offered as well to the Gentiles. How did such a revolution come about?

Already in the second chapter of Isaiah, God's concern for "all the nations" is clear:

> "In days to come the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it. Many peoples shall come and say, 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.' For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." (Isa 2:2-4)

This wonderful inclusion of the nations is found also in the Little Apocalypse of Isaiah (c. seventh century BCE) at Isaiah 25:6ff.

> "On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear. And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; he will swallow up death forever." (Isa 25:6-7)

Although this text is indeed a progression from Isaiah 2:2ff., nevertheless, Isaiah 25 teaches that the offer of salvation to all nations is not only *by means* of Israel, but by means of *becoming Israelites*. In practice, this would mean joining the religion of the Israelites and accepting their pivotal role in God's history with humankind.

Nevertheless, viewed within the limits of the period it is an impressive and generous insight. It responds to a peculiarly Israelite problematic. In antiquity, polytheism was generally tolerant and concern for the salvation of others by means of *our* religion was not actually an issue. You have your gods and we have ours. The same easy indifference accounts for syncretism, that is, the tendency to "pick and mix" beliefs from a variety of sources. But in the prophetic texts we see the dawning realisation that God is one alone. With that conviction arises the consequent question, how will the other nations fare?

In the middle of First Isaiah, an unexpected text jumps off the page:

> "The Lord will strike Egypt, striking and healing; they will return to the Lord, and he will listen to their supplications and heal them. On that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian will come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians. On that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, whom the Lord of hosts has blessed, saying, 'Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my heritage.'" (Isa 19:22-25)

This is a text that presumes some kind of Jewish settlement in Egypt, as in Jeremiah 44:1 (or it may be a text from a later period which has been added here).

Second Isaiah, writing during the exile in his Book of Consolation, takes this awareness of God's concern with all the nations a step further:

> "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth." (Isa 49:6)

> "Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live. I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David. See, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples. See, you shall call nations that you do not know, and nations that do not know you shall run to you, because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you." (Isa 55:3-5)

This is a new role for Israel - to be the means by which God is made known to other nations. In the last part of Isaiah, it becomes clear that what is envisaged is conversion to the faith of Israel, as we read,

> "I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations. (Isa 42:6)

> See, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth, I tell you of them. (Isa 42:9)
>
> Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn." (Isa 60:3)

This vision comes to expression too in the prayer book of Israelite religion, the Psalter:

> "Among those who know me I mention Rahab and Babylon; Philistia too, and Tyre, with Ethiopia - 'This one was born there,' they say. " (Ps 87:4)

Although the distinctive duality remains, the prophets call for a mission among the aliens: Isaiah 42:5ff.; 66:19; Zechariah 14; Tobit 14:6. The insight that God is not just ours and concerns himself not just with us will lead eventually within the Christian gospel to a breakthrough in relation to the Gentiles. The creator who wants to save everyone can no longer be confined to an ethnic group. The place of other nations in God's plans is a biblical issue, in both the Old and the New Testaments. However, the wider question of the role of other religions in God's plans for humanity is a modern question that is not specifically raised in our texts, although it is a question with which contemporary Christians must struggle.

The reader may like to read the story of Jonah in this context. It constitutes a quite ironic reflection on narrow nationalism and religious mean-spiritedness. The new attitude towards the nations is not based on any discovery of the joys of pluralism. On the contrary, it is rooted in a sense of responsibility towards God and a desire to be true to an understanding of God who is not exclusive to one nation.

The Story of Jonah

The Bible uses many different kinds of writing to communicate its teaching about God. The book of Jonah is a rare biblical *genre*, that of satire or ironic comedy. It seems to have been written during the Persian period (548-332 BC), although it purports to come from Jonah, son of Amittai (2 Kings 14:25). Because the book counters a narrow nationalistic faith, we may conclude it was written at a time when feelings against the outsider and the foreigner were high.

Before looking at the message, it is useful to notice a few unusual features. It portrays, mostly in prose, an unwilling prophet, who tries to escape God's call by going to Tarshish, a place where according to Isaiah God is not known (Isaiah

66:19). God however is persistent and, by means of a boat, a storm and a great fish, sends Jonah to Nineveh, "the great city." But where or what was Nineveh? It used to be the ancient capital of Assyria, the most hated enemy of Israel (2 Kings 18:13-37). So, the prophet is sent on an apparently ridiculous task. But, the outcome is surprising.

When the reluctant prophet arrives at Nineveh and preaches judgement in the name of God, the results are startling. Every single person repents, from the king down to the lowest citizens and even extending to the animals (as God himself notes!). In response, God quite reasonably decides not to inflict disaster on Nineveh. Jonah's response, however, is different: anger and displeasure. The prophet confronts God for being "a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing" (Jonah 4:2). God defends God's self robustly: "And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals?" (Jonah 4:11). God's word is the last word.

The unwillingness of Jonah is instructive. He is unwilling to carry God's word beyond the confines of Israel. He is unwilling to recognise the genuine response of the Assyrians. He is unwilling to accept God's merciful concern. In a word, he is unwilling to accept God as God really is, gracious and merciful to all. Perhaps the writer has in mind that great passage from Isaiah, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isa 55:8-9).

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

(1) Church members often think "my/our God" is just that, "mine/ours" and no one else's. Have you met that attitude in yourself or others?

(2) Prejudice against other cultures is often supported by religious differences. Am I genuinely convinced that "my/our" God is truly the God of everyone in every time and place? Have I any contact with people of other Christian denominations or with those of other religious faiths in my community?

(3) How can people of different religions live at peace with each other, and so contribute to a peaceful co-existence not only in our country, but on this planet?

PRAYER *(Jonah)*

God, by whose word we were made,
by the words of our own stories
we shape and reshape the world.

And so we pray:
Teach us to be so at ease with ourselves in your love
that we are never, like Jonah, wrong-footed
by the story of your kindness to others,
and knowing no grievance,
may only laugh with joy.

5: THE BOOK OF RUTH

The Bible makes use of a wide variety of literary styles and it contains not only laws and historical chronicles, prophetic exhortations and warnings, but even some material cast in the form of the short story. Examples would be Esther and Jonah. A particularly well-loved tale is recounted in an extremely brief book in the Bible, the book of Ruth. The story itself is easily summarised, but a summary overlooks the detail and the subtlety of the telling, which disclose the heart of the book of Ruth.

The events the story describes are located in that difficult period between the entry to the land (under Joshua) and the establishment of the monarchy (under Saul). Briefly, a famine occurs. A man, named Elimelech, from Bethlehem, and his wife, Naomi, emigrate to Moab on the other side of the Jordan river and the Dead Sea. They bring their two sons with them. Some time afterwards, Elimelech dies and Naomi is left a widow in a foreign country. Having married Moabite wives, both her sons Mahlon and Chilion die and this leaves Naomi alone with her two foreign daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth. Naomi hears that food is available once more in Judah and wishes to return. With great fairness, understanding and generosity, she offers each daughter-in-law the chance to return to her own family and wishes each one well. Orpah takes up the offer, but Ruth adheres to her mother-in-law in words that are very moving,

> "But Ruth said, 'Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; Where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die - there will I be buried. May the LORD do thus and so to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you!'" (Ruth 1:16-17)

Eventually mother-in-law and daughter-in-law arrive at Bethlehem. The Bethlehemites barely recognise Naomi. Both women have lost husbands, Naomi has lost sons, and Ruth - by adhering to her mother-in-law - has forgone the chance of off-spring. They now belong to the category of the extremely poor. For such people, the system of gleaning was devised, by which reapers were not to "vacuum" everything into their bags, but leave a significant amount for the truly destitute. Ruth begs to be allowed to glean in the fields of Boaz and she sets about her task. She comes to the attention of Boaz himself and, eventually, they meet and marry. Such a marriage dramatically reverses the fortunes of the small female family unit and they enjoy a new-found prosperity. Not only that, Ruth conceives, bringing the joy of a lineage to Naomi. The child is named Obed, who was to become the father of Jesse, the father of (king) David (Ruth 4:17).

Apart from being a carefully compact and deeply felt story, written from the perspective of women, the book of Ruth gives rise to thought. The story is example of the love between two women of different nationalities, Naomi and Ruth. This love happens in spite of the desperate situation of both women. Already, at this level, Ruth the Moabitess is a source of comfort to Naomi the Israelite woman. The faithful love of her daughter-in-law is a source of great comfort to Naomi in her loss. As well as that, Ruth has energy and is ready to work, when it is her turn to be in exile. Because of her sterling qualities, she gains Boaz for a husband. When material prosperity is crowned by fertility, Ruth becomes a source of happiness and blessing not only for Naomi and Boaz, but for all Israel: from her is descended the great King David, the very paradigm of the good monarch, whose career became the focus of nostalgic hope for generations and for centuries.

In a word, a foreigner enters the history of Israel by a series of misfortunes. This very same foreigner, now herself an exile, becomes a source of blessing, a matriarch through whom God gave Israel the gift of King David.

The Story of Jesus' Genealogy

Genealogies and genealogical services are popular these days. The Bible too provides lists of past generations and these can sometimes be significant. For instance, the book of Ruth ends with a short genealogy: "Now these are the descendants of Perez: Perez became the father of Hezron, Hezron of Ram, Ram of Amminadab, Amminadab of Nahshon, Nahshon of Salmon, Salmon of Boaz, Boaz of Obed, Obed of Jesse, and Jesse of David." (Ruth 4:18-22) It signals a remarkable fact: the Jewish hero *par excellence*, King David, had a great grandmother who was a foreigner!

