THE
CORRYMEELA
COMMUNITY

Faith and Politics

The Faith and Politics Group was an unofficial group of Christians who met together from 1983 to 2002 and produced a series of documents on the political situation from a faith perspective. Corrymeela members, including three leaders, were involved.

This website has four of the Group's documents:

- Remembrance and Forgetting (1998)
- Boasting: Self-righteous Collective Superiority as a Cause of Conflict (1999)
- Transitions (2001) (Dealing with changes in Irishness and Britishness and issues of identity)
- A Time to Heal: Perspectives on Reconciliation (2002)

REMEMBRANCE

AND

FORGETTING:

BUILDING A FUTURE IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Remembrance and Forgetting: Building a Future in Northern Ireland

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1. INTRODUCTION

In 1991 the Faith and Politics Group produced a booklet entitled *Remembering Our Past: 1690 and 1916* in which we considered two "foundation events" in Irish history: the Battle of the Boyne and the Easter Rising. We tried to look at the significance of these foundation events for today. This booklet seeks to take the discussion further and to explore the significance of what we remember and what we forget.

How the past is to be dealt with is an issue which has been given particular focus by the Good Friday Agreement and its subsequent endorsement in referenda, North and South. It is of the nature of political settlements that they look to the future. They require a new start to be made, which implies release from the past. How does this release best take place? Is it through a "blessed act of oblivion" (William Gladstone), drawing a double line underneath the past? Or is it through a remembering and a reckoning with the past?

In parts One to Seven we deal with how we remember **and** forget, and how we construct the past using particular interpretative keys. We illustrate this in the case of Ireland. We explore issues relating to the suppression of memory in part Six and whether memory needs to be recovered. In part Seven we give a couple of examples of the recovery of memory in the Republic of Ireland.

In parts Eight and Nine we consider the dangerous power of memory and how it relates to the desire for revenge and to a desire to keep faith with the heroic sacrifices of the past.

In part Ten we explore alternatives to revenge and sacrifice in terms of truth telling, punishment, restitution, respect for victims of violence, respect for the dead and the need for new covenants.

In part Eleven we deal directly with how the past is to be dealt with in terms of grieving, telling our stories, dealing with the wounds, forgiveness, and acknowledgement of wrongs and apology.

Part Twelve deals with the churches and memory and part Thirteen suggests the possibility of a new configuration of remembering and forgetting in a context where injustice, antagonism and desire for revenge have been taken out of the Northern Ireland situation.

2. THE IMPORTANCE OF MEMORY

Nations and peoples weave their sense of themselves into narratives. These (foundational) stories tell us what we need to know about ourselves and how we remember what has happened to us. The stories function not only internally in maintaining community identity and solidarity, but also externally in shaping the relationship of the group with those outside. And the stories, in turn, are shaped by these relationships.

The symbolic narratives of groups are incorporated in flags, anthems, songs, speeches, national holidays and war memorials. They are also incorporated into festivals and rituals, e.g. Remembrance Day and the Twelfth of July.

Whatever is remembered has a direct bearing on the things that preoccupy us today. Thus remembering is always selective. Remembering **and** forgetting are two intertwined ways of

reconstructing the past, and thereby giving identity. All groups depend on the forgetting of events and of people that do not fit into the 'story'.

No memory tells us simply what is the case because every remembrance is laden with individual and collective desires and interests, as well as collectively shared convictions - which are themselves shaped by 'cultural memory'. Thus, for instance, arguments about how many Serbs were killed in Croatian concentration camps during the Second World War, or the number of Protestants killed in 1641, are not just about facts. Facts and events need larger narratives, and since larger narratives are in dispute, facts and events are in dispute too. There are different 'memories' of the same event.

People often construct their past using a particular interpretative 'key'. This is a way of reading history, enabling people to understand themselves, but also how their enemies fit into the story. An example: in 1389 the Serbs fought against the emergent Ottoman Empire at the Battle of Kosovo Polje. They lost. Remembering this battle came to be the interpretative 'key' for how the Serb people understood themselves. The Yugoslav dissident Milovan Djilas said*: "wipe away Kosovo from the Serb mind and soul and we are no more."* The Serbs had fought to defend the values of Christian Europe. However, Christian Europe, and particularly the Catholics, never appreciated the sacrifice, and the Serbs came to see themselves as heroic victims. President Slobodan Milosevic sought to draw on the story at the 600th anniversary in 1989 to reassert his own power.

Jewish identity has been built round the trauma of events, in particular in this century the holocaust. The novelist David Grossman has commented that there is no week in the Israeli calendar in which there is not a memorial day of some sort for a traumatic event. Examples of how Protestant and Catholic have used particular interpretative keys to construct their history will be discussed in part Four.

3. MEMORY AND POWER

Victory gives the victor the right to render the 'official' story. They can tell a story of triumphalism and superiority, of manifest destiny, of a mission to civilise, depending on the chosen interpretative 'key' or 'keys'. The 'nasty' bits – often a reality of massacre and murder - can be forgotten.

The vanquished retain their memories – what one has suffered one never forgets - and out of them narrate their own version of what happened. The story becomes a story of resistance, a resentment of that defeat, and a hope for a decisive transformation of the situation.

The vanquished often have to fight the version of events, the story, as told by the dominant people or colonial power. David James and Jillian Wychel illustrate this from the experience of the Maoris in Aotearoa/New Zealand (the power to name is also part of the struggle between rival stories):

> *"… it has been difficult for the Maori story even to be heard, let alone accepted, by the majority. The Pakeha community [the majority community] and the monocultural state in Aotearoa/New Zealand have until recently held an almost complete grip on the education system and the media, and therefore on easily accessible information.*

One of the peripheral but strongly held themes of the Pakeha story is of the assimilation of Maori to the new national order introduced by the Crown. One of the central themes of the Maori story is of resistance to assimilation despite all attempts by the Crown and the dominant culture and of continual demands for local self-determination and for a voice in national matters.

The occupation of Pakaitore/Moutoa Gardens in 1995 was a classic instance of the difference between the two stories. For most citizens, relying on the mainstream media for their information, it was a story of a turbulent time of youthful anger and violence, of gang involvement, of vandalism against historic monuments, and of the final vindication of the law through the court declaration that ownership of the land did properly lie with the local council.

For the occupiers, the story was one of mainly disciplined protest against the delay and denial of justice, of withstanding harassment from the police and the community, and of the drawing together of the iwi, young and old, into a twelve-week intensive seminar-cum-political negotiation which has helped to create new representative bodies for the iwi… The legal title to the land was never the main issue."

Often the oppressed internalise the oppressor and their story. Even after liberation or a change of circumstances, the story can live on in the minds of the former oppressed. Envy, resentment and enmity can continue to be present. The vanquished often have to face the forgetfulness of the victor. The Irish have a story about the killing instigated by Oliver Cromwell at Drogheda in 1649; it is important to their identity. The English have no story at all.

The vanquished often tell their stories in ways that demonise the conqueror: they refuse to recognise their humanity and see them as incapable of changing. Memory can be a form of thirst for vengeance. And the victims find it difficult to acknowledge that they can be perpetrators too. As the *Irish Times* columnist Fintan O'Toole says of the Irish: *"In our collective memory we are always the victims, never the perpetrators."*

The victor can attempt to erase the memory of those who have suffered. Thus, ethnic cleansing (following on the holocaust) is an attempt to eradicate the accusing truth of the past. As the historian and commentator Michael Ignatieff says:

"In its wake the past may be rewritten so that no record of the victim's presence is allowed to remain. Victory encloses the victim in a forgetting that removes the very possibility of guilt, shame or remorse, the emotions required for a sustained encounter with the truth".

4. INTERPRETATIVE KEYS IN IRISH MEMORY

<u>The Ulster Protestant Community</u>

What interpretative keys are used to construct Ulster Protestant memory and identity?

There are identity stories of:

Siege (1689, siege of Derry)
Massacre at the hands of Catholics (1641)
Resistance (1689, 1912 Home Rule, 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement)

Blood Sacrifice (1641, 1690 Battle of the Boyne, 1916 Battle of the Somme)
Struggle and Deliverance (1689, 1690)
Victory over Catholics (1690).

Thus, the Protestant story is a saga of conquest, endurance, sacrifice, deliverance, fear of betrayal, and the endless need for vigilance. The hope is that the people will continue to escape and have the victory. Memory is a form of resistance. The story is endlessly replayed; the parades are a mnemonic device, a ritual recalling the need for vigilance.

Important in this is the religious dimension. There is a sacred story of Protestant martyrdom and Catholic duplicity. There are echoes of the history of Israel, of the covenant community who have been delivered but are surrounded by pagan enemies liable to corrupt with their idolatry and destroy with their violence.

The Irish Catholic Community

What interpretative keys are used to construct Irish Catholic memory and identity?

There are identity stories of:
Defeat (Battle of Kinsale 1603, 1690)
Victimisation (Cromwell, the Famine, Partition)
Betrayal (Treaty of Limerick 1691)
Dispossession of the land (17th Century)
Injustice and oppression (18th Century Penal Laws)
The eternal cycle of sacrifice (ennobling failure) and rebirth/redemption (1916).

Some of this is linked to the sacrificial themes of Irish Catholicism and stories of endurance in the faith during times of persecution. Memory is also a form of resistance in the Catholic tradition and there are rituals that sustain the resistance (e.g. the annual orations at the Republican plots on Easter Sunday).

What the Traditions Share

In both traditions the present and the heroic past are linked. Sacrifice is a strong theme and we have to remain loyal to what past generations have done. Sacrifice – like vengeance - is a form of ritual violence and binds present to past. The problem with interpretative keys is that the complexity of actual events disappears; they promote selective remembering. They emphasise the differences between people. They inhibit new possibilities and hope for a new story.

