



## Press comment

### The lesson of the Jean McConville case is as old as Moses – human beings count



*Jean McConville (left) with three of her children before she vanished in 1972,*  
Whatever the background to the case, her killing cannot just be forgotten - Fr Alexander Lucie-Smith writes in the Catholic Herald

Inter-religious dialogue is not something that I have ever taken up in an official capacity, but it is a worthwhile activity on an informal basis, as it deepens one's understanding of what others believe, and it deepens, which is perhaps more important, one's understanding of one's own beliefs.

The other day I was talking about religion with one of my Jewish friends. What I came away with was this: that the following verse of the Pentateuch

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(which the Jews call the Law or Torah) is of the very greatest importance; indeed it is beautiful, to wit:

I have witnessed the affliction of my people in Egypt and have heard their cry of complaint against their slave drivers, so I know well what they are suffering. (Exodus 3:7)

The implications of this are astonishing. First of all, God cares, He has compassion on His people. That is of course a theological point, and quite a revolutionary one at the time when Exodus was written, for it was the unshakeable belief of ancient peoples that the gods were indifferent to human suffering. After all, the Immortals dwelt in bliss on Mount Olympus: it was not that they did not care, they could not care, for how could Zeus stoop to contemplate that which was so below himself?

But there is also a human point here, which would, I hope, be shared by all, whatever their religious allegiance or lack of it, and it is this: human beings, no matter how significant, count. The cry of the slave, and the cry of the oppressed, are something we should never ignore. And thus this verse of Exodus is really the foundation of the entire Western tradition, which sees the individual as the centre of meaning and truth, and of an importance that can never be nullified. The whole discourse on human rights begins with God's revelation to Moses at Horeb.

These thoughts seem more central than ever when one considers the item now dominating the news, namely the murder of Jean McConville. As everyone know knows or ought to know, this took place in December 1972, which is a very long time ago. Mrs McConville was dragged from her home by unidentified people and never seen again, to be secretly murdered and then buried.

It all happened a long time ago. After the passage of four decades, isn't it time to forget Jean McConville? Hasn't time deadened the sound of her terrible cries and those of her ten children as she was dragged away to her death?

Well, no.

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The cry of Jean McConville has to be heard, and the case cannot be allowed to be forgotten, simply because the cry of the poor, oppressed and suffering must always be heard. To ignore it is to undermine the basis of our society, namely that the individual counts, indeed the individual is of paramount importance and never to be forgotten.

If we forget Jean McConville we can forget human rights, the rule of law, and all the foundation stones of our society, chief of which is the inviolability of the person and their innate dignity.

So, we cannot forget Jean McConville, and the truth must come out, however long it takes.

It has been said that the recent arrest of Gerry Adams in connection with the case is politically motivated, and its timing aimed at derailing his party's chances at the European elections. If this is true, it is very much to be regretted. The case of Jean McConville should not be regarded as in any way political, or be used as a way of scoring political points. It should be seen purely for what it in fact is: a moral question. A woman is abducted and murdered: are we prepared to say that this sort of thing happens, it is part of the price we pay, and it is all in the past? Or are we going to say: such things are wrong, and never justifiable; there is a moral law, which is absolute and never to be broken, and that law must be defended at all costs? This is the moral question we face.



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