Something similarly remarkable may be observed in the genealogy of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew 1:1-17. Five women are mentioned, all but one by name: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, the wife of Uriah (Bathsheba) and Mary. It is possible to look at these women through different lenses (for example, some irregularity in ethics, nationality or status), but of special interest in our study is the presence of foreigners in Jesus' background. This may not be Matthew's primary focus, but it is interesting that foreigners feature on the first page of a Gospel which on the last page has the words: "Go therefore and make disciples of *all nations*" (Matthew 28:19). Tamar (Genesis 38) was a Canaanite. Rahab (Joshua 2 and 6) was a resident of Jericho, before the entry into the land of chosen people, and so,

perhaps, a Canaanite. Ruth (Ruth 1) was from Moab, as we saw above. Finally, Bathsheba was the wife of Uriah the *Hittite*. Just as King David had "something in his background", Matthew is purposefully telling us that Jesus, too, had "something in his background".

Looking into our own family history and genealogical background can be fraught. Researchers often unearth "surprises" and frequently we learn that our make-up is ethnically and religiously more mixed than family tradition had led us to believe. We are all rather more variegated than the purists would have us believe!

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

(1) Who are the different religious, ethnic and racial minorities where I live?

(2) What is my experience of the foreigner as gift to me personally and gift as well to our parish and community?

(3) How are people from other cultures sometimes perceived as a threat?

(4) What have Irish people brought to countries to which they have emigrated?

(5) What benefits have those of different religions and races who now live among us brought to Ireland?

(6) Are there potential benefits, which we, individually or as a nation, do not experience because of our lack of openness to strangers?

PRAYER *(Matthew 1)*

God of our Lord Jesus Christ,
whose family tree both inspires awe and hints at scandal,
in every generation you have freely called to your purposes
those whose names we could not pronounce.

And so we pray:
Keep us from embracing any sense of identity
which is grounded in what or who we are not,
and bless us with the sure knowledge of whose we are.

6: THE WISDOM LITERATURE

Within the Bible, a strand of literature is present which is truly international and can teach us about our common humanity and our shared quest and shared resources. This is the "wisdom literature" of the Old Testament. We will use it to reflect on experiences we share with all of humankind - those universal experiences and questions common to us all.

(a) Common Human Experiences

The wisdom literature is marked by an absence of themes which concern Israel as a nation. Thus, for instance, the national story of the exodus from Egypt and entry in Canaan is largely missing. Likewise, specific theologies such as the covenant and the temple are not at all central. Even well known figures such as Moses and David and profound experiences such as the exile are given scant treatment. Those concerns that marked out Israel as distinct, even superior, are also absent. What do we find instead? We encounter an awareness of experiences which are common to all human beings, irrespective of nation or language or religion, i.e. the struggle for the meaning of life (for example Ecclesiastes), living a good life (for example Proverbs), sexuality (for example Song of Songs), death and the question of evil (for example Job). These are questions that every human being faces, once the basic requirements of food and shelter have been met to some degree.

The fact of existing at all gives rise to at least two responses: wonder and despair. The despair is found most easily in the book of Ecclesiastes, one of the most philosophical books in the Bible. Within it, Ecclesiastes is portrayed as a king who has looked at the meaning of life and tried to satisfy his quest for meaning and satisfaction in a variety of ways - power, money, success, love. He is sharply aware of the contingency of existence and suspects that this brute fact of existence has actually no meaning at all. His awareness of the hunger, the restlessness of the human heart, tells us something that is true of us all. Neither is Ecclesiastes an unfeeling intellectual, as may be seen from the sympathy and pathos which mark his description of the decline of old age (Ecclesiastes 12:1-8). Though he sees no solution, Ecclesiastes suffers the human predicament.

Elsewhere, the wisdom literature treats this hunger for something more from a completely different standpoint. The book of Wisdom takes up this wonder at our existence in words that speak to everyone and the attitude is very different from that of Ecclesiastes. The writer seeks wisdom, that gift from God that can guide us through

life and lead us to him (Wisdom 7-9). The fact of being thrown into existence is a matter for wonder-filled engagement and part of a search for elusive wisdom, as memorably described in Job 28:1-27.

The death of each of us places an unavoidable question mark over all our achievements as we already indicated above in Ecclesiastes. Not only death, but also the experience of evil and unaccountable suffering belongs to the puzzle of life which affects every human being (Job). On the positive side, the wonder of human love and human sexuality is a cause for celebration and delight, as we read in the Songs of Songs.

Such texts in our core tradition remind us of those things which every human being experiences. It is tempting to see the "outsider", the "immigrant", the person seeking asylum, the "refugee", the "traveller" only as a problem, someone (something?) to be dealt with administratively. Once we permit ourselves to see the human face of the stranger, then we realise that here is someone with parents, with children, with a history, with dreams - in a word, another human being. Then, of course, "administration" is no longer adequate. If we permit ourselves to see the person, someone like me, facing into the puzzle of life and death and love, then our common human experience must have its say.

The Story of Job

The book of Job is one of the astonishing achievements not only of biblical literature, but of world literature. As a prime example of a wisdom book, it is commonly recognised that we are dealing here with a spiritual exploration of the experience and meaning of suffering rather than with the biography of an individual. As noted above, the book explores in particular the question of innocent suffering, the age-old question of "why do bad things happen to good people". On a human level, the exploration is deep, at times even searing, but always truthful. It dares to bring the question before God with a directness that later generations might find disturbing.

As such the book invites an empathy across cultures and religions: this is what happens in people's lives often, unfortunately. As the great philosopher Søren Kierkegaard once said, the book of Job "keeps the wound of the negative open" - a striking phrase. Although Job is a biblical book and God's special name in the Bible, YHWH, is used of God from Job 38 onwards, in reality the book of Job is a book for all who reflect in any way on the question of suffering.

In our increasingly connected world, with immediate, graphic communication of news, it is often the disasters that arouse genuine concern across the globe. An emerging realisation that the human being in pain is my sister and brother is a mark of our time - in many ways a sign of genuine progress. Nevertheless, although compassion for the *distant* neighbour is truly genuine, perhaps it needs to be made more concrete and immediate by extending it to my nearby (or next-door) neighbours. The generous realisation that at a certain level, we all go through the same challenges and changes can unmask the strangeness of the stranger. In this way our eyes are opened and we see not a problem or an alien or an intrusion, but in reality another human being very like myself.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

(1) What has been my experience of our shared human experiences that alert us to the shared humanity of us all irrespective of colour, creed or nationality? In what concrete ways has this become obvious to me?

(2) How can we see others not simply as problems, but as people like ourselves facing the mystery of life, with all its challenges, material, relational, religious and philosophical - recognising the additional difficulties faced by people who are away from home and homeland.

(b) Creation Theology

We have described above two great movements in human reflection and religion: the prophetic discovery that the one God desires salvation for all and in the Wisdom writing the awareness that we share a common human question and challenge. These great movements in human reflection and religion make sense in light of the Bible's understanding of men and women created in the image and likeness of God.

The religious setting of the Bible was that of a world which believed in many different gods. These polytheistic religions had no difficulty in creating images of the gods because, although higher and more powerful, the gods as such were not essentially different from human beings. In contrast, the monotheistic religion of the Bible was utterly convinced of the unique character of its God, for whom no image could ever even approach being adequate. In stark contrast to the efforts of the surrounding cultures to create God in the image and likeness of humans, the biblical story of creation tells how God creates humans in God's own image and likeness. The Bible turns around the natural inclination to see God in our image and likeness.

There has of course been much discussion about what in us humans resembles God. The one authentic resemblance may be in our role vis-à-vis creation: humans are to act in the created world in the same way as God acted towards the created world, that is by being creative and caring. We know only too well today the damage we have done to creation and we are aware that we need to think beyond our life-time to the generations yet to be born. Be that as it may, the fundamental intuition here is that all humans bear the likeness of God and therefore a likeness to each other. All human beings, without distinction, are in the image and likeness of God. Although this is a late religious and theological understanding of human beings in the Bible, nevertheless it provides the religious rationale for the universalism evidenced in the prophetic writings and in the wisdom literature. Although this understanding of being in God's image and likeness comes in the first chapter of the Bible, in the order of writing it seems to be a late development, a kind of logical conclusion which serves to act paradoxically as the preface to what had been written earlier. This "being in God's image", an icon of God, is true of all humans beings, without distinction of culture or class, colour, creed or gender.

A document such as the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) speaks of the dignity of the human person. This dignity is the ground of certain rights, freedoms and duties. In itself, it is rooted in an understanding of the uniqueness of each person. The hope of the Universal Declaration is to find common ground to reach common standards of treatment and a way of living together on the planet so that we will all show deep respect for the individual dignity of each. In the Bible, this reflection

goes even deeper. The biblical view of the human person sees the deep reason underpinning this dignity not only in the uniqueness of each individual, but in God's very self. Because every single human being, without exception and without distinction, is made in God's image, the imperative to respect each man and woman on the planet is as strong as it could possibly be. Those who believe in God know that dealing with fellow human beings, especially the deprived and the destitute and those in danger, is not a matter only of politics or legislation or economics. It is also a matter of faith. The deep significance of each of us is grounded in the very being of God. This is true of me. It is true of the people I love. It is true of those I don't love. It is true of everyone.

The Story of Psalm 19:1-6

This Psalm expresses the belief of the wisdom literature that God expresses himself in the beauty of creation. The silent voice of God is powerfully eloquent for those with eyes to see. This word of God is not confined by place or time, but is there for all to see. Light and sunlight are especially beautiful - the sun rises, like a bridegroom coming form his tent, beaming no doubt! The poem enlarges the vision of the Israelites. God is God to all, present to all, at all time, everywhere. The great arc of God's oversight includes each of us. In the light of Christ, the good news is that we are loved by God. "For it is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." (2 Cor 4:6) The really good Good News, challenging us always, is that God loves everyone else just as much as God loves me!