5. MEMORY AND FORGETTING IN THE CONTESTED SPACE OF NORTHERN IRELAND

Before antagonism intensified in the 19th century, people in Northern Ireland experienced the world in ways that reflected 'Protestant' and 'Catholic' much less sharply than was the case later. In this, they paralleled many societies in Eastern Europe at the same time. For instance, Albanians and Serbs lived relatively peacefully side by side in Kosovo before and during the Ottoman Empire. Ethnic tensions only began to increase in the 19th century, with the rise of Serb nationalism.

However, as rivalry increased – under the impact of the rise of nationalism and religious revival – communities of fear and threat emerged. Identities that once were permeable began to be closed off. Differences were emphasised. As fears increased people began to

focus on the moments of antagonism in the past, e.g. stories of massacre. Remembrance of earlier events only grew in strength as contestation increased. For instance, the first commemoration of the Battle of the Boyne took place one hundred years after the event.

Antagonism controls memory. Memory tells us who our enemies are today and what they have done to us in the past, or what they have been stopped from doing in the past. History is gradually shaped into an 'us' and 'them'. Parallel stories develop.

David Jones and Jillian Wychel illustrated this from their experience of visiting the Tower Museum in Londonderry:

> *"The concept of parallel stories arising out of a contested space was dramatically illustrated in one part of the Tower Museum in L'Derry. A corridor ran between windowed displays on either side. On one side was the Nationalist story of specific events told through its symbols and artefacts and on the other side the Unionist story of the same events. On the one side the kerbstones that linked the corridor was painted orange, white and green; on the other red, white and blue".*

Antagonists tell parallel stories, but antagonists are also interlocked. Thus, there is an interdependence of memory. The theologian Alan Falconer says of Northern Ireland: *"The identity of each community has been shaped by the actions, attitudes and declarations of other communities".* We have shaped each other, including each other's memories.

Antagonism simplifies the story, controls what is remembered and tends to exonerate us from what happens in the conflict. We simply cannot see our role in the 'play': that we are caught in a fear/threat relationship.

As antagonism progresses, scapegoating and demonisation intensify. People normally belong to different but overlapping identities: religious, cultural, ethnic, national. In situations of conflict, these identities tend to fuse. Thus, for instance a religious threat becomes a political threat, and vice versa.

As antagonism escalates, all we can remember are the threats to our community and ourselves. The 'hopeful' bits – the stories of good relationships and co-operation – drop out of history because they are seen as unimportant in the light of subsequent events. The political scientist Frank Wright has illustrated this in his retelling of a forgotten 'moment' of co-operation between Protestant and Catholic in the Tenant League's struggle to protect the position of tenants in mid-19th century Ulster. Wright has also demonstrated that the on-going division between Protestant and Catholic has been shaped by the presence of Britain. Both sides remember how this presence has affected them; the British do not remember – it is not important for their identity.

6. SUPPRESSION OF MEMORY

What we remember is a constructed narrative. These constructed narratives drive out part of reality, the bits that do not fit into the narrative. Thus, the Pope's support for King William in 1690, and the Presbyterian United Irishmen disappear from Ulster Protestant remembrance. The many Irish Catholic Nationalists who died in the First World War did not fit into the new National myth with its authorised memories. They disappeared into an historical limbo.

A "deep remembering" (Geiko Mueller – Fahrenholtz) will disclose a complexity of events and a complexity of identity. If we cannot tolerate a complex image of ourselves, e.g.admitting elements of shame and elements of guilt, then we distort ourselves and we distort our neighbour. There is the danger of demonisation and scapegoating, and we risk feelings of rage, frustration, self-hatred and self-pity. A community in its rage and despair from loss of power can retreat inwards, see itself as the victim and refuse to examine the past. Particular memories are preserved as the community closes itself off.

Memories may be suppressed because to talk about them is too painful. The history of our guilt may be hidden, remembrance blocked by denial, discomfort and defensiveness (the willed amnesia of the perpetrator or victor). The victims may be reduced to silence or unable to speak. Returning to the point of pain has great difficulty for both victims and perpetrators. But if deeds are not identified and named they maintain their hidden power.

The unacknowledged and sub-conscious pains of older generations can have a contaminating impact on the younger ones. Not only the sins of the fathers but the pains of hurt and shame may be passed down the generations.

The danger of suppressing the past is a theme which snakes its way through many of the books of the Jewish writer, Elie Wiesel. In his novel *The Fifth Son* the father, who was a concentration camp survivor, feels unable to talk about the past to the son. The effect was that the past could not become really past; it continued to entangle hopelessly the present, in particular the life of the son. The book ends with the son saying:

> *"A sad summing up: I have moved heaven and earth. I have risked damnation and madness by interrogating the memories of the living and the dreams of the dead in order to live the life of those who, near and far, continue to haunt me: but when, yes when, shall I finally begin to live my life, my own?"*

Similarly, Seamus Deane in his novel *Reading in the Dark* tells the story of acts of betrayal, which took place in Derry in the 1920s. They profoundly affect one family but they could never be openly talked about. The lost uncle hovers over the family and the family house is *"as cunning and articulate as a labyrinth, closely designed with someone sobbing at the heart of it"*.

We may not be able to talk honestly about what happened. The Irish historian Tom Garvin speaks about what happened after the Irish Civil War:

> *"For a long time after the end of the Civil War, a lot of people didn't like talking about it. A sort of conspiracy was entered into by a lot of people – to ensure that the bitterness of the Irish Civil War was not transmitted to a younger and possibly more innocent generation."*

The construction of a state, the re-building of society, the need to work with former opponents, the compromises that an end to conflict require, a realisation that no-one has clean hands, fear of stirring up new bitterness, fears about the amount of truth that can be borne, the psychological burden on individuals: all may seem to require a prudent silence or a determination to let bygones be bygones.

It may well be that this approach may 'work'. A generation may 'background' its hurt, pain and bitterness and carry them to the grave in order to avoid passing them on to younger generation. And thus for a future generation a conflict may become irrelevant. Some

countries, like Spain after Franco, and Poland under its first post-Solidarity government, determined to draw a thick line under the past.

This solution may be available in particular situations, although it should be made clear that particular people and groups have carried the burden of making it 'work'. In other situations the danger may be that if we have not faced the demons of the past the pragmatic and necessary agreements we make will be of a precarious nature. There will be a constant danger of them breaking down and of the past repeating itself. Dangerous silences may be created which can break into the bitter voice of mutual recrimination, with the risk of setting off a new round of the cycle of conflict. Thus, the "act of oblivion" approach has its dangers. By repressing the real history of the interethnic carnage between 1941 and 1945 in the former Yugoslavia the Titoist regime helped to create the conditions for its return. The international community has attempted to create an imposed silence over the history of the recent war in Bosnia so that the carefully planned 'peace' reached with such difficulty is not jeopardised. History may, however, repeat itself.

A Christian account puts the weight on: establishing the truth about the past, acknowledging guilt and responsibility, acting forgivingly, and then moving on. Nevertheless, in an imperfect world counsels of perfection may not always be politically feasible and may even threaten a fragile peace process. The best we may find in some situations is that politicians and groups may be able to act in new ways without dealing with the past.

7. RECOVERY OF MEMORY

Memories can be recovered without the renewal of bitterness. We can begin to face the complexity and the pain. The following are two examples:

The first is an extract from a letter which appeared in *The Irish Times* of 11th December 1997 from Una O'Higgins O'Malley, a former member of the Faith and Politics Group. It concerns remembrance of the Irish Civil War.

"Your columnist Vincent Browne can be a formidable confronter on radio but, on reflection, I found something important in his recent accusation to Nora Owen TD that Fine Gael, while priding itself on its part in founding this State had never openly expressed sorrow for the 77 executions and for such incidents as Ballyseedy carried out in the name of its predecessor, Cumann na nGael. I utterly refute, however, his facile taunts that Cumann na nGael paid no price for all of this. For a start, they lost Michael Collins and I think, among other things, of the assassination of their Vice-President and of his father (my father and grandfather). But this letter is not about 'what-aboutery'; rather it is an attempt to suggest the necessity for some structured way of together remembering, expressing sorrow for, and maybe even repenting of, the violence of our shared past.

I have difficulty with this word 'repenting' it is because I don't see how succeeding generations can really take responsibility for what was done before their time in circumstances with which they are not familiar. However, insofar as we have overlooked the anguish of the other side and failed to attempt reconciliation with them, we do have matters of which to repent.

Some years ago the leaders of Ogra Fianna Fail and of Young Fine Gael (grandsons of Sean Lemass and of Kevin O'Higgins respectively) together laid a wreath of shamrocks at the Four Courts in shared remembrance of all who had lost their lives as a result of the Civil War – part of a Walk of Remembrance organised by the Glencree Centre for Reconciliation. At that time, it would not have been possible to have had participation from Sinn Fein. But at a concelebrated Mass in Booterstown on the 60th anniversary of the assassination of O'Higgins, he was remembered in the company of the three Republicans who had killed him – something which brought great peace to at least two of the families involved.

I think that if we want our current peace process to succeed we must consider appropriate ways in which we might try to heal the wounds of the past – wounds which can still throb surprisingly painfully after so many decades. Would the new Taoiseach with the support of the Opposition approve, for instance, of a special inclusion in the Remembrance Service held annually at Kilmainham in July of prayers for forgiveness and healing of the Civil War? Many other ideas could be floated by a representative group facilitated, for example, at Glencree. I believe it would be good to address this unfinished business before the end of the century and the start of new millennium".

The second is a report from *The Irish Times* of 25th November 1997 of the promotion of joint remembrance of the Irish dead of the First World War.

"THE Government is to contribute £150,000 towards the purchase of a Peace Park and the construction of a Round Tower in Messines Ridge, West Flanders, to commemorate the 50,000 Irishmen from both sides of the Border who died in the first World War in the 300-mile battlefield in France and Belgium.

