



Reconciliation



By the time you are reading this, the events of Nelson Mandela's funeral will be long gone. But he is rightly honoured for his struggle for recognition and then for reconciliation in South Africa. I was

struck by a number of comments I heard on discussion programmes. One contributor found obscene the 'forgiveness' (immunity from prosecution) received by perpetrators of horrific crimes, in the name of 'reconciliation'. He felt that forgiveness was something which only could be conferred by the person wronged, and that acquittal by governments was not moral. "If you were the mother of that child, would you feel it right for them to go free?", he asked.

Justice or General Good?

There are two implications close behind his words: firstly, that one purpose of criminal justice is to satisfy the desires for revenge or recompense of the wronged person or their relatives. Secondly, that there could never be a case for an individual's 'rights' to be subordinated to the greater

good of the community.

These are not simple issues. And I'm sure that as we face a New Year we will all at some point be in a situation where we feel like saying 'it's not fair'.

Standing on our rights

But before we stand up for our 'rights', let's ask ourselves how ugly we look as we do so: are we being selfish, vindictive, aggressive, narrow, un-forgiving? It may help to think of one person who gave up his right to life for the greater good of the whole world. We've just celebrated his birth: the Bible tells us that in Christ God was reconciling man to himself. One of the best summaries of what it cost him is in Philippians 2:6-8 - Jesus Christ, 'Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,



but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!'. Hard as it may be to understand, I think Mandela's efforts for reconciliation were along the right lines.

Margaret Hobbs is from
St Thomas's Church, Oakwood
www.st-toms.org.uk