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

(1) How have I experienced this sense of our being in God which all humans share?

(2) In what ways do we categorise immigrants, refugees and people who are simply different? Why do we do this?

(3) How can I meet other people in ways that recognise our resemblance to each other and that acknowledge that we have similar hopes and needs?

(4) The ecological crisis provokes a sense of sharing the planet together - what are the practical steps I can take in my own life so that the next generation will find the earth a safe home for all peoples?

PRAYER *(Job)*

God, whose heart is the first of all hearts to go out to us
in times of confusion and pain,
in the very sinews of your love
you are moved with compassion for all your people.

And so we pray:
In your great mercy,
free us from the temptation
to protect ourselves with excuses,
and lead us into solidarity
with those who journey in darkness,
knowing that even the darkness is not dark to you.

7: THE GOSPELS

The ministry of Jesus took place during a time of political occupation and religious revival. The occupying and tax-levying power was the Roman Empire. It sparked several revolts in the early Common Era. The religious revival, as is the nature of these things, took several forms. The Sadducees and Scribes took great interest in the building and completion of Herod's Temple. The Pharisees were engaged more with the people, bringing to them the teaching of Moses and their own traditions, touching especially the dietary and purity regulations. The Essenes and the people in Qumran had retired to the desert, there to live in perfect observance of the Law until God should intervene and provide a new Temple and a new, unpolluted, priesthood. In spite of their variety, all the various religious groups agreed in principle on several kinds of exclusion. At an obvious ethical level, public sinners such as prostitutes, and outcasts such as lepers, were to be kept at more than arm's length. At a political level, one did not have anything to do with Romans and their functionaries such as tax-collectors and military figures. In particular to eat with the non-Jews (Gentiles) was strongly forbidden and at Jesus' own trial in John's Gospel, his opponents will not even enter the residence of the Gentile Pontius Pilate (John 18:28).

This system of exclusion received its metaphorical and practical expression in the dietary laws, the *kosher* regulations. Because certain foods and the use of certain vessels were declared ritually unclean, socialising with outsiders was rendered impractical and virtually impossible. This had a metaphorical dimension. The regulation of *what* I allowed into my physical body became a means of controlling *whom* we allowed into our social body. And because these rules were concerned not just with food but with "purity", that is, being worthy to pray, they had a religious grounding which went well beyond the modern experience of the vegetarian or vegan, avoiding foods for a very different motive.

The Christian approach to foreigners shows both continuity and discontinuity with Jewish tradition. In the New Testament, as in the Hebrew Bible, the *religion* of foreigners is disparaged (sometimes in a nuanced way, as in Acts 17, the story of Paul on the Areopagus in Athens). But the new movement appropriated elements of the Jewish tradition in a radical way. This is true, for instance, of these texts from the book of Leviticus:

> "You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself: I am the Lord." (Lev 19:18)

> "The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God." (Lev 19:34)

On Jesus' lips, these words become the corner stone of Christian ethics.

> "He answered, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself." (Luke 10:27)

> "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous." (Matt 5:43-45)

Already in Paul, the earliest Christian writer, this synthesis is being offered:

> "Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law." (Rom 13:8)

> "Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law." (Rom 13:10)

> "For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself." (Gal 5:14)

In Christian practice, this meant an attitude of decided openness to "Gentiles" - accepting them as full members of the community, without pre-condition. This change of attitude did not happen without a great struggle, which is reflected in many texts in the New Testament. The fact that the early church *had* to struggle to arrive at this openness could mean one or both of two things. It could mean that the teaching of Jesus on the matter was not unmistakably clear. It could also mean that his challenging teaching met with ordinary human resistance. There seems to have been a three-stage process. The first of these is that Jesus limited his mission initially to the people of Israel. The second is Jesus' open table-fellowship - but the implications of this powerful gesture are not followed through until we come to the third stage, which is Jesus' encounter with the Syro-Phoenician woman. We glance briefly at each of these stages.

It seems clear that initially the mission of Jesus was to the people of Israel alone.

> "These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." (Matt 10:5-6) "He answered, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.'" (Matt 15:24)

It is to his own people that Jesus sends his first disciples.

Nevertheless, Jesus eats with everyone. It was shocking and offensive. He eats with a tax collector (Mark 2:15-17). He allows a prostitute to wash his feet with her tears (Luke 7:36-50). He heals the servant of a centurion (Matthew 8:5-13). Jesus explicitly rejects the common opinion that what enters the body makes people unclean (Mark 7:17-23). A woman with a flow of blood touches him (Luke 8:43-48) and is not condemned. All these actions had a powerful social consequence: the breakdown of the "caste" system of dividing people into clean and unclean. The implied theology was also disturbing: God accepts everyone without pre-condition.

The implications of this "hospitality of the kingdom" become explicit during that mysterious encounter with the Syro-Phoenician woman. At first, Jesus, contrary to our usual picture of him, is disinclined to be of help, as we read:

> "From there he set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice, but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syro-phoenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. He said to her, 'Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.' But she answered him, 'Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.' Then he said to her, 'For saying that, you may go - the demon has left your daughter.' So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone." (Mark 7:24-30)

The reply of the Syro-Phoenician woman is both tenacious and witty. Jesus changes his mind and the result of the encounter is a fundamental re-orientation of the mission, with immense consequences for the subsequent history of Christianity.

The story of the Syro-Phoenician woman took place in territory associated with Elijah - that prophet who was markedly, even offensively, open to foreigners. It is not accidental that in the gospel of Luke, Jesus makes explicit reference to Elijah, as he draws out the full implications of his opening sermon at Nazareth:

> "When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.' And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.'" (Luke 4:16-21)

"The year of the Lord's favour" meant that all the preaching of the Kingdom was under the banner of Jubilee - Jubilee now extended fully and as of right to Gentiles.

This shift in perspective gives rise then to several stories in the gospels in which Gentiles and non-Jews feature. The Samaritans are praised in the story of the Ten Lepers and in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 17:11-19; 10:29-37). The Samaritan Woman makes a remarkable journey of faith in her conversation with Jesus by the well (John 4). Jesus finds immense faith, greater than he found in Israel, in a centurion (Matthew 8:5-13). When Jesus dies, it is such a foreigner who acknowledges the identity of who it is that died (Mark 15:39). Many of the disputes in early Christianity were caused by the need to work out fully the consequences of Jesus' actions with regard to "outsiders".

The Story of the Weeds among the Wheat

This intriguing parable is found in Matthew 13:24-43. In fact there are several parables here: the weeds among the wheat, the mustard and the yeast a woman took. Some verses later in the text we get the interpretation of the parable of the weeds and the wheat. The parable and its explanation are unique to Matthew's Gospel and the suspicion that we are dealing with both texts and issues from the *time of writing* is confirmed by typically Matthean words used. It is likely that the opening parable and its interpretation are meant to deal with issues which arose *after* the resurrection and perhaps even after the first missionary thrusts of Christianity. Together they address a "church" question: what do we do with people who are "in" but not "of"? How do we deal with people who are half-hearted or lukewarm in the community? The broad response is tolerant: leave them alone and at the time of harvest all will be revealed!

At the same time, the parable and its allegorical reading function as frames around the series of mini-parables, taken from the common tradition or from the sources used by Matthew and Luke. Both of the mini-parables "comment" on the parable of the weeds. The mustard seed represents astonishing *growth*, that is, there is always hope, things can change. The broad "hospitality" of the mustard tree might itself be a little allegory for the Matthean community to be more welcoming! Secondly, in the parable of the woman cooking, the leaven has a kind of *inevitability* - the bread will rise almost no matter what. The leaven will cause "rising" of its own accord. Matthew thus relativizes the intolerance of insiders. They are to rise above their judgements of others!

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

(1) Who are the untouchables of today, the people we never ever meet socially or otherwise? Are they always foreigners?

(2) By what systems of exclusion do we keep such "others" at a distance... in our country, our neighbourhood, our street, our parish, our family?

(3) If exclusion on any basis is impossible in the light of Jesus' own preaching and practice, what are the consequences for my living of Christian values?

(4) It is not uncommon for people to leave prejudices unexamined until they actually meet someone personally, one-to-one. How have I been obliged to re-think my attitudes as a result of meeting someone from a different culture, religion or ethnic background?

(5) Read the poem *The Kingdom* at the end of the study guide. How does it challenge me and my community in relation to the kingdom of God?

PRAYER *(Matthew 13)*

God of our Lord Jesus Christ,
around whose messy open table the church took shape,
the seeds of your love have been scattered with abandon
across the growing places of our lives.

And so we pray:
Teach us to wait for the harvest
with the same careless generosity
you have shown in planting,
that our fields may be ripe and full at your coming.

8: OTHER NEW TESTAMENT WRITINGS

Towards the end of his mission, Paul placed a very high value on hospitality to strangers. He locates it between the sharing of the community and blessing of those who persecute us.

> "Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them." (Rom 12:13-14)

Such unreserved openness was not to be presumed at the start of the Christian movement. The practical form of the question was the relationship between Jew and Gentile, which exercises a great deal of the remaining documents of the New Testament. The real challenger here is Paul. His readiness to drop circumcision and religious dietary rules in the light of Christ was understandably popular among Gentiles but was to prove deeply disturbing to Jews who were Christians as well. We see this issue in his letter to the Galatians and in 1 Corinthians. It is likewise reflected in story form in the Acts of the Apostles (10:1-43). Here we read the liberating words:

> "Then Peter began to speak to them: 'I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.'" (Acts 10:34-35)

Behind this story lies an insight into God and God's dealings with human persons. This is an insight found across the New Testament, namely, that what God did in Jesus' life and ministry, in his death and resurrection, was intended for everyone, emphatically without ethnic distinction. The fact that from that moment everyone, without distinction, was a candidate for the kingdom implied a new ethical attitude towards those who had been ethnic "outsiders". Alas, it also brought with it a break with Judaism, which is deeply felt in the New Testament. Its most pained expression is in Romans 9-11.