The Taoiseach, Mr. Ahern, said yesterday this would serve as 'a powerful symbol of reconciliation.'

The project is being carried out by the organisation, A Journey of Reconciliation, whose joint executive chairmen are former Fine Gael Donegal TD, Mr. Paddy Harte and Mr. Glen Barr, former senior political spokesman of the Ulster Defence Association.

Mr. Ahern said 'I thought it was an excellent idea and I was glad to recommend it to the Government for financial support.' He wanted to commend the people who had undertaken the project.

Today both patrons and trustees of the Journey of Reconciliation will travel to Messines to meet the Burgomeister, Mr. Jean Liefooghe, and an inter-denominational ceremony will take place which will celebrate the 'turning of the sod' on the proposed site of the war memorial.

As a memorial, it will recognise the savagery of war, and the futility and the inhuman scale of the killing.

It will also become a place where both communities can join together in remembrance. Its construction will involve young Protestants and Catholics from north and south. In addition, voluntary contributions and assistance from the business community on both sides of the Border will be vital to the project.

The design of the Peace Park and the Round Tower symbolises the ideas and features representative of the entire island of Ireland. Four areas characteristic of the provinces will be treated in landscape terms.

The Round Tower was chosen as it predates the Reformation and political divisions in Ireland. No one political or religious party can lay claim over it. The symbol of ancient Ireland, Newgrange, is relocated in the design so the position of the sun will shine down the site axis and enter an opening in the Tower at 11 a.m. on November 11th, which was the exact hour and date of the Armistice in 1918".

8. THE DANGEROUS POWER OF MEMORY

Commemoration of past events is frequently a pitched battle between opposing ideologies and groups. The past is an argument about the present. Often commemoration tells more about contemporary needs than about the events themselves. The literary critic Edna Longley says: *"Commemorations are as selective as sympathies. They honour our dead, not your dead"*.

Commemoration can revive conflict. Sir Kenneth Bloomfield in his report *We Will Remember Them* speaks of *"the first stirrings of the current conflict in the clash of conflicting ideologies in 1966, at the time of commemoration of the Easter Rising and the Battle of the Somme respectively"*. It is no accident that these are the two defining events in modern Irish history and that they have been told as stories of heroic suffering and sacrifice.

Memorials often tend to perpetuate the past and its hurt. Jane Leonard in a report entitled *Memorials* (1997), commissioned by the Community Relations Council, says of the memorials to those killed in the Troubles:

> *"Consider the experiences of loss, desires for revenge, national and religious identity, bewilderment and continuing vulnerability on some existing memorials"*.

This suggests the difficulty of common remembrance in a context of a civil conflict where victims (and their families) were often bitterly opposed to each other. There is still no common memorial to the dead of the Civil War in the South.

There is a dangerous power of memory to stir up hatred and desire for revenge. This is because in places like Rwanda, the former Yugoslavia, and Ireland the past continues to torment because it is not really past. The past 'contaminates' the present. There is no saving distance between past and present.

Such societies are not living in a serial order of time but in a simultaneous one. The German theologian Geiko Mueller-Fahrenholz tells a story of a visit to the Republic in 1969:

> *"Somewhere south of Dublin we passed a village and the remains of what would have been a large mediaeval church caught our eye. So we stopped and walked over to the ruins. On our way back to the car, we met a peasant woman. Pointing with her thumb to the ruined church she said grimly: 'Cromwell did that to us'".*

This story can be paralleled by the explanation given by a Belfast woman to a member of our Group for why Orangemen are not allowed to attend Catholic services: *"It's because of all those people they killed"* – the killing she was referring to was the massacre of Protestants in 1641.

For the women yesterday and today were the same. Michael Ignatieff says about the Balkans:

> *"Simultaneity it would seem is the dreamtime of revenge. Crimes can never be safely fixed in the historical past; they remain locked in the eternal present, crying out for blood".*

9. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF REVENGE AND SACRIFICE

Two of the chief obstacles in the path of reconciliation are the desire for revenge and a desire to keep faith with the heroic sacrifices of the past. This is why memory has a dangerous power. We now consider the significance of revenge and sacrifice.

Revenge

Revenge is a desire to keep faith with the dead, to honour their memory by taking up their cause where they left off; the violence is a form of **respect** for the community's dead. Time and again the slaughter inflicted by one side in Bosnia in 1992 was repaying a slaughter in 1942.

Revenge is also an expression of the demand that things must be put right. A wrong has been done and it must be put right through inflicting suffering on the other(s). Thus at the heart of revenge is a demand for justice. The use of violence is a way of settling the account and redressing the wrong.

There is, however, a paradox at the heart of revenge. The past cannot be undone. Killing will not bring the dead back to life. The impact of injustice on past generations cannot be undone. The violent pursuit of justice and visions of justice creates more injustice and intensifies the cycle of revenge. And the cycle of revenge brings unending futility.

Sacrifice

The heroic sacrifices of past generations (e.g. those of 1916) are another pull of the past on the present, requiring honour and respect. Further they may require – indeed demand - further acts of sacrifice in the present, because the imagined community of the martyrs must be kept faith with until final redemption is obtained. Nationalisms and political ideologies tend to take on aspects of religion (e.g. "For God and Ulster", "For God and Ireland"). As such they make absolute claims on their adherents. In particular, they demand that adherents must be prepared, if necessary, to die for the cause.

Vengeance and sacrifice share much – they are often inter-related. They require – and continue to require – acts of violence, thus continuing the vicious cycle of violence. Commemoration of the glorious dead in stories, rituals and monuments edifies and unifies the believing community. It stimulates vengeance and sacrifice, and clothes their usual tawdry reality in seductive attractiveness.

10. ALTERNATIVES TO REVENGE AND SACRIFICE

We have argued that revenge is a form of respect for the dead and a seeking after justice. But revenge usually results in an unending cycle of violence and the 'fact' of injustice cannot be undone, e.g. the dead cannot be brought back to life. Therefore revenge must be replaced with new forms of respect for the dead (or the victims who are alive) and by forms of justice which do not seek to return 'like' for 'like'. Similarly sacrifice needs to be replaced by acts of "living sacrifice" (Rom. 12:1), such as working for justice, peace and good relationships. We now explore what this might mean.

Truth Telling

It has been shown in many situations that it is important for a public account to be rendered of what happened and who was responsible. Wrongdoing and injustice are publicly acknowledged. Building a trustworthy peace, it has been argued, requires honest discourse about the past. Thus Truth Commissions have been established in such countries as South Africa, El Salvador and Guatamala. Of central importance is that these are official attempts at truth telling. They arise from, or are part of, a peace process and often incorporate political compromises.

Thus, in South Africa, amnesty was given to perpetrators in return for public disclosure. The perpetrators were held to account but they were not punished if they disclosed what they had done. Signs of contrition or apologies were not required, even though they did take place on some occasions. The victims were able to publicly tell their story, and for the families of victims there was the possibility of finding out what happened to their loved ones. The victims and their families were given respect. The aim was the restoration of personal and civil dignity. A process such as this may be sufficient for many people to put the past behind them. What was given up, however, was the possibility of punitive justice against the perpetrators.

An official Truth Commission may help to change public discourse and memory. The 'facts' of some events and the responsibility for them may be established. Particular lies may be nailed. The magnitude of the hurt and the pain may be exposed. All of this is important but the limitations of such Commissions need to be understood. There is no necessary link between 'truth' and 'reconciliation'. The 'truth' may bring anger and further polarisation. The 'truth' proclaimed by a Commission may not be accepted. This is because

there are competing 'truths' in situations of conflict; what has happened is embedded in rival narratives of why it happened and who was responsible. Truth Commissions cannot bring the arguments of the past to a conclusion. New realities, critical and moral reflection, spiritual transformation, changed relationships and time may, however, open up the possibility of some 'shared' truth being established.

In Northern Ireland the families of those who have disappeared without trace - up to 20 people were abducted by paramilitaries, killed and secretly buried - seek to find out what happened to them. There are the disputed deaths by the security forces in controversial circumstances. There are the unresolved murders. People want to know exactly what happened, and who did what. The families of the Bloody Sunday victims in Derry want the innocence of their loved ones established.

Many people want answers. Will a Truth Commission mechanism in Northern Ireland provide some of them? Truth Commissions are grounded in a peace process and appear to work best when there is a powerful political consensus that 'truth' must be established. The context of a fragile peace like Northern Ireland's, where the conflict continues to smoulder on, may be unpropitious. Nevertheless, the issues are not whether we need a Truth Commission but how are we to deal with the past, and how we are to finish with what has happened? Some reckoning has to take place. There has to be some encounter with truth so that we can have freedom from the past. This may point to the need for various groups and institutions (e.g. churches) to engage in a process of structured self-examination of their role in the conflict.

Punishment

Punishment is the punitive aspect of justice. We cannot do without some form of punitive institutionalised response to wrongdoing, no matter how inadequate and imperfect it may be. Punishment of the perpetrator is a statement that the injured person matters. Through the criminal justice system the perpetrator is called to account and held responsible for their misdeeds. The truth of what happened is hopefully revealed and there is the possibility of the victim's story being told. The perpetrator pays for what they have done and this is reflected in the seriousness of the sentence. Punishment is one way respect is shown to the victims (and their families).

Without an adequate criminal justice system people often feel impelled to express their anger in unrestrained ways, for example through retaliatory action. The function of a properly working justice system is to prevent a spiral of revenge by successfully criminalising and punishing offenders. The continued functioning of the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland – no matter how inadequately – preserved the community from even worse excesses of retaliatory violence.

It is understandable that early release of paramilitary prisoners causes difficulties. It seems to indicate that what has been done to the victims of violence and their families is of no account. They are not respected. There is no justice. There is no fairness. This is why actions by paramilitaries which show that victims are respected might help, for example expressions of regret, remorse, or even apology. These expressions are signs that the people we have injured are fellow human beings with claims upon our respect.

