

‘Half of my family were killed in Shatila,’ Fatima told me after dinner. ‘My mother’s sister and all her immediate family. Her daughter was pregnant and the Israeli soldiers made a bet, for a can of beer - boy or girl? Then they cut her open and killed the baby boy. They said, ‘He would have grown to be a Palestinian terrorist.’ (p.114 *Walking to Jerusalem*: Justin Butcher)  
Genocide, re-lived. But it comes closer to home than that: remember it was the Christian Phalangists who did most of the killing in the Shatila and Sabra refugee camps in Lebanon in 1982, and here at home in the UK,

*Abortions on grounds of disability are allowed right up to birth.. note(s) the double standard of abortion right activists who talk loudly about equality and would undoubtedly not be comfortable with abortions performed on grounds of sex and race but are happy to condone the killing of disabled babies. (Review of Missing Millions ed. Lynda Rose)*

– from a photocopy of a review left here inadvertently by a disabled Christian. And so it goes on. One can look, time and time again, through history and find such harrowing facts. Archbishop Tutu, so justly honoured for his work chairing the South African *Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, often in tears as he heard the details of violence from both sides of the apartheid divide, knowing in the telling that healing was taking place and criticised for believing in another context that ‘God has a soft-spot for sinners’. And these sinners are universal, as much Christian as Jew, as much confirmed believer as secular humanist. If today’s feast means anything, it’s to highlight the universality of sin but, also, the narrow window of hope in Christ that allows grace to slip through.

*I am writing this my children  
to stop you sinning;  
but if anyone should sin,  
we have our advocate with the Father,  
Jesus Christ, who is just;  
he is the sacrifice that takes our sin away,  
and not only ours, but the whole world’s.*

This is no justification for sin but to give hope for the sinner and for the sinner’s conversion to love, to peace, to truth and reconciliation.

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