The most optimistic expression of the new welcome to Gentiles is in Ephesians (2:13-22) that speaks of "one new humanity":

> "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus

> putting to death that hostility through it. So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God." (Eph 2:13-22)

Its most eschatological expression is found in Revelation 21.

> "And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them.'" (Rev 21:3)

Two texts from the later parts of the New Testament testify to this new acceptance:

> "Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the friends, even though they are strangers to you; they have testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on in a manner worthy of God; for they began their journey for the sake of Christ, accepting no support from non-believers. Therefore we ought to support such people, so that we may become co-workers with the truth." (3 John 1:5-8)

The open table-fellowship of Jesus is carried on in the Christian community as we read:

> "Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured." (Heb 13:1-3)

In this final commendation in the letter to the Hebrews, the reference is to Abraham at the oak of Mamre (Genesis 18:1-15). The story concerns one of the ten tests of Abraham, a tradition that had become popular in first-century Judaism. As the narrative of Genesis unfolds, it becomes clear that Abraham is receiving God as guest. Hospitality is no mere human transaction - I was a stranger, and you welcomed me. In the passage from Hebrews, several strands of biblical reflection come together: the universal promise to the patriarchs, the command to love the resident alien, Jesus' unreserved hospitality, the removal of ethnic boundaries in the Kingdom, the vision of humanity no longer at odds with itself.

Finally, it is necessary to mention an unusual feature of the Greek language in the New Testament, which is not without its potential for meaning. The English word *xenophobia* (fear of foreigners) comes from *phobia*, meaning fear, and *xenos* meaning a foreigner or a guest. The two meanings of *xenos* seem contradictory. The move from foreigner to guest implies a journey. This is first of all a journey in society's attitudes to foreigners—later Greek society did not automatically think of the stranger as enemy but as guest. This change of attitude constitutes an invitation to replace hostility with hospitality. It means looking beyond the strangeness of the other and instead seeing him/her as a brother or a sister. After all, we are all, in one sense, guests . . . *and foreigners.*

> "In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!" (Col 3:11)

Belonging to the new Israel, being a Christian, a follower of Jesus, depends not on ethnic origin, but rather on living justly, with generosity and compassion.

The Story of Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch

The magical story of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8 takes up some themes of the Emmaus story from Luke 24, but in a more outward-looking way. The characters in the story are somewhat exotic. Philip is rarely mentioned in the New Testament (really only in John and Luke-Acts). The Candace, queen of fabled Ethiopia, is also glamorous, even if unnamed and otherwise unknown. Frequently, eunuchs (a condition abhorrent in particular to Jews) were used as officials in ancient monarchies, often in charge of the treasury. The story follows on a ministry among the Samaritans (Act 8:25) and in a way parallels that mission, but in an outreach well beyond the confines of the Holy Land. Bearing in mind the literary form of a "chance encounter", magically expressed, it tells the story of a foreigner, seeking God by searching the Scriptures. This good man needs a word of interpretation to make the meaning of the Bible clear to him. It turns out that the lens of Christian teaching clarifies the inner meaning of the prophetic text: in the light of Christ, we get to know not only our true desires but are set on the way to satisfying that deeper hunger. The story is a remarkable instance of the general effect of Pentecost as noticed by the list of peoples: "Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs" (Acts 2:9-11).

Just as in the Emmaus story, a traveller is accosted by an unknown figure, who is able to plumb the depths of God's word. It shows great courage in the writer of Luke-Acts to take the outreach of the Christian proclamation far beyond the hallowed settings to new contexts, using quite exotic figures, illustrating once more the inclusiveness of Luke-Acts, reflecting closely the teaching and practice of Jesus himself. From a biblical point of view, the story serves to illustrate a quite liberating, even bracing, text from Isaiah, which reads "Do not let the foreigner joined to the Lord say, 'The Lord will surely separate me from his people'; and do not let the eunuch say, 'I am just a dry tree.' For thus says the Lord: To the eunuchs who keep my sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, I will give, in my house and within my walls, a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off." (Isaiah 56:3-5)

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

(1) The first two generations of Christians struggled with the questions of inclusion. How do we experience this today in our country and in our church community?

(2) What practical steps can we take in our neighbourhood and church community towards a greater acceptance of others?

(3) The vision of one humanity united in God lies at the heart of the New Testament. How can that vision guide us in society and in the Church today?

(4) Are there examples of institutionalised exclusion in Ireland today?

(5) How can we as individuals and as parishes/communities encourage more inclusive structures and attitudes in the places where we live and work?

PRAYER *(Acts 8)*

God, who has so arranged the world
that our deepest insights often come
from those most unlike us,
in the lives of others we are given lenses
through which to see our own lives more clearly.

And so we pray:
Gather us around your Word
as you gather us around your table,
so that as our lives are broken open before us,
so around your table may another place be set.

CONCLUSION: PENTECOST

As a dramatic tableau, the scene of Pentecost in Acts (2:1-13) expresses very richly this insight of the New Testament into the worldwide nature of the Christian proclamation. A list of nations, beginning with "devout Jews of every nation" continues

> "Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs - in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." (Acts 2:9-11)

It covers the known inhabited world (literally the *oikoumene*, hence ecumenical). The remarkable thing is not that such a variety of nations should be gathered at Jerusalem, but rather that the many-tongued mutual incomprehension is somehow overcome. (Acts 2:6-8)

> "And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, 'Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?'" (Acts 2:6-8)

The scene has a literary and theological motif stemming from the book of Genesis. The division of languages imposed after the arrogant fiasco of the Tower of Babel is here undone. But it is not merely a question of overcoming languages. Rather, they all understand because something which every human needs to hear has been communicated by the Spirit: that God shows no partiality and has no favourites. We still experience diversity - but it is no longer destructive. All who have heard the gospel have heard something which reaches so deeply into the human heart, in such a way that culture and language, ethnic and racial backgrounds are no obstacle. This surely has consequences for the way in which the believer looks on the stranger - there are no strangers, only brothers and sisters who have yet to meet and get to know each other.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

(1) What in the life of Jesus and in Christianity helps us to see that all are equal before God?

(2) The experience of being together overcomes difference of race, language and culture. When have you experienced that kind of gathering? What was it that helped you and the other people to bond?

(3) How can I/we make that vision and hope a reality in our own sphere of influence?

PRAYER *(Acts 2)*

God, whose Spirit is known
in the bringing together of those
who were once kept apart,
you have announced good news
in the very human accents
which have become most dear to us.

And so we pray:
Come, Holy Spirit,
and celebrate in us that love of God in Jesus Christ
which need never be measured and will never run short,
and for whose cadences you have given us,
without distinction, the ears to hear.

THE KINGDOM

It's a long way off but inside it
There are quite different things going on:
Festivals at which the poor man
Is king and the consumptive is
Healed; mirrors in which the blind look
At themselves and love looks at them
Back; and industry is for mending
The bent bones and the minds fractured
By life. It's a long way off, but to get
There takes no time and admission
Is free, if you will purge yourself
Of desire, and present yourself with
Your need only and the simple offering
Of your faith, green as a leaf.

R.S. Thomas[1]

[1] R.S. Thomas, *Collected Poems 1945-1990*, London: J.M. Dent, 1993; p233.
Used with the kind permission of the publishers.

INDEX OF BIBLICAL CITATIONS

Hebrew Bible / Old Testament /Septuagint (including the books from the wider canons). Page references are in brackets.

Isaiah 1-39 (p.18)
Isaiah 2:2-4 (p.22)
Isaiah 2:2ff (p.22)
Isaiah 19:22-25 (p.23)
Isaiah 25:6ff (p.22)
Isaiah 41:21 (p.19)
Isaiah 42:5ff (p.24)
Isaiah 42:6 (p.19)
Isaiah 42:8 (p.19)
Isaiah 42:9 (p.24)
Isaiah 43:11 (p.19)
Isaiah 43:8-13 (p.19)
Isaiah 44:6 (p.19)
Isaiah 44:6-8 (p.19)
Isaiah 45:16, 20 (p.19)
Isaiah 45:5 (p.19)
Isaiah 46:5-7 (p.19)
Isaiah 49:6 (p.23)
Isaiah 55:3-5 (p.23)
Isaiah 55:8-9 (p.25)
Isaiah 56:3-5 (p.45)
Isaiah 60:3 (p.24)
Isaiah 66:19 (p.24, p.24-25)

Jeremiah
Jeremiah 10:1-5 (p.19)
Jeremiah 10:5 (p.19)
Jeremiah 10:6 (p.19)
Jeremiah 44:1 (p.23)
Jeremiah 51:15 (p.19)
Jeremiah 51:15-19 (p.19)

Baruch
Baruch 6 (p.19)

Daniel
Daniel 2:46-47 (p.16)
Daniel 3:28 (p.16)
Daniel 4:34-37 (p.16)
Daniel 6:25-27 (p.16)

Jonah
Jonah 4:2 (p.25)
Jonah 4:11 (p.25)

Zechariah
Zechariah 14 (p.24)