Punishment necessarily individualises guilt. In the context of community conflict (Northern Ireland, former Yugoslavia, Rwanda) the pursuit of justice through the legal system is an ambiguous and frustrating activity, while necessary. Community conflict creates a context

where there are all sorts of degrees and categories of guilt: that of the ideologues who promote hate and prepare the ground for violence; that of those who plan and direct acts of violence; that of those who plant bombs and pull triggers; that of helpers and supporters; that of condoners and bystanders; and so on. There are sins of omission and sins of commission. There are the sins of people who journeyed into the far country of violence. There are the sins of the people who stayed "at home", who remained law abiding but who have been consumed by anger, resentment, self-righteousness and the refusal of generosity. There are the misdeeds of groups e.g. the paramilitaries, and there are the misdeeds of the state, its agencies and agents.

An aspect of all of this is the systemic – the transindividual - reality of evil - something particularly evident in conflict situations. This reality generating its own momentum and logic. Part of the dynamic is the seductiveness of violence and its endless justifications, and the fear, dread, hatred, excitement and frenzy which carry people along, "the diabolic forces of violence" in the words of the German sociologist Max Weber.

Human beings live in and through networks of relationships, and in communities. When these networks and communities go awry human beings tend to go awry too. Thus in coming to judgement on individuals we need to look at what happened to the networks and communities of which these individuals are part. For instance, the paramilitaries are deeply rooted in communities. They have often acted out the aspirations, fears, angers, hatreds and hurts of much larger groups of people who would not allow themselves to be involved personally in violence.

Community conflict brings distortion and dehumanisation to everyone. This is most obviously seen in what has happened to victims of violence. However, the communities from which paramilitaries come have also been dehumanised by security force action, by sectarian violence, deprivation, injustice, etc. To go further, many members of the security services have been dehumanised by what they have been involved in and by what has happened to them.

This is not to say that we make no distinctions between actors, actions and activities – for this we **must** do. Clearly some have suffered far more than others. Some individuals, groups and institutions have killed and injured far more than others, and thus carry more guilt and responsibility. Horrendous actions are **not** automatic, or even 'understandable', responses to someone else's behaviour, or to injustice, or to history, or to the 'system'. Human beings remain moral agents. Conscious options for violence are made. What we **are** suggesting is a moral complexity – a tangled web – of which we are all part.

Honest discussion about this moral complexity, particularly concerning the issues of guilt and responsibility and who has paid the price of the conflict, is something that is required of us if we are to deal adequately with what has happened over the last 30 years.

Part of the complexity is the issue of the punishment of perpetrators. On the one hand the perpetration of violence demands punishment and this is why the granting of amnesty in many countries in South America was greeted with outrage by many. Impunity means that the past and what happened are not faced up to. There is no accountability and no justice. The dead get no respect.

On the other hand the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland could not bring an end to politically motivated or retaliatory violence, by convicting and punishing perpetrators. Only a few of them were caught and convicted. And perpetrators are part of a chain of guilt, of

communities that have gone awry, of institutions and groups that have demanded and commanded total dedication and loyalty. In part their violence has had a representative character. Further, perpetrators can also be victims too. In a context of a serious attempt to move away from a repetition of the atrocities of the past and to bring an end to community conflict the claims of mercy and forbearance have weight. Forbearance and mercy take what has happened seriously but deal forgivingly with those responsible for the misdeeds of the past.

Those organisations using violence to achieve political ends may alter course in response to changing realities and circumstances, even to the point of embracing peaceful means. This may open up the possibility of such groups being involved in a political settlement.

Settlements involving those who have used violence bring all sorts of issues and questions to the fore: Has violence finally ended or is it simply a tactical suspension? What about the decommissioning of weapons? What about the release of politically motivated prisoners? What about unsolved terrorist crimes? What about the 'military' end of these organisations? How are those former comrades who will not accept the settlement to be dealt with? Many of these are difficult and painful issues – issues relating to trust and confidence between communities and to different perceptions of justice and punishment – and can not be resolved at once. They have to be dealt with as part of a process of political transition.

It is of the nature of political settlements that they recognise and accommodate political realities and necessities. They require a new start to be made and a line to be drawn underneath the past. They seek to avoid issues of blame and put the emphasis on responsibility for the future. The aim is to end the cycle of conflict by the creation of a peaceful democracy where people can live together under the rule of law. We become partners in a common project.

In seeking to move to a new future from a violent past there is a balance to be struck between the claims of punitive justice, the claims of mercy and forbearance, and what is required to create the 'common good' of a peaceful democracy. The early release of prisoners should be seen in this context. And of course the elements of risk, painful contradiction and ambiguity need to be acknowledged.

In the striking of a balance people may be left without justice and without any ending. There is the element of the tragic and the intractable in conflict situations – the "tears in things" (Virgil). One aspect of this is that people continue to pay the price of the conflict all their lives, and this is too often passed down the generations. There is no relief from memory; it continues to sear and scar.

Restitution

Restitution is the restorative aspect of justice. We can never undo and make good the evil that has been done; in this sense strict restorative justice is impossible. We can seek to repair the damage that has been done, where that is possible. However, restitution should be seen more as an act of compensation that fulfils certain functions in the present: firstly, as a sign of recognition of the seriousness of what has happened; secondly, as a sign of the seriousness of repentance; thirdly, it meets some need of the victim; and fourthly, it aims at facilitating a more human future. Respect is shown to the victim. Thus working for peace, reconciliation and justice by those who have been involved in violence can be seen as a sign of repentance and restitution (it is a "living sacrifice"). There is a danger of focusing too much on

financial compensation, for how can we measure the 'value' of a death or injury or how can we compare one death or injury with another?

Respect for Victims of Violence

Victims of violence have their particular needs: for justice, for the seriousness of the harm to be acknowledged, for apology and repentance from those who have done them wrong, for their stories to be heard, for compensation, for practical support. They have a claim upon our respect, to be remembered and allowed to remember. The past cannot be put right, but we can seek to ensure that it is not repeated. This is one form of memorial to the victims of violence.

Respecting the Dead

We acknowledge the suffering and grief of the other side. We face up to the deaths our side has caused. Perhaps, in time, we will be able to mourn together.

One of the key things in the South African situation was a capacity to have empathy with opponents. When Nelson Mandela first met F.W. de Klerk he immediately made the point that he understood the Afrikaners' suffering in the Boer War. He respected their dead.

And respect for the dead may enable us to live differently. Thus the character of Marian in Stewart Parker's play *Pentecost:*

> *"Personally, I want to live now. I want this house to live. We have committed sacrilege enough on life, in this place, in these times. We don't just owe it to ourselves, we owe it to our dead too… They're not our masters, they're our creditors, for the life they never knew. We owe them at least that – the fullest life for which they could ever have hoped, we carry those ghosts within us, to betray those hopes is the real sin against the Christ, and I for one cannot commit it one day longer."*

New Covenants

The German philosopher Hannah Arendt has suggested that the primary requirements for people to live together are:

(1) their willingness to enter into promises and agreements – covenants –and to keep them; and
(2) their willingness to set aside the past – its broken promises and agreements, its enmity and its vicious circle of action and reaction -–and start anew. This is where forgiveness comes in – which will be discussed in part Eleven.

Living together in Northern Ireland requires promises and agreements in a number of key areas:

- the establishment of a political consensus that will undergird the rule of law, the criminal justice system and policing, so that violence from whatever source can be successfully criminalised;
- all groups being bound by the principles of democracy and non-violence and showing in practice that there is a clear and unambiguous break with violence;
- the creation of just conditions for the future;
- the creation of a shared community where different communities have security and parity of esteem.

The Good Friday Agreement is a political accommodation which seeks to end the cycle of violence – the vicious cycle of action and reaction – between the communities in Northern Ireland. It is an attempt to start anew with a set of promises and agreements contained in the Agreement or flowing from it.

The Good Friday Agreement is not peace but an opportunity to make and build peace. As the South African politician Kadar Asmal, who has had long experience of Ireland, said after the Good Friday Agreement: *"You are nowhere near a larger settlement in Ireland."* By "larger settlement" he means finding a way of living together. The Agreement affords us a **possibility** and it provides necessary political structures which give us the institutional means of working together by cross-community consensus.

Finding ways of living together will be a painful, slow, difficult, uncertain and risky process with no results guaranteed. It is a question of inching our way out of the shadows and into the light. It will require learning the ways of peace, democracy, respect, restraint and compromise. There are no easy endings to civil conflicts. It will take a long time for relationships to be transformed and for distrust, hurt and fear to be overcome - particularly in a context where large numbers of people remain angry, resentful, disbelieving and alienated. We can expect no utopian outcome; human peace is always imperfect. Therefore we must accept the humanity and fallibility of each other.

While we hope for reconciliation (the final end of justice is renewed relationships), what may emerge at first is simple co-existence where there is a willingness to accept the existence of the other. Such co-existence assumes co-operation on a fair basis.

11. DEALING WITH THE PAST

Important in all of this is how people remember and how they deal with past. How people remember profoundly affects how they behave in the present and significantly affects their politics; thus in Northern Ireland the politics of historic grievance and the politics of siege. Our accumulated history – *"the debris, we carry with us, each, of hurt and counter hurt"* (Amy Clampitt) - is part of today's reality. It pushes people back to standing by their 'own' and against their enemies. Memories can enslave and condemn us to a seemingly endless living out of the past. In the words of the Scots poet Edwin Muir:

> *"… loves and hates are thrust upon me by the acrimonious dead".*

Grasped by the ghosts of the past we are unable to imagine a different future.

Because the past can so possess us it is important that we find ways of letting go what has happened. We now explore ways in which this can take place.