New Testament

Matthew
Matthew 1:1-17 (p.28)
Matthew 5:43-45 (p.37)
Matthew 8:5-13 (p.38, p.39)
Matthew 10:5-6 (p.38)
Matthew 13:24-43 (p.39)
Matthew 15:24 (p.38)
Matthew 26:73 (p.7)
Matthew 28:19 (p.28)

Mark
Mark 2:15-17 (p.38)
Mark 7:17-23 (p.38)
Mark 7:24-30 (p.16, p.38)
Mark 15:39 (p.39)

Luke
Luke 4:16-21 (p.39)
Luke 7:36-50 (p.38)
Luke 8:43-48 (p.38)
Luke 10:27 (p.37)
Luke 10:29-37 (p.39)
Luke 17:11-19 (p.39)
Luke 24 (p.44)

John
John 4 (p.39)
John 18:28 (p.36)

Acts
Acts 2:1-13 (p.47)
Acts 2:6-8 (p.47 x2)
Acts 2:9-11 (p.44, p.47)
Acts 8 (p.44)
Acts 8:25 (p.44)
Acts 10:1-43 (p.42)
Acts 10:34-35 (p.42)
Acts 17 (p.36)

Romans
Romans 9-11 (p.42)
Romans 12:13-14 (p.42)
Romans 13:10 (p.37)
Romans 13:8 (p.37)

2 Corinthians
2 Corinthians 4:6 (p.34)

Galatians
Galatians 5:14 (p.37)

Colossians
Colossians 3:11 (p.44)

Ephesians
Ephesians 2:13-22 (p.42, p.43)

Hebrews
Hebrews 13:1-3 (p.43)

3 John
3 John 1:5-8 (p.43)

Revelation
Revelation 21 (p.43)
Revelation 21:3 (p.43)

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Part One: Guidance for Groups

We would strongly suggest that all members of any study group be provided with a printed copy of the booklet; these are available at a very reasonable cost. The material is also on the web. Our intended audience includes church study groups (as part of ongoing group study or for a special occasion, such as Lent), school classes, individual study, as well as for use in sermons, homilies and talks.

You can use this study guide in a variety of ways. Ideally speaking, each section would require a session in itself. This could be arranged in various ways. What follows are some suggestions.

One Unit per Session

Those present begin with a moment of quiet, opening themselves up to the word of God in Scripture. If the participants have been asked to read the study part at home, then it would be possible to begin with immediate reactions, questions and observations. It would be very important to bring the experience of those present to bear on the reflections. The exercises are designed to promote this.

The suggestions below for dramatisation could be used at this point.

The suggested pointers for reflection are only suggestions, and it may be better to follow the interest and intuition of the participants. Towards the close of the session, it might be good to have a reading from the Bible, followed by prayer. The participants could consider how they could bring their time together back to the larger community of believers. A typical session could be like this:

Prayer	5 minutes
Discussion	40 minutes
Practice	10 minutes
Prayer	5 minutes

If you are using dramatisation or the other exercises below, you need to take account the time required for this. Suggested timings are given in the dramatisation and exercise sections but are variable depending on circumstances. At atmosphere of ease and flexibility will be an advantage. If an important and lively discussion develops, it should be allowed "to flow".

We strongly recommend that the overall programme would include time to plan "feed back" to the local church or school. Such reporting back should *definitely* include dramatisation, music or another exercise - the impact will be far higher than simply a verbal report. A priest, minister or school principal may be delighted by the offer of ready-made input.

When the Time is Short

If the time is short, then perhaps it might be good to take just a selection of the sessions. Alternatively, if the group is large, it might be possible to cover two topics per session, by dividing up the work and asking half the group to work on one topic and the other half on another. In this case, bringing the topics together will call for some care and preparation on the part of the facilitator. Again, it would be very important to end with time in prayer, as described in (i) above.

Use by an Individual

Of course, the guide could also be used by an individual. It would naturally be up to each person to see how best to profit from the material offered here. The importance of beginning and ending in prayer should be borne in mind.

Part Two: The Use of Dramatisation

Competent literacy is assumed in many of these dramatisations and exercises; if you think there may be anyone in the group with literacy problems, or problems with English, then you may need to offer assistance unobtrusively or not use a particular exercise.

Getting dramatic about the Bible Passages - Explorations using Drama

Introduction

Bringing the biblical stories and passages in this publication to life can be done very effectively by dramatising them. Drama serves to imprint a story more strongly in people's memories. Dramatisation can take place either within the group as part of the group's regular meetings or as part of a report or feedback by the group to their church or a larger audience.

The first thing to say about drama is that many people are afraid of "acting". It is pointless and even counterproductive to try to push people into doing something like this where they may have difficulties. But they can still be encouraged to be involved, for example, by taking smaller roles or through making suggestions or helping in other ways. Only take volunteers, and, if needed, women can take men's roles or vice versa. It can also be emphasised that it is not an acting competition - it is about helping people to learn from the Bible stories or passages and, for example, reading from a script is fine.

Dramatisation also takes time to prepare. If it is being done in the group itself, the leader can look for volunteers at the previous meeting to enact the passage for the next time. People should read the piece in this guide on the relevant passage beforehand, and the biblical passage itself. Those involved can then meet in their own time to prepare, even if it is only for a short period immediately before the next meeting (this is obviously easiest if people would otherwise have to come together specially). Someone needs to take responsibility for preparing a script beforehand - this should not necessarily be the leader.

If doing mime (that is, portraying characters and acting out situations or stories by gestures and body movement without the use of words), you can have "free mime" (those involved make the actions they feel appropriate), or everyone follows the actions of a leader or an agreed set of actions (the second and third options are usually preferable).

In fact a lot of preparation is not required but it does require the following:

a) as necessary, someone to prepare the script from the Bible passage (for example, creating dialogue from indirect quotations) and make as many copies as are needed.
b) identifying and inviting people to take on the particular roles.
c) someone to introduce the drama by setting the scene at the start and reading the appropriate parts of the Bible passage and possibly part of the commentary at the beginning.
d) where necessary, someone to source props (which can be very simple and symbolic) but very few are needed.
e) one or two practice runs before presenting the drama to the group (the "Suggested rehearsal time" given below is only for this part of the process). If using drama to report back to the church or larger group, a practice run in front of the study group is advisable beforehand.

While it should not necessarily be your role as group leader to direct the dramatisation, the task may fall to you. The availability of someone with dramatic experience, even just for consultation, could be important for groups without experience of making

dramatic presentations - feel free to ask for such help if you want it. But you should also emphasise that the point is to learn from and enjoy the stories or passages. Making mistakes or not quite getting it "right" is fine and can at times be amusing and add to the experience.

Another dramatic device, time permitting, is to explore alternative endings to a story. How would the story have worked out if someone did something differently? This can be explored dramatically, or in discussion afterwards. It can be a useful way to explore some of the issues, but it does require additional time. It can be useful for the leader/facilitator to have this question in hand to use if discussion fails to take off.

Do not feel because you do one passage in this way that you have to dramatise them all... Some are obviously more straightforward for enactment than others, so you can be guided by the extent to which group members want to be involved. If you just want to dramatise the occasional piece, or indeed none, that is fine.

Some suggestions for dramatising the different stories and passages now follow. Feel free to think up innovative ways of exploring these or other biblical passages. Trust your own imagination - what is offered here are only some suggestions. The suggestions include fairly straight enactment, mime, use of music, and in one case what amounts to a game, but there are other possibilities. There is much more to dramatisation of the Bible than meets the eye.

It is important that time should be left after the dramatisation is finished to get reactions from both participants and audience, asking such questions as: How did you feel? What thoughts does this trigger? Much of the learning can come through the different insights shared at this stage.

Possible Ways of Dramatising the Passages

1) The Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9)

When the earlier part of the story is read, those involved can mime the actions of builders working cooperatively on the tower, showing participation, interaction and camaraderie. When their language gets confused, people cannot communicate, they get frustrated, angry, and down tools. They then spread out "all over the place" in the room representing dispersal.

- Props: none needed, the "tower" may be more powerful symbolically if invisible, and tools likewise can be imaginary but defined by the relevant action of the workers.
- Suggested rehearsal time: 10+ minutes.

2) The Story of the Shibboleth

There is battle, blood and guts in this story (Judges 12:1-6) which cannot be realistically represented, so what is done needs to be quite symbolic. The Bible passage can be read with the dialogue enacted in two parts. The first is the men of Ephraim talking to Jephthah, and his reply. The second is the challenge to the Ephraimites as they ask to cross over the Jordan, and their inability to pronounce the "h" in "shibboleth".

- Props: You can use rolled up newspapers as swords if you want. The river can be represented by some coats or other material.
- Suggested rehearsal time: 20 minutes.

3) Esau and Jacob

There are several well-known stories in Genesis 25-33, including Jacob's deceiving of Isaac in order to receive his blessing, "Jacob's ladder", and the reconciliation of Jacob and Esau (Gen 33:1-17). While you can refer to some of these in any introduction, the most relevant for dramatisation in this context is the last, concentrating on the two roles of Jacob and Esau.

- Props: None required. Those not playing one of the two main roles can portray those accompanying Jacob, including sound effects for animals and children.
- Suggested rehearsal time: 20 minutes.

4) Naaman the Syrian

This story (2 Kings 5:1-19) can be presented straightforwardly but to cut down on the various roles you can start with verse 6 and present it with four roles: Naaman, the king of Israel, Elisha, and Naaman's servant.

- Props: a "letter" for presentation to the king of Israel. The river Jordan can be represented by some material or coats (though showing Naaman getting down to immerse himself once is enough).
- Suggested rehearsal time: 20 minutes.

5) Psalm 67

If you have a musician he or she can play an appropriate piece of instrumental music before or during the reading of the psalm or you can use recorded music. If you want to mime, you can concentrate on portraying praise, singing, the yield of the earth, and finally, God's blessing.

- Props: whatever is required to play music, live or recorded.
- Suggested rehearsal time: 10 minutes.

6) Jonah

Although the book of Jonah is very short, the story needs to be truncated for dramatic presentation. You can start, briefly, with Jonah fleeing and going on board a boat, a couple of sailors swaying with Jonah in the storm, and Jonah being thrown overboard for bringing the storm.

The "big fish" that Jonah ends up in can be portrayed by an upright table (Jonah being underneath), before he is "spewed out" again on dry land.

The Ninevah story needs just two roles, Jonah and the king, as well as the narrator. You can omit some of the story of the bush towards the end though you need to include verses 2 and 3 of chapter 4; the narrator can just paraphrase the part about the bush before going to verse 9, Jonah's response, and then finishing with God's comments in verses 10 - 11.

- Props: a large table can double as boat and fish - upturned as the boat, right way up as the fish. If you did decide to portray the "booth" in 4:5 the table can be pressed into service again! And if you want to portray the bush in 4:6 it can be represented by someone holding a coat.
- Suggested rehearsal time: 30 minutes.

7) Ruth

This is one of the most moving books in the Bible. Perhaps the essential part to dramatise is Ruth 1:15-18 but the situation in 1:1-14 needs at least to be paraphrased as an introduction, or you can start the dramatisation from verse 8 (in which case you need someone to play Orpah as well as Ruth and Naomi). The story of the relationship between Ruth and Boaz is rather longer (chapters 2 - 4) and if you want to portray this then it needs to be paraphrased significantly, with these two and Naomi being the main roles.

- Props: none required for chapter 1.
- Suggested rehearsal time: 15 minutes if going to verse 1:18; significantly longer if doing the story of Ruth and Boaz.

8) The Story of Jesus' Genealogy

The point about Jesus having "foreign", non-Hebrew, ancestry is covered in the text and you may not want to give it further enactment. If you do, you can get all participants in a circle and read Matthew 1: 1 - 17.

When each descendent of Abraham is mentioned, the next person puts their hand on the shoulder of the person to the side for a moment. The names will rotate around the circle more than once; when it ends, those who have been "named" in the reading (by a hand being placed on them as the name is read) as from a non-Hebrew background - Ruth, Tamar, Rahab, Bathsheba - are to step into the circle and say who they are . You need to explain this beforehand.

- Props: none required apart from paper and markers to write the names.
- No preparation time is necessary for this except perhaps to write the four names above on a flip chart so people "know" if they are named.

9) Job

Job's suffering is extreme so, if enacting part of the story, you can dramatize the misery. The scene is set in the first two chapters. You can paraphrase chapter 1:1-12, and present 1:13-22 dramatically; you need one "Job" and four messengers. You can "cut" it there or continue with chapter 2, reading or paraphrasing verses 1-6 and presenting 7-10 ("Satan" does not need to appear).

For the beauty and agony of the following chapters you could read a few quotations before, if desired, finishing with 42:7-17.

- Props: Job and his family (1:13) can be portrayed sitting at a table or on the floor. Verse 20 can be portrayed symbolically or Job really can tear an item of clothing. If presenting 2:7-10 you can use a broken piece of a flower pot as the potsherd - Job can pretend to have sores and be in agony. Chapter 42:10 and following can be portrayed simply by joyful people joining Job and by sound effects for animals and children, and children playing.
- Suggested rehearsal time: 30 minutes.

10) Psalm 19

You can mime this or enact a prepared story triggered by the reading.

- Props: possibly live or recorded music in the background.
- For mime, suggested rehearsal time: 10 minutes.

11) The Weeds among the Wheat

There are three parables in Matthew 13:24-43 with the first being most amenable to dramatic enactment. The weeds among the wheat can be done in mime, with the weeds wearing one dramatic colour and the wheat another, equally dramatic, colour

(for instance, black and bright red respectively); with actors close together and mixed up, each will gradually rise from a crouching or lying position to stand and then wave hands in the air. A "reaper" can separate the two.

- Props: appropriately coloured clothes.
- Suggested rehearsal time: 10 - 15 minutes.

12) Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch

Acts 8:26-38 (or 40) can be enacted with just two roles, that of Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch (whose name we do not know).

- Props: an upturned table can be the Ethiopian eunuch's chariot with a chair as his seat on it or behind. A rolled piece of paper can be the words of the prophet Isaiah. The water he is baptized in can be left invisible or represented symbolically.
- Suggested rehearsal time: 15 minutes.

Part Three: Exercises to Help Explore the Themes

Below are some suggestions for exercises to go with each of the chapters to further extend the exploration. While exercises have been linked with particular chapters ("suitable to go with"), the match is not always exact and you can feel free to "mix and match". The outcomes of some of the exercises are similar.

The appropriateness of using these exercises depends on the nature of the group; some may really enjoy and benefit from the exercises, and feel that they complement the rest of the session, while other groups may prefer to stay with discussion, or you can use some exercises and not others. We have deliberately included a range of exercises, which allows for variety and the needs of different groups.

As leader or facilitator it is your responsibility to understand the nature of the group sufficiently to do what is appropriate and, if necessary, you can ask them whether they would like to do a particular exercise. Allow anyone who does not want to be directly involved to "sit out", observe and feed back to the group on what happened; stating that you will be doing this may help to persuade some waverers to proceed. You can also see, preferably beforehand, if there is someone else in the group who can give you a hand if you could use help.

You will need a sense of where to use an exercise in a session. While the exercises can perhaps best be used as an icebreaker and opening exercise at the start, they can also be used as a break from normal discussion in the middle, after there has been some study

of the Bible passage(s) concerned and thus exploration of the topic for that session. Suggested timings are very much estimates, given that an exercise which energises and stimulates one group may seem routine to another. The extent to which people will need to talk about the exercise can vary greatly. Having a watch or clock handy to consult is necessary, or you can ask a participant to be a timekeeper, requesting them to let you know when so many minutes have elapsed; this does not mean that you immediately end an exercise or part of an exercise but so that you can carefully "budget" your time to the maximum effect, allowing time for other parts of the programme.

a) Songs of Emigration

The experience of emigration has a large place in Irish culture and history (including Ulster-Scots emigration to North America). This exercise aims to connect that experience with people coming to Ireland today.

1. At the session before, invite people to bring in a CD the next time which has a song about emigration (or, if they can sing, a song that they will perform); if doing this for the first session, suggest it clearly in the invitation. Encourage them to think of modern songs as well as traditional ones (modern examples include "Irish post" and "N17" by the Saw Doctors). You need to have at least a couple of songs on reserve to add to the list or if people do not bring ones in.
2. Bring in your CD player and play three to five songs, and/or allow live singers to perform; this can be done in part or entirely while people are gathering for the session. Where the lyrics may not be understandable on a first hearing, you can write out or read some of the key parts and encourage others to do the same (before the song is played).
3. Then brainstorm two lists, one after the other, placing them side by side on a flip chart; a) the feelings of emigrants, and b) the feelings of those left behind.
4. Invite reflection on similarities or differences for migrants to Ireland today, perhaps ticking "feelings" on the chart that would be identical.

- Requirements: CD player, appropriate songs, some large sheets and markers to write words and for the brainstorming.
- Suggested time: 10 – 15 minutes to play the songs, 10 minutes for brainstorming (5 minutes each), and a further 15 minutes reflection, or 35 minutes total. You can play songs that there may not have been time for during a break, at the end, or during another session.
- Suitable to go with: the Introduction or Chapters 1 or 8.

b) Map - People in and out

This is a straightforward mapping exercise - literally.

1. Put a copy of a world map on to a flip chart or the wall so people can see it (make a rough outline copy of a large map if you wish).
2. Mark on it - by using different coloured markers or large stickers - where people have come from to your locality, and where people have gone to live and work abroad, now or in the past. If one or two people have come or gone from or to a particular country they can still be included.
3. Briefly take any comments afterwards (globalised society, push and pull factors etc.)

- Requirements: large map, coloured stickers and/or markers.
- Suggested time: 20 minutes, more if discussion takes off.
- Suitable to go with: the Introduction or Chapter 1.

c) Breaking in to a Closed Circle

This is a symbolic exercise but it can also be a bit physical. So you may need to control it carefully for safety's sake and also warn people who are not fully able-bodied to participate by observing what happens rather than being in the circle; also tell people that if you cry "stop" all action must cease immediately. You will need at least ten or twelve people for the circle, plus volunteers for outside; fewer than ten can make the circle too small. Others can be observers.

1. Those in the circle stand as close as they can together, feet together, and arms around each other, facing inwards; in turn, a volunteer outside the circle is given the chance of getting in. The people in the circle should move to try to prevent those outside getting in. It is a non-verbal exercise so there is no talking.
2. Allow several people to try to get in (people can leave the circle temporarily to try to get in). If needed, and the first few participants try only physical ways of barging in, suggest that they use imaginative and creative approaches. Again, they should do it non-verbally.
3. Debrief when the exercise is finished by asking for reflections from those trying to get into the circle, those in the circle, and observers.
4. Then ask the question: Is this what it is like trying to be accepted in a local community if you're perceived as an outsider?

- Requirements: open space of about 5 m x 5 m without chairs or other objects to fall over. Leader/facilitator needs to carefully monitor the action so as able to immediately shout "stop" if there is the risk of anyone getting hurt.
- Suggested time: 30 minutes.
- Suitable to go with: Chapters 1 or 5.

d) Dots / Categories

The next two exercises are two different ways of exploring the same area and it only makes sense to do one of these. They are about the formation of groups and inclusion and exclusion.