Grieving

We may need to lament and grieve for what has been lost and done, and acknowledge anger, bitterness, pain, resentment, loss of identity and uncertainty. For this we need a language. The resources available in the biblical language of lament and the ritual actions of the faith community could be of help in this.

Telling Our Stories

We need to tell our stories to each other and listen intently to what we are told – which involves reaching beyond the words - feeling the pain of the other as transmitted through the 'memory' of their community. This is 'felt' history. Thus, we begin to see from the perspective of the other. We practice what the Croatian theologian Miroslav Volf describes as "double vision", seeing both "from here" and "from there".

Geiko Mueller-Fahrenholz describes an exchange of stories between the former German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt and the Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev, during Brezhnev's visit to Bonn in March 1973:

> *"On one evening there was a meeting in the residence of Willy Brandt, who was then chancellor. The atmosphere was cordial until Brezhnev began to recall in great detail some of the atrocities committed by Nazi troops in Russia. Everyone was listening with a mixture of respect and dread, because it was obvious that the Soviet leader had to free himself of these oppressive memories. His words had to be understood as an indication of what it had cost the Russians to come to the capital of Germany – the heart of what had been their most bitter enemy.*
>
> *Brezhnev spoke for some twenty minutes. Then Schmidt, who was minister of defence at the time, responded by telling his own story, for he had been one of the German soldiers stationed in Russia. He spoke of the schizophrenic situation of German soldiers who did not adhere to the Nazi ideology but had been educated to be patriots and thus felt bound to defend their country. In recalling this encounter nearly 15 years later, Schmidt comes to a revealing conclusion; he writes that this 'exchange of bitter memories greatly contributed to the mutual respect' that existed between him and Brezhnev despite the fact that the two found themselves in opposite camps from that evening up to the end of their terms of office".*

Dealing with the past may mean working through our history together, particular visiting together those points that continue to have a painful sting, as Schmidt and Brezhnev did. It may help us recover what we have forgotten, denied, covered up and silenced.

It may mean looking at our symbols – anthems, rituals, songs, festivals, special occasions – and the stories and memories in these symbols. What do they say about the 'other' side? What do they say about us? Is this what we want to say now?

Honest discourse about the past – particularly in the presence of the other – may provide resources for a more hopeful future. The danger is that we refuse to do this and instead we search for people and institutions to blame for what has happened over the last 30 years. We make ourselves "whited sepulchres" (Matt. 23: 11) who hide our guilt, responsibility and hypocrisy in proclaiming that we are radically different from these other people.

Dealing With the Wounds

People and communities must be given a way of dealing with their suffering, wounds and grief. There is a need for opportunities for the past to be addressed symbolically, ritually and liturgically, and for spaces to be *"provided for people to express to and with each other the pain and injustices experienced. Acknowledgement and mutual recognition of the legitimacy of their experience is decisive in the reconciliation dynamic"* (the US Mennonite expert on many conflict situations, John Paul Lederach). If hurt, pain, anger, guilt, and loss are not dealt with effectively they will be driven underground, sure to surface in unexpected and harmful ways.

Forgiveness and acknowledgement of wrongs (including apology) are interrelated ways of dealing with what has happened, which may be deeply transformative.

Forgiveness

One of the main reasons why violence was not much greater over the past 30 years has been the way that many people have chosen consistently to seek to cut cycles of vengeance by calling for, and practising, non-retaliation and forgiveness. Forgiveness is a central aspect of the Christian Gospel. It has significantly penetrated Irish life, and its practice – particularly by many victims and their families – has had social and political effects.

However, the victims of violence or their families cannot be burdened with the demand that they forgive those who have perpetrated crimes against them. That is something they may, or may not, be able to do. None of the rest of us can sit in judgement on them. Nor can anyone forgive on behalf of those who have suffered.

What is required is that the community at large – battered, hurt and damaged by what has happened over the last 30 years – be prepared to enter into a more general process of being able to set aside the past – with all its enmities and demands for revenge – and start anew, accepting the existence of the other. This is something in the nature of forgiveness. As the former Zambian President, Kenneth Kaunda, said, forgiveness is not so much an isolated act but *"a constant willingness to live in a new day without looking back and ransacking the memory for occasions of bitterness and resentment"*.

Such a process of communal forgiveness takes what happened seriously; thus, truth seeking and telling are important. It does not trivialise or condone violence and injustice. Guilt and responsibility remain. What such a process does do is seek to bring peace to the past for the sake of the present and the future. The goal is healing and a move forward into new relationships. It is about rebuilding what has been torn to pieces, creating trustworthy and sustainable structures and providing secure social spaces for people. Such forgiveness is made easier when there is evidence of people acting in new ways, e.g. decisively moving away from violence or being prepared to negotiate new and just political arrangements, or when regret or apology is expressed for what has happened.

If we fail to forgive we will hand on our bitterness to the next generation. The conflict in the former Yugoslavia is an example where bitterness was handed down; not only from memories of atrocities committed during the Nazi period, but going back generations before that, even to the wars between Christian and Turk. And, if the politics of grievance is not given up, the past keeps everyone in its grip. Either we find ways to forgive or else we separate from, or seek to destroy, each other. Thus, forgiveness is a practical necessity for continuing to live together. (For further discussion on the issue of forgiveness see the Appendix.)

Acknowledgement of Wrongs and Apology

There are many people who carry responsibility for what they have done, or been involved in, over the last 30 years. That is something which cannot be avoided or evaded, although we have discussed the complexity of the issue earlier. People have to live with what they have done or been involved in. It is in this context that repentance arises: stopping what we are doing; recognition, examination and acknowledgement of wrong doing; finding another way; seeking forgiveness; and seeking to repair the harm done. Repentance is the 'letting go' of evil behaviour.

Clearly we are not responsible for, or guilty of, acts we have not done, or in which we have not been directly involved. At the same time, we belong to groups, communities and nations that have done things which were wrong, in the distant or more immediate past. Our history has imposed suffering on others and often brought benefits to ourselves. We cannot run away from this history and its consequences, for we are caught up in it, even if we are not personally guilty. The past affects present realities and relationships. Thus, there is a solidarity in sin, which involves the living and the dead.

Acknowledgement of wrongs done and hurts caused represents a facing of the reality of what a particular group, community or nation has done. Our acknowledgement of what has happened, our sense of regret and our disapproval of past actions by our group or community are forms of respect for past generations and present day victims. They enable us to conduct our relationships in the present in a more generous and just way.

Acknowledgement of wrongs done and hurts caused may take the form of apology. Apology is the verbalised face of repentance. It opens up the possibility of reconnection with the other. For instance, the Stuttgart Confession of Guilt in 1945 recognised the Evangelical Church in Germany's share of the responsibility for the terrible things done during the Third Reich. It paved the way for an honest approach to what had happened and for that Church's re-entry into the ecumenical community.

Apology – clearly and publicly expressed – is one way of convincing people that a clear break with the past has been made. Of course, apology has to be followed by or linked to, an attempt to undo wrongs and act differently – to establish a new justice and a new relationship.

Public rituals of atonement are important to help individuals come to terms with the painfulness of their societies past, for their healing and for reconciliation. As Michael Ignatieff says:

> *"When President Alwyn of Chile appeared on television to apologise to the victims of Pinochet's crimes of repression, he created the public climate in which a thousand acts of private repentance and apology became possible. He also symbolically cleansed the Chilean State of its association with these crimes."*

For apology to have power it must be made by leaders who have credibility and a capacity to be considered representative, both by the group they are apologising on behalf of, and by the community to whom they are apologising. Timing is important; there are particular moments when words of apology speak. Too soon and often the apology is not believed: the pain, hurt and anger of the victims appear not to have been taken seriously. Place and context are important, as is an audience willing to respect and hear the speaker. Apology

also needs to be set in the context of a process of establishing a new relationship. And the words chosen are important. For apology to have power it should be about specifics, where possible, and not just generalities. It must seek to render an account rather than be a glib ritual.

But symbolic actions may be more important than any words; for instance the West German Chancellor Willy Brandt falling to his knees at a monument to those who died in the Warsaw ghetto rising.

Demands for apology are often part of a claim for justice and respect. An acknowledgement that a wrong has been done is important. But demands for apology are often counter-productive and can feed resentment. They are frequently seen as an attempt to humiliate the other. Apologies best arise out of process of free, honest and authentic reflection, and not from moral blackmail. Apologies – even murmurs of regret – should be received in a forgiving spirit with a lack of self-righteousness by a community. After all, there is *"none righteous no, not one"* (Rom. 3:10) everyone is a sinner, all groups have committed wrongs in their history. The aim should be new relationships, not moral (or other) victories.

12. THE CHURCHES AND MEMORY

The churches in Ireland have carried memories of community experience and given it meaning. They have helped to maintain memories – memories of fear, grievance, antagonism and anxiety. They have assisted us in naming our enemies and told us why they are enemies.

It is clear that there have been positive Christian contributions in the conflict over the last 30 years. The deep seriousness with which certain Christian imperatives have been taken by faithful Christians – imperatives such as love, kindness, peacefulness, patience, self control, non-retaliation, forgiveness – have been crucial in restraining the conflict. Similarly the courage and leadership of many individual pastors and church leaders has helped to contain the violence. There have been many Christians in the forefront of peace and reconciliation work. More and more churches and church leadership have co-operated together. Increasingly distinctions have been made between political and religious commitments. Nevertheless the churches as institutions have contributed to community division and sectarianism. In a spirit of humility and contrition the churches are challenged to acknowledge their part in and responsibility for the conflict. There is a reckoning to be made. Judgement will come in some form or another.