Dots

Use a number of different coloured sticky-backed dots; with a group of fifteen you could use four each of three different colours (e.g. red, black, green) and one each of three colours (e.g. blue, white, yellow). Dots can be made on address labels with coloured markers.

1. Participants close their eyes and a randomly coloured dot is placed on their forehead (so they cannot see what colour "they are").
2. With eyes open again, people are asked to form groups. This part is complex because people cannot see what colour "they are" (they have not actually been told they have to form groups by the colour of their dot so they could do it any way they wished but most will go by colour) and are likely to "read" responses from other people. A few people may have a fruitless search for a group.
3. When it has gone on long enough, call a halt and get people to look at their "colour" and analyse what it was like finding or not finding a group to belong to.

- Requirements: Appropriate number of coloured sticky-backed dots, as above.
- Suggested time: 30 minutes.
- Suitable to go with: Chapters 2 or 3.

Categories

1. This is done the same way as the "Dots" exercise except people have placed on their foreheads, again with their eyes closed so they cannot see what they are, a category of person. You can use address labels and markers to write the categories.
2. With eyes open people are then asked to form groups. As well as general categories of people such as "church worker", "shop assistant", "lawyer", etc, you should have categories of ethnic minorities, e.g. "Traveller", "Assistant in Chinese takeaway", "Polish construction worker", "African asylum seeker" etc; obviously you need to have enough labels for participants.
3. Let the groups form, call a halt, and then get people to take off their labels to see "what they are", and analyse what happened.

- Requirements: sticky-backed labels with categories written on them.
- Suggested time: 30 - 40 minutes.
- Suitable to go with: Chapters 2 or 3.

e) Sharing Names

Our names, and how we feel about them, can say quite a bit about us, and sharing on them can increase the realisation of our diversity.

1. Going around in a circle - allowing people to "pass" if they feel uncomfortable doing this - get people to explain the origin of their given names and surnames (start with yourself as an example). What ethnicity and nationality or geographical origin is their surname, or their given names, associated with? "We" all come from somewhere else originally and this can add an extra dimension to people's understanding in the group.
2. When everyone has shared (check if anyone who has "passed" earlier wants to come in before the end), take brief reactions.

- Requirements: None except you as leader/facilitator need to have given thought to your "name" input to set a model for others sharing.
- Suggested time: 2 minutes per participant (the time limit should be stated before the start in case someone starts telling their family history, in which case it is easier to get them to finish up)
- Suitable to go with: Chapters 2 or 4.

f) Belonging

This exercise explores the fact we all belong to different groups and categories.

1. Make sure everyone has paper and something to write with and invite them to list groups or categories that they belong to, up to ten categories; this can include family, church, neighbourhood, voluntary, community, political, social, recreational, sporting, national, etc.
2. Then ask them to rank them in importance to them (1 as most important, 10 as least important). When this has been done, ask them to think about, and mark on their sheet, any tensions between their membership of different groups (it could just be time, or conflicting beliefs, etc.).
3. Then pair people off for five minutes, asking people to choose someone they do not know so well; as a speaking/listening exercise each speaks for a couple of minutes about points of interest arising for them and tensions involved. Give people notice after a couple of minutes that it is time to change over, and a warning again towards the end so pairs have time to "wrap it up".
4. Come back into the larger group and take any points arising.

- Requirements: Paper and pens/pencils, a watch to time the pairs exercise, a flipchart and markers if you want to use it to list tensions mentioned.

- Suggested time: 10 -15 minutes for the personal analysis, 7 minutes for pairs, and 15 - 20 minutes for group discussion; total around 40 minutes.
- Suitable to go with: Chapters 2 or 5.

g) Inclusion Sets

This explores the extent to which groups are integrated in the local community.

1. Draw a large circle on a chart to represent "the local community" (and write this in the circle).
2. Then brainstorm, writing on a separate sheet, a list of categories of "groups" locally - include sporting clubs, community associations and voluntary groups, as well as ethnic groups such as Travellers and ethnic groups which have migrated here recently.
3. After this, place a smaller "set" (circle) representing each category brainstormed on the "local community" chart. Get agreement on how far in to the larger "local community" circle each set should be placed; fully inside represents "fully integrated", partly inside indicates partly integrated.
4. When finished, analyse what are the factors that lead to integration (you can list them on a sheet), and if necessary explore the difference between integration and assimilation.

- Requirements: large sheets of paper and markers.
- Suggested time: 30-40 minutes.
- Suitable to go with: Chapters 5 or 8.

h) Stereotypes: First Thoughts

We may be anti-racist and against discrimination on grounds of identity but we all still have aspects of racist and other stereotypes in our heads; this exercise aims to get us to acknowledge this fact. It can be a powerful exercise in getting us to look at the conflict within us between our rational approach and our inherited ideas from our culture and upbringing.

1. Tell people that the list they make is for their own personal use only and they do not have to share anything from it if they do not want to. Make sure everyone has paper and something to write with.
2. Then call out, quickly, just allowing people time to scribble something down (and no "time to think"!), a list of categories of people and ask participants to write down the first thing that comes into their heads, without censoring it; it is helpful to give each category a number.

   The list can include: people with red hair; women drivers; men drivers; members of the Travelling community; gay people; US Americans; the English; social workers;

the Irish; Roma people; Russians; members of the GAA; soccer fans; Polish people; asylum seekers; politicians; Nigerians (add other categories as appropriate).

3. When the list is completed, ask people to share if there was anything that surprised them about what they put down - but emphasise that people should only share what they want to share and that they can talk in general terms if they want (so as not to embarrass them). People may open up about what they put down but it should be their choice to do so. Encourage them to hold on to their list for further personal reflection.

   Another version of this exercise (which appears in the appendix of the "Inter-Cultural Insights" booklet also produced by AICCMR) is where "first thoughts" are written down anonymously, put in a box, and then analysed in the group. If this is being done it makes sense for the group leader to read out answers (on one category at a time) because otherwise people may recognise one another's handwriting and it will cease to be anonymous.

- Requirements: the leader/facilitator needs to have decided on an appropriate list of categories of people. Participants need paper and pencils or pens.
- Suggested time: 30+ minutes.
- Suitable to go with: Chapter 6 or the Introduction.

i) Differences

This again is about division and difference, and how significantly these are seen, but it also emphasises that there are many different kinds of difference.

1. It is enacted by people dividing into two polarities across the room in relation to differences - the leader needs to state clearly which side is which (if people are less polarised on the issue at hand, or the question does not fit them, they can gravitate more towards the middle but it is more an "either/or" exercise than a barometer or single continuum).
2. You can come up with your own list, tweaking the list below to fit the group, but possibilities include; vegetarians and non-vegetarians (the leader would say "vegetarians this side of the room, non-vegetarians that side . . ."); snorers and non-snorers; cat lovers and cat haters; parents and people who are not parents; people who have lived abroad and those who have not; people brought up Catholic and people brought up Protestant; women and men; people born in Ireland/Northern Ireland and people born outside the island; people who like to sleep with the window open and people who like to sleep with the window closed; people who speak a second language fluently and people who do not.

3. Without labouring things too much, the leader can ask people at particular points during the exercise how it feels to be where they are, taking comments from different positions.
4. You can also ask how important these differences are, a question best asked at the end.

- Requirements: the leader/facilitator needs to have decided on their list of categories (some of these can be omitted if discussion during the exercise takes off).
- Suggested time: 30 minutes.
- Suitable to go with: Chapters 6 or 7.

Acknowledgement: A few of the exercises are adapted from, or included in, Mari Fitzduff's *Community Conflict Skills - A Handbook for Group Work* (out of print, but there are copies floating about, particularly in Northern Ireland).

RESOURCES

Included here is a short list of publications and, also, contact details for a number of organisations in the asylum/ refugee/ migrant field - neither list is exhaustive and such information changes frequently.

Publications

Murray, Bishop Dónal (Bishop of Limerick) *The Theological Basis of Human Rights*, Published by Irish Commission for Justice and Peace, 1998
Available: Refugee and Migrant Project, Columba Centre, Maynooth, Co Kildare)

Welcoming Angels - Report of the Archbishop's Working Group on Combating Racism, Church of Ireland Diocese of Dublin & Glendalough, 2005

Embracing Difference: Guidelines for Interfaith Events and Dialogue, Prepared by Committee for Christian Unity and the Bishops of the Church of Ireland, 2007.
Available: Church of Ireland House, Church Avenue, Rathmines, Dublin 6

Inter-cultural Insights - Christian reflections on racism, hospitality and identity from the island of Ireland, Published by the All-Ireland Churches' Consultative Meeting on Racism (AICCMR), 2008

For downloading:

www.irishchurches.org
www.edgehillcollege.org
www.embraceni.org

Hardcopies: Inter-Church Centre, 48, Elmwood Avenue, Belfast BT9 6AZ

Who's who? A flyer with core information on who is a person seeking asylum/ a refugee/ migrant., prepared by Refugee and Migrant Project, 2008
Available: hard or e-copy - Refugee & Migrant Project, Columba Centre, Maynooth, Co Kildare.
Email: refproject@iecon.ie

Colwell, Peter, *Above us and Between Us*, An introduction and resource on the letter *A Common Word Between Us and You* signed by 138 Muslim Scholars, 2008.
Available: Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI), 2, Paris Garden, London SE1.

Unity in Diversity In our Churches, A resource prepared by the Parish-based Integration Project (PIP) to assist local parishes and congregations with the integration of new residents into their faith communities and Irish society, 2008.

For downloading:
www.iccsi.ie

Hardcopy: Mr Adrian Cristea, PIP Co-ordinator, Bea House, Milltown Park, Dublin 4.
Email: adrian@iccsi.ie Tel 01 2690951

Directory of Migrant-Led Churches, Published by the All-Ireland Churches' Consultative Meeting on Racism (AICCMR) 2008.

For downloading:
www.irishchurches.org
www.iccsi.ie

Hardcopy: Inter-Church Centre, 48, Elmwood Avenue, Belfast BT9 6AZ

Migration Nation - Statement on Integration Strategy and Diversity Management, published by Office of the Minister for Integration, 2008
Available: OMI, Dept. of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, Dún Aimhirgin, 43-49 Mespil Road, Dublin 4.

Contact details of Church and Non-Governmental Organisations

REFUGEE AND MIGRANT PROJECT
Irish Bishops' Conference
Columba Centre
Maynooth
Co. Kildare
Tel: 01 5053157
Fax: 01 6016401
Email: refproject@iecon.ie
www. catholicbishops.ie/refugee and migrant project

EMBRACE NI
12-14 University Avenue
Belfast BT7 1GY
Tel: 07969921328
Email: info@embraceni.org
www.embraceni.org

VINCENTIAN REFUGEE CENTRE
St. Peter's Church,
Phibsboro,
Dublin 7,
Tel: +353 (1) 8102580
Fax: +353 (1) 8389950
Email: refugeecentrephibsboro@eircom.net

SPIRASI
213 North Circular Road,
Phibsboro,
Dublin 7.
Tel: 01 8389664
Fax: 01-8823547

RUHAMA
(Support for women in prostitution/trafficked persons)
Senior House
All Hallows College
Drumcondra
Dublin 9
Tel: 01 8360292
Outreach Workers: 086 3813782/086 8553853/ 086 8288539/086 381 3783
Email: admin@ruhama.ie or help@ruhama.ie www.ruhama.ie

ACT TO PREVENT TRAFFICKING (APT)
(Associated with Conference of Religious of Ireland (CORI) and Irish Missionary Union (IMU) - working against trafficking in people)
APT
c/o Conference for Religious
Bloomfield Ave
off Morehampton Road
Dublin 4
Tel: (APT - direct lines) 087 0639783/086 2524046/085 1344262

PARISH-BASED INTEGRATION PROJECT (PIP)
(under auspices of Inter-Church Committee on Social Issues {ICCSI})
Mr Adrian Cristea
PIP Co-ordinator
Bea House
Milltown Park
Dublin 4
Tel: 01 2690951
Email: adrian@iccsi
www.iccsi.ie

MIGRANT RIGHTS CENTRE IRELAND (MRCI)
55, Parnell Square West
Dublin 1
Tel: 01 889 7570
Fax: 01 889 7579
Email: info@mrci.ie
www. mrci.ie

CROSSCARE MIGRANT PROJECT
1, Cathedral Street
Dublin 1
Tel: +353 (0)1 873 2844
Fax: +353 (0)1 872 7003
Email: migrantproject@crosscare.ie
www.migrantproject.ie

INFORMATION AND SUPPORT UNIT
Mount Sion,
Barrack St,
Waterford
Tel: 051-852564 / 087-9128166
www.presentationbrothers.com/ourwork/immigrants.

COIS TINE
St Mary's
Pope's Quay
Cork
Tel: 021 4557760
Email: coistine@sma.ie
www.coistine.ie

JESUIT REFUGEE SERVICE
Head Office
Della Strada
Dooradoyle Road
Limerick
Tel: 061 480922
Tel: 061 480927

Dublin Office
Ground Floor 13,
Gardiner Place
Dublin 1
Tel 01 8148644

UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSION ON REFUGEES
Suite 4
Merrion House
1/3 Lr Fitzwilliam Street
Dublin 2
Tel: 01 6312510
Email: iredu@unhcr.ch
www.unhcr.ch

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL
48 Fleet St
Dublin 2
Tel: 01 677 6361

THE IRISH REFUGEE COUNCIL
Second Floor
Ballast House
Aston Quay
Dublin 2
Tel: 01 764 5854
Email: info@refugeecouncil.ie
www.irishrefugeecouncil.ie

REFUGEE INFORMATION SERVICE (RIS)
1ST & 2ND FLOORS,
18 Dame Street,
Dublin 2
Tel: 01 645 3070
Fax: 01 677 0061
Email: info@ris.ie

RIS GALWAY OFFICE
Citizens Information Centre (CIC),
Augustine House,
St Augustine Street,
Galway,
Tel: 091 532 850
Fax: 091 530 894
Email: infogalway@ris.ie

AFRICA CENTRE
9c Abbey Street Lower,
(Methodist Church Building)
Dublin 1,
Tel/Fax: +353-1-865 6951
Email: info@africacentre.ie

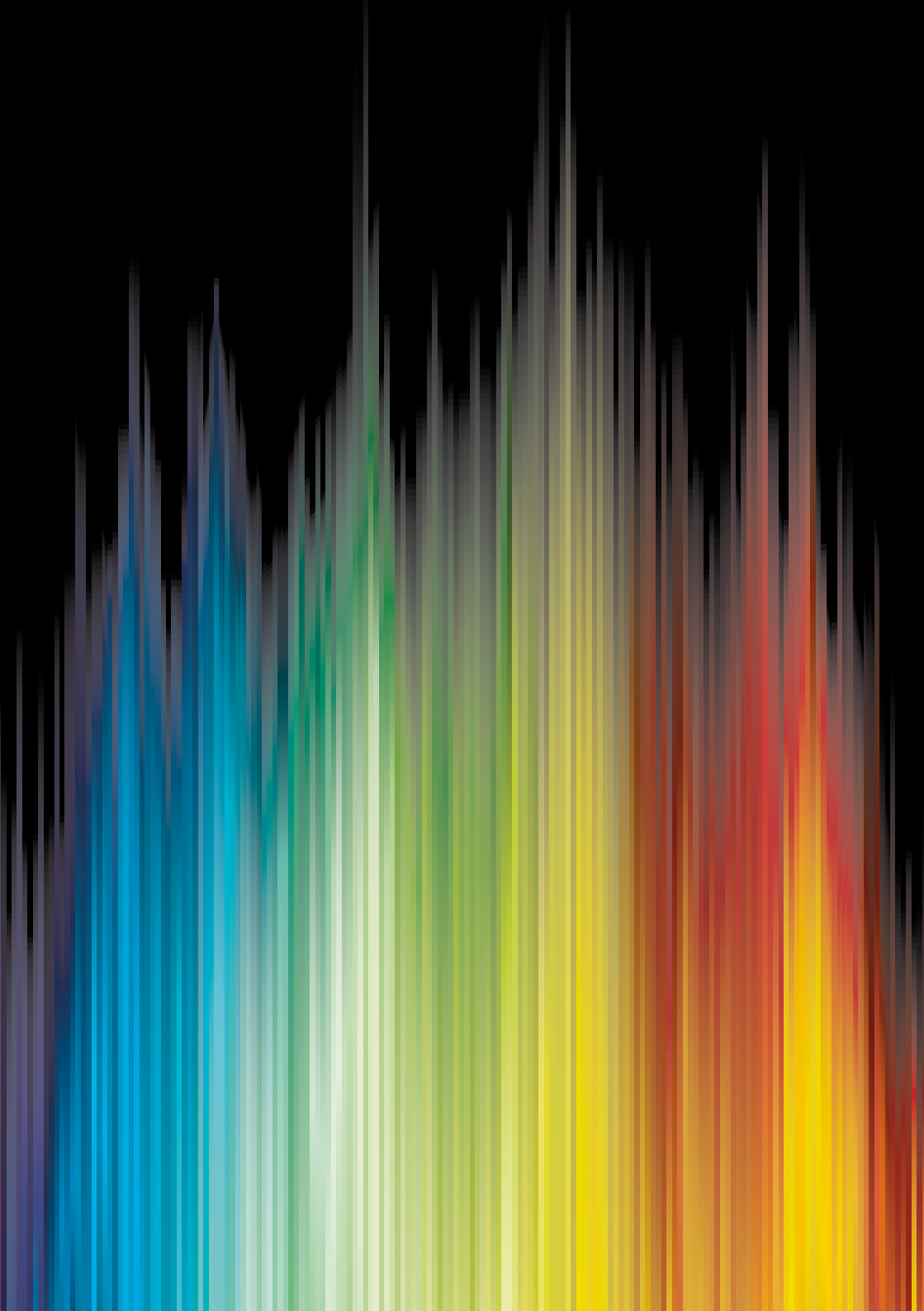
IMMIGRANT COUNCIL OF IRELAND (ICI)
2 St Andrew Street
Dublin 2
Tel: +353 1 674 0202
Email: admin@immigrantcouncil.ie

INTEGRATING IRELAND,
17 Lower Camden Street,
Dublin 2,
Tel: +353-(0)1-475-9473
Email: info@integratingireland.ie

Soli Deo Gloria

NOTES

NOTES



Published by the Irish Inter-Church Meeting
Produced by AICCMR

For copies of this booklet: (£5 in Northern Ireland, €5 in the Republic, enquire for bulk orders or availability):

1. Republic of Ireland: Refugee and Migrant Project of Irish Bishops' Conference, Columba Centre, Maynooth, Co Kildare. Make cheques payable to 'Refugee and Migrant Project'. For queries or to check availability; refproject@iecon.ie
2. Northern Ireland: Irish Inter-Church Meeting, 48 Elmwood Avenue, Belfast BT9 6AZ. Make cheques payable to 'Irish Inter-Church Meeting'. For queries or to check availability: info@irishchurches.org