Over many years we have fed sectarianism by defining our own denomination's identity primarily in opposition to other traditions. Theological disagreement has often been animated and kept alive by the need to tell a story which justified exclusivity, separation and division. And at the same time the dividedness of our communities has been reflected in our churches. We have often allowed the stories of nationalism and cultural and political identity to overpower the story of the gospel. Political loyalties and exclusive traditions have been put before the God who will have no other god before him, even in the church. Divided churches have failed to be agents of healing and reconciliation in a divided society. We have been satisfied to be chaplains to tribal communities. In speaking to the churches in Northern Ireland, *Sectarianism: A Discussion Document (1993)* said:

> *"What has happened in Northern Irish society calls us to a profound change of heart (metanoia). The call is to face reality to abandon our myths, to accept our part of the responsibility for what has happened*

and find new ways forward together" (p.100).

We need to remember and feel the pain of failure to face the damage that has arisen from our unhappy past.

We need the grace to turn away from the captivity of our limited visions and our tattered absolutes.

We need to turn to God, not to our political prescriptions or our cultural and ecclesiastical traditions. Turning to God must first of all be an act of repentance. And, in order to make this repentance in a truthful and credible way, churches must also come face to face with the painful reality of their own complicity with, and participation in, the brokenness and fallenness around us. The test of this is the seriousness of our engagement with the issue of sectarianism.

As we turn to God in repentance, we find that to turn to God is also to turn to one another. And in this apologies and expressions of regret are important. Some instances of this in Ireland are the following:

- the Catholic Bishop of Ferns, Brendan Comiskey, in June 1998 expressing "deep sorrow" and asking forgiveness for the Catholic boycott of Protestant businesses in Fethard-on-Sea, Co. Wicklow;
- the Catholic Bishop of Killaloe, William Walsh, in 1997 apologising and asking forgiveness for the "pain and hurt" caused "to our non-Roman brethren" by the *Ne Temere* decree, followed by the regret expressed by the Archbishop of Armagh, Sean Brady, on the same subject in the following year;

- the Presbyterian General Assembly passing a resolution in 1966 urging its members "humbly and frankly to acknowledge and to ask for forgiveness for any attitudes and actions towards our Roman Catholic fellow-countrymen which have been unworthy of our calling as followers of Jesus Christ";
- a representative group of Orange Order chaplains expressing "deep sorrow" to the Roman Catholic community in Northern Ireland that so many of them had been intimidated out of their houses and that several of their churches had been burnt, after widespread disturbances in early July 1998 connected with the refusal to let an Orange procession go down a road at Drumcree, Co. Armagh.

13. REMEMBERING AND FORGETTING

New relationships and new covenants will enable the communities to rewrite their histories – it will create a new configuration of remembering and forgetting, a new 'economy of memories'. As the assassinated Egyptian President Anwar Sadat said: *"Peace is not a mere endorsement of written lines, rather it is the rewriting of history."* This will be in a context where injustice, antagonism and desire for revenge have been taken out of the situation. It will be a certain kind of remembering: remembering the past in order that we do not repeat the past's destructiveness, so that we become different people. It will also be a certain kind of forgetting: forgetting not as amnesia but rather as a release from the full weight and burden of the past.

14. MEMORY AND BIBLICAL FAITH

Throughout the Old and New Testaments people are being called to remember God's acts. And this remembering calls them into certain patterns of response, to be certain sorts of people. This is a remembering that frees us.

God's acts are not 'normal' acts of power. In the Exodus the Israelites, who are about to be made victims by the Egyptians, are delivered by God. In the resurrection Jesus, who was made a victim by the religious and political authorities and the crowd, is vindicated by God. This is a radical and subversive change of perspective. Because of God's acts we hear and recall the story of people who would have been discarded by history as having no relevance, no importance, no existence, or as simply guilty ones. Jewish and Christian faith are built round the memory of victims, victims who escape. These stories break the usual pattern of power relations. The powerful usually make history and it is their story which is remembered and becomes the defining one; the victims are reduced to silence. But God leads a powerless and oppressed people out of slavery and enters into a covenant relationship with them. Exodus becomes the foundational story of the Jewish people, as Easter becomes for Christians. They are interpretative keys.

The Passover injunction to remember involves the re-appropriation of God's liberating activity when he brought the Israelites out of Egypt and gave them a future. The past is made present again. The Jewish people in the celebration of Passover experience again their deliverance in the context of their own time. Such a re-living is also an act of thanksgiving to God for entering into a covenant relationship with the community.

At the heart of Christian faith is a person who did not make victims and yet was put to death as a guilty one. In the Eucharist we return to this innocent victim *("Do this in remembrance of me"*). Through this remembering once again the past is made contemporary and the liberating activity of God is experienced. The activity of remembrance is paralleled with God's remission of sin, through the death and rising again of Jesus. As we appropriate the memory we are able to accept responsibility and seek forgiveness. We remember that the sacrament originated *"in the same night, as he was betrayed"*. Those who eat at Jesus' table are his betrayers, then as now. And he continues to accept us, to allow us into his fellowship. We remember the body broken "for us" who were God's enemies and the blood shed to establish the "new covenant" – the new relationship of promise and commitment – with us who have broken the covenant (1 Cor. 11: 24-25). We also partake in the expectation of a new heaven and a new earth *("For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup you proclaim the Lord's death <u>until he comes</u>"*, 1 Cor. 1:26). Thus memory becomes a ground of hope for a redeemed future.

In the remembering of Jesus the liberating activity of God is experienced and we are offered the possibility of remembering the people we have diminished and rejected and injured – the people we have made victims. We are given back memory. This recovery of memory is the ground of hope, for it offers us, in the presence of Jesus, the possibility of the restoration of relationships. There can be no authentic hope without memory. As T.S. Eliot says *"This is the use of memory: for liberation"*.

The Christian story is about giving us the memory – through the innocent victim, Jesus – to see our own victims (this is deep remembering). It is a subversive memory because it makes us uncomfortable, because our false innocence – the narratives we wish to tell – is exposed. We enter a new story where we relinquish denial. We see and accept our part in the story. We discover the truth about ourselves.

The Christian story also tells us that the victims do not in their turn make victims. Render no man evil for evil. The aim is the remaking of relationships, the embrace of the other, the starting again of promises and commitments. We seek to break down the *"exact and tribal intimate revenge"* (Seamus Heaney) for we no longer need to inflict suffering on others. Victims are not required.

APPENDIX

FORGIVENESS – A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

(adapted from *Forgive Us Our Trespasses…?)*

Central to the Gospel was Christ's teaching on unconditional forgiveness. Modern scholars agree that in relation to forgiveness Jesus only departed from the practice of his time in one aspect: he forgave unconditionally. The Dutch Dominican theologian André Lascaris says:

> *"When Jesus started his public life, he only brought about a seemingly minimal change: he accepted people into his company who were sinners and were not able to fulfil the demands of the Torah. He forgave unconditionally. He offered communication to people without asking anything from them beforehand. He transcended the fundamental law of justice, the law of reciprocity. According to St. Luke Jesus forgave his enemies on the cross 'for they do not know what they are doing' (Luke 23:34). This same power to forgive unconditionally he gave to his disciples (John 20:23)."*

This change is at the heart of Christianity. Jesus offered a way back into the community for people who had no way back because they could not fulfil the demands of the Law. He did this through offering unconditional forgiveness.

The phrase from the Lord's Prayer "forgive us our trespasses…" meant originally "forgive us our financial debts". In Jesus' time, as today, there was huge poverty because of debt. The remission of debt offered a way back into the community for people who were being crushed by it. The demands of the Law and the demands of debt were major oppressive realities at the time of Jesus, and Jesus was concerned about both.

Clearly a legal or a banking system cannot be run successfully if people always know that they will get off or avoid paying their debts. But if we do not allow people a way back when the legal or financial system is oppressing them, we are in essence saying that we prefer them to be destroyed.

The God revealed in Scripture wishes to offer people a way back to Him. He seeks to provide a new future and a way forward for people dominated by the past and its consequences. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ is the sign and promise of this. When the divine reality of forgiveness and new life is given, experienced, grasped or even glimpsed we have the possibility of forgiving others. We are able to be forgiving because we ourselves have been forgiven.

This is why forgiveness has the priority, why there is always inclusion before exclusion, and acceptance and grace before judgement. The Lord's Prayer asks us to ask forgiveness of God only to the extent that we are willing to offer it to others.

Forgiveness is not Reconciliation

There is a difference between forgiveness and reconciliation. Forgiveness is our side of the process: we forgive someone who has injured us. Only we can forgive; no one can do it on our behalf. It may and often does lead to reconciliation. But not always. Why? Because the other party may not say "sorry", may not repent, or is not willing to accept our forgiveness.

Repentance requires change. The person who commits wrong has to do more than say "sorry". He or she has to turn towards the person they have wronged, acknowledge what they have done and try to make amends. That is what the Bible means by repentance. It involves a willingness to enter into new and just relationships.

Reconciliation only happens when both aspects – forgiveness and repentance – come together in a new and more just relationship.

The Inter-personal and the Political

We move by means of analogy from the inter-personal – where forgiveness and repentance are normally located – to the political where we speak of the social embodiment of forgiveness, repentance and justice. Such a movement is valid; nevertheless, there are limits to the scope of the analogy. Individuals cannot be compelled to forgive or repent, even if there is a communal disposition towards forgiveness, repentance and justice and a political settlement broadly acceptable to a large majority of people. These may facilitate interpersonal forgiveness and repentance, but they do not guarantee it. Some may not repent and others may not be able to forgive. Coercion may have to be applied on minorities who will not accept a political settlement, which a significant majority willingly accepts. There is a limit to what communal effort and politics can achieve. There always remains an area of transcendent activity and concern which takes us beyond the world of politics. This is particularly applicable in the case of forgiveness. The presence of forgiveness points to the transcendent concern and activity of God. It shows us the world on the "far side of revenge" (Seamus Heaney).

Publications of the Faith & Politics Group

Breaking Down the Enmity (1985)

Understanding the Signs of the Times (1986)

Towards an Island that Works (1987)

Towards Peace and Stability? (1988)

Remembering Our Past: 1690 and 1916 (1991)

Burying Our Dead: Political Funerals in Northern Ireland (1992)

(All the above, together with a new introduction were published as
Breaking Down the Enmity in 1993)

The Things that Make for Peace (1995)

Liberty to the Captives? (1995)

Forgive us our Trespasses…? (1996)

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Boasting

Self-righteous Collective Superiority as a Cause of Conflict

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CONTENTS

Boasting

Self-righteous Collective Superiority as a Cause of Conflict

Introduction

The Faith and Politics Group has issued a number of documents on the Northern Ireland situation from the perspective of Christian Faith. This present one attempts to look at one issue which is an underlying cause of conflict in different situations, including Northern Ireland. That issue is self-righteous collective superiority. In Part One we consider a number of examples of how this manifests itself and the basis people find for it. When strongly held, it can make the resolution of conflict very difficult because it works against compromise and the reaching of agreement.

The roots of self-righteous superiority lie deep within us all, both at the personal level and as part of a collective. Our need to differentiate ourselves from others; the quest for truth and transcendence; our yearning for belonging, order and security; our concern for identity; the will to live and flourish; our sense of particularity; our wish for recognition, significance, esteem and justice: all contain within them the possibility that they will overreach themselves and create a sense of self-righteous superiority. Further, a sense of superiority, particular religious superiority, can encourage a will to power and a desire to dominate others. This is considered in Part Two.

It is our contention that the Christian Faith can free us from such delusions of righteousness even though we all fall back into them from time to time. In Part Three we examine the new belonging together in Christ which does not exclude or promote superiority and look at the writings of Paul that condemn collective self- righteous boasting of superiority. In Paul's letter to the Romans he writes about justification through grace by faith, but since he is writing in the context of conflict between Jewish and Gentile Christians, what he writes has direct implications for the resolution of inter-community conflict.

These issues inevitably raise questions about truth. We make a number of points about truth in Part Four. Developing positive relationships with others both personally and collectively is vitally important and we make a number of suggestions in the Conclusions. At the end of this millennium marked by much international, ethnic and inter cultural conflict we dare to proclaim the Good News that reconciliation between enemies is possible through Christ.

Part 1. Manifestations of Superiority

The Irish Inter-Church Meeting produced a report on sectarianism in which it is stated that one universal source of sectarianism is **"*assuming the superiority of one's own community*.** " When communities are in conflict this assumption of superiority makes reaching an accommodation much more difficult.

This **sense of superiority**, experienced in many different ways, is a **major hindrance to reconciliation** and the solving of problems in relating one community to another. When a community convinced of their superiority demonises another community, it feels that the *other* should eventually give way to what is inherently superior. There is therefore no urgency to understand the other side, seek a solution, or search for compromise.

Many people who would not admit to sectarian, racist or extreme nationalist attitudes nevertheless feel that the collective group to which they belong is superior to others. A feeling of collective superiority is often not recognised by those within the group, though it may be obvious to those outside. Derogatory comments about another community, for example, are often accepted without questioning their truth. Sometimes it simply takes the form of **overlooking** the other side. It means that within one group it is regarded as important not to be curious about what the other group is really like. A teacher from Dublin took part in an exchange scheme with a school in Northern Ireland. When asked what had struck him most about the experience he replied, "lack of interest." During the whole time he spent in the school no one asked him what it was like to be a teacher in Dublin. Likewise many in the Republic of Ireland would prefer not to have to think about Northern Ireland.

Sometimes collective superiority manifests itself in **aloofness and disdain**. This is often associated with class differences. There are elements of class disdain in the attitude of many to those in the Republican and Loyalist movements. In turn this can cause a strong reaction resulting in a desire to reverse the positions rather than confront the feelings of superiority. Many Communist regimes which started with the intention of treating everyone equally have ended up treating with disdain others with whom they disagreed.

Those who have strong **ideological convictions** find it hard even to listen to those with different convictions. Ideology when it is unchallenged produces a sense of superiority which can merge into idolatry- a sacred position. Some forms of Republicanism and Loyalism convince their adherents that their position is ideologically so superior and absolute that compromise is impossible.

Paradoxically those who for various reasons are made to feel collectively inferior often feel superior by virtue of being **victims.** There is something glorious about being an underdog. There is a link between inferiority and superiority which is part of the dynamic of rivalry. There is evidence in Ireland of a cult of victimhood which makes reconciliation with former oppressors very difficult.

Many people construct a **negative identity** for themselves- an identity based on opposition to others. With this negative identity they often boast of being superior to others but underneath are uncertain and afraid. Marc Gopin, a Jewish theologian, says:

> *There is often great identity confusion in many parts of the world, particularly among those who are violent in the name of religion, as to what their religious identity really is as an in- depth experience. It is for this reason that we see in violent situations or even conflictual situations that identity is defined by who I am not. It is what 1 have called a negative identity. A negative identity is not a very pleasant identity. It needs conflict and misery in order to sustain itself. .... If identity is essentially negative, if there is a deep doubt or lack of vision as to a substantive identity that can be conceived without the enemy, then there is no choice but to recreate the circumstances in which conflict with an enemy is necessary.*

We often cover over **fear, difference and uncertainty** by asserting ourselves, because fear and insecurity can in a strange way lead us to reinforce a sense of superiority. Traditional fears re-ignited, unite a community against the "inferior" enemy. In a situation of tension and heightened fear, those within a community who are less fearful and more open to building relationships across communal boundaries, lose influence. The resulting separation causes an

even greater communal sense of superiority.

One of the most difficult forms of superiority to detect from within is the superiority of those who believe that they **think and act rationally**. Those who cannot rationalise their feelings are despised and avoided by those who regard themselves as rationalists. As a result the "chattering classes," as they are sometimes called, have very little influence on everyone else. In practice, we delude ourselves if we think we can persuade people by rational argument to stop feeling a sense of rivalry with another group.

Neither can the fears and uncertainty that generate religious dogmatism be dealt with by purely rational means. Even those who engage in ecumenical discussion and activities are sometimes guilty of feeling superior to those who for various reasons do not. When a religious group feels superior to another group the rivalry prevents one side hearing let alone influencing the other.

This even applies to people who see themselves as ecumenists. Pastor David McConaghie of the Elim Pentecostal Church has this to say about **ecumenists**,

> *I find it really annoying when I hear ecumenists saying that people like me are fostering hatred.....Ecumenists, say they are tolerant, but they apply a double standard. They have to accuse me of being anti-Catholic. They can't see me as acting out of conscience, of adopting a rational, intelligent, mature position. They criticise the tenets of the faith that I hold, yet they say they are not anti-evangelical or anti-Protestant.*

In a situation of serious conflict a community which feels superior for any reason can feel justified in getting rid of, or **scapegoating,** the inferior who is causing trouble, rather than attempt reaching any accommodation. .This is classically expressed in the doctrine of Caiaphas: *it is expedient that one person die and that the whole nation not perish* (John 11:50.). This is where superiority leads ultimately,- that **sacrifices** are necessary in order to preserve the superiority. It may start with the thought of getting rid of just one person, but can proceed to whole groups of people.

Basis of Superiority

A feeling of self-righteous superiority can be based on power or size, culture, race, gender, age, morality or religion. Since this document is about collective conflict we will consider only the grounds which ethnic groups, communities and nations use to justify their feeling of superiority.

a. Power

Feeling superior is often linked to feeling part of something **bigger** and more **powerful** than the rival community. In the Czech Republic there is an area that used to be called the Sudetenland. It looks under-populated and has a feeling of former glory that has now gone. That is not surprising because after the Second World War almost 2.5 million German speaking people were forcibly removed from the area. Before the war started, despite being a minority the Sudeten Germans felt superior to their Czech neighbours. They refused to learn the Czech language or feel part of the Czech nation. Nationalist feeling was easily aroused in Germany to run to the defence of people of the same culture. The Nazis used what they called threats to their fellow Germans in Czechoslovakia to dismember the country in 1938.

Another example is Bosnia where the Serbs feel related to the Slav/Orthodox family, the Muslims are descendants of the civil servants of the Ottoman Empire and the Croats were part of the former Hapsburg Empire. Conflict in this area is not just local rivalry but can be traced back to these former links that made one group feel superior to another and at the same time fearful of them.

Concerning Britain, David Marquand, the British political scientist, writes:

> *Imperial Britain was Britain. The iconography, the myths, the rituals in which Britishness was embodied were of necessity, imperial, oceanic, ex-European: they could not be anything else. Empire was their reason for being British, as opposed to English, or Scots, or Welsh.*

At its very least Britain has traditionally given many people - English, Scots, Welsh and Irish - a sense of belonging to something big and above all powerful.

Power, of course, is not only about being big in numbers and size, it is very much to do with technological superiority, particularly as manifested in advanced weaponry. Until the middle of the nineteenth century small arms in the non-western world were able to measure up to those of Europe, but by the second half of that century European arms were vastly superior. The battle of Omdurman(1898) was portrayed in England through pictures, as hand to hand fighting, but it would be better described as butchery because the weapons used by the British forces could fire rapidly to a distance of a thousand yards and no Sudanese got nearer than three hundred yards. They were slaughtered in thousands at "insignificant loss to the victors" according to Winston Churchill then a war correspondent. Few people questioned such victories even though eleven thousand Sudanese warriors died and hardly any of the sixteen thousand wounded survived while the British lost forty eight soldiers. Might seems to have been assumed to be right. The other weapon that enabled slaughter and devastation to be carried out from a great distance and with safety was the gun boat which was to become the symbol of imperialism. Successful war confirmed a sense of European superiority.

b. Biological difference

The slaughter of "inferior" races by European imperial powers was at first justified as bringing Christian civilisation to dark places but this justification was, for many, replaced by the theory that the superior human races would *inevitably* overcome the inferior. Scientists began to discover species that were extinct and had to suggest reasons why this could have happened. Charles Darwin thought the explanation lay in some species being better adapted to the environment than others. Only those that adapted survived. In a letter to Lyell in 1859 Darwin considers the possibility that even within the human races there could be a kind of biological patricide with the *"lesser intellectual races being exterminated."* In 1871, Darwin came to the conclusion that:

> *"at some future period not very distant as measured in centuries, the civilised races of man will almost certainly exterminate and replace throughout the world the savage races***"** (*The Descent of Man,* chapter 6).

Istven Lindquist in his book *Exterminate the Brutes* propounds the theory that this extermination of people regarded as inferior by the imperial powers of Europe was continued in the Second World War when Germany carried out similar atrocities to "inferior" people in Eastern Europe. There is evidence to suggest that the British Empire was regarded as a model for Germany. National Socialism fits into this mainstream of European history far more comfortably than most of us want to admit. What it did was to turn European imperialism on its head and treat some Europeans as Africans had been treated.

c. Culture

Superiority in size becomes linked to superiority in **culture.** What is it that **attracts** a people towards the more powerful power despite living on the circumference of its influence? One

reason is that the connection enhances their sense of being **superior** to the native population. Feeling superior in power and having a superior culture justifies trying to educate the natives. Frank Wright points out that this was often done with the wrong motive of eradicating the *inferior and superstitious* culture of the native peoples.

Regarding Ireland Frank Wright writes:

> *Until the 1820s the largely Protestant-endowed Education system had provided the only funded education in Ireland. In Ulster, Catholics made use of it and there had been little sign of religious discord over educational issues. Then the opponents of Catholic emancipation started what they called the Second Reformation with the declared purpose of using the education system to "enlighten" Catholic children. This is the background to the present system of separate education.*

Another form of trying to eradicate what was regarded as an inferior culture was the changing of local names. The famous Czech spa generally known as *Karlsbad*(German) is now in an independent Czech Republic called by its original name of *Karlovy Vary. America* is an invention of the discoverers. For Columbus the names of places in the language of the indigenous people were unimportant, as was their culture. He gave the places he "discovered" new, "Christian" names. Naming was thereby an act of claiming the land. The playwright, Brian Friel, treats this issue as exemplified in Ireland, in his play *Translations*

Sometimes very small cultural differences are elevated in importance to emphasise the difference between one cultural or ethnic group and another. This can give rise to ridicule but in certain circumstances it can even lead to violence as Jonathan Swift accurately observed in *Gulliver`s Travels.* In his fictional war between the Lilliputians and the Blefuscudians eleven thousand people die rather than break their boiled eggs at the wrong end. How the letter "H" is pronounced seems to be very important for many people in Ireland.

d. Purity

A sense of collective superiority can also be linked to purity. Religious purity often prohibits contact with those of different beliefs that might lead to a blurring of distinction. There is a fear of contamination by association. This partly explains the reluctance of many Protestants to become involved in any ecumenical meetings. The resultant separation increases a sense of superiority.

There is a myth of a *pure* ethnic identity and hence that there can be an ethnically pure state or territory. The Nazi movement in Germany tried to start a process aimed at producing a nation free of all non-Ayrian contamination.

In general the desire for purity leads to the desire to get rid of or eliminate all that is impure. Impure people are people who do not belong to us and are therefore regarded as a source of danger. In its most extreme forms it can lead to expulsion and even extermination.

Marc Gopin remarks that often those who are zealous for their particular religious grouping, desire not just to be **pure** and un-contaminated by the stranger, but often seek to break boundaries and try to ***consume*** or dominate the stranger. Speaking from the terrible Jewish experience of persecution, he says, the central challenge of human existence is *how to meet the other without consuming him.* There is a tendency for zealous religious people to want others to become like them, just as there is a tendency for zealous nationalists to want to swallow up those whose identity is different. The desire for purity motivates either the drive to push out those who are different or try to swallow up and consume them.

e. Morality

In any situation of conflict no side will initiate an attack on the other until they have made

their moral superiority clear to all on their own side.

Before declaring war on another nation, a nation or alliance of nations will try to justify the decision on the grounds of stopping cruel treatment of some minority in that area even though the invasion may cause much more suffering. A major recent academic study of "humanitarian intervention," by Sean Murphy, reviews the record after the Kellogg-Briand pact of 1928 which outlawed war, and then since the UN Charter, which strengthened and articulated these provisions. He writes:

> *In the first phase*," "*the most prominent examples of 'humanitarian intervention' were Japan's attack on Manchuria, Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia, and Hitler's occupation of parts of Czechoslovakia. All were accompanied by highly uplifting humanitarian rhetoric, and factual justifications as well. Japan was going to establish an 'earthly paradise' as it defended Manchurians from 'Chinese bandits.' Mussolini was liberating thousands of slaves as he carried forth the Western 'civilising mission.' Hitler announced Germany's intention to end ethnic tensions and violence, and 'safeguard the national individuality of the German and Czech peoples,' in an operation 'filled with earnest desire to serve the true interests of the peoples dwelling in the area.'*

When conflict breaks out the propaganda of both sides will try to demonize the other. The other side will be regarded as not only morally inferior but evil. The Serbs regard themselves as victims of aggression from Croats, the Ottoman empire, and now NATO. With this background of fear of further victimhood they in turn demonise the Albanians who live in Kosovo as justification for having driven them out.

The Tutsi people came to central Africa as conquerors and labelled the local people "Hutus" which means "slave" or "servant". The European colonisers of that part of Africa maintained and exploited these distinctions. When the Hutus sought to rid themselves of Tutsi domination by genocide they first labelled the Tutsi people "cockroaches."

Imperialist powers justified the "white man's burden" as necessary because of the moral inadequacies of the "inferior" cultures. The practice of polygamy, suttee (the practice of burning widows), etc. were often cited without being conscious of injustices in their own countries. On the other hand, Thomas Davis, Yeats and de Valera used "anti-materialism" as a distinguishing mark of Irish culture making the Irish morally superior to the English.

According to Vamik Volkan, an international conflict analyst, many paramilitary leaders have a sense of being victims themselves due to physical violence, rejection by peer groups, or breakdown of family relationships. They then find their primary identity in their ethnic group. Concluding from their own experience that passivity will bring further trauma, they take action against those they regard as the "enemy." Projecting the cause of their victimisation on others they feel a moral justification for what they do. When conflict has ceased, it is important to find a role for them in their ethnic group. Some could be encouraged to play a role in *restorative justice* - helping to heal relationships within their own communities.

f. Religion.

At a conference on *Sectarianism*, organised by the Peace Committee of the Presbyterian Church, a Ballymena elder said that one of the chief causes of sectarianism amongst Presbyterians was a sense of **religious superiority** over Roman Catholics. Sometimes this is based on a sense of being a chosen people, but more often on what they regard as their superior doctrine of justification by faith and not by works. In fact in Northern Ireland this doctrine, perhaps above all others, became the touch stone of religious superiority. In their

recent book *Anti-Catholicism in NI, 1600-1998* John Brewer and Gareth Higgins show that while there are various forms of anti-Catholicism amongst Protestants, all include a sense of superiority, and a defining of one position over against another. Indeed, for many Protestants, the need for a clear cut division between the two traditions is so great, any suggestion of finding common ground or ways of working together seems to pose a threat of instability.

Roman Catholics also have a sense of religious superiority. There was the claim that the Roman Catholic Church alone was the true church-now modified by Vatican II to state that the Roman Catholic Church is a church in which the fullness of truth subsists. Such understandings have affected and still affect the issue of mixed marriages.

Religious superiority is often associated with belief in an exclusive possession of the truth that alone saves. How this assurance is expressed or implemented varies from one tradition to another: claims about the inerrancy of Scripture, the infallibility of the Pope, privileged access to the Eucharist, conditions for the validity of baptism, experience of the Spirit, to name but a few examples.

Ancient rivalry and division between Catholic and Protestant have conditioned us to believe that one set of beliefs will always be held over against another. The rise of nationalisms in the 19th. century seemed to offer escape from the world of religious differences and sectarianism. However, as Frank Wright has stated, *nationalisms are not merely like religions - they are religions (*See article by David Stevens in *Studies* - Volume 86). Nationalisms use terms such as chosenness**,** purity and sacred land; - the nation - not God - is to be worshipped by the people. These ideas can also be the basis for collective superiority.

Superiority Questioned

We will show in Part Three that boasting on the basis of any of the above is challenged by the Christian Faith. However it is important to point out that some judgements made about groups of people in the past are now seen to have been wrong. A growing body of evidence is showing that when economic, educational and other circumstances are right, many ethnic groups, thought by some to be inferior, have flourished, e.g.. Some Western archaeologists when they saw an ancient site in what is now Zimbabwe thought it must have been built by the Chinese because they regarded the Shona civilisation in Zimbawe as inferior and so incapable of producing such impressive structures. It has now been shown that their imperialist judgement was wrong. The site is now known as "Great Zimbabwe". The "Celtic Tiger" is another example of a people, formerly regarded by some as lazy, who have developed what is now recognised as the fastest growing economy in Europe.

Part 2. Superiority and Domination

National superiority supported by a belief in divine sanction has been used to justify the **domination** of one nation over others. The ancient Babylonian empire is an example of this desire to dominate seeking divine sanction. The name Babylon means "Gate of the God Marduk". The building of the Tower of Babel with its top in heaven was to provide a gate for the god Marduk to meet with the Babylonian king to arrange matters on earth. The Babylonian empire had forced everyone to speak the same language. Imperial architects strive to make their name great by erasing the names and language of simple people and small nations. According to the writers of the Book of Genesis, God disapproved and shattered this totalitarian project by causing linguistic confusion. The Book of Revelation significantly refers to Rome as another Babylon. After the fall of the Roman empire those

who believed in the divine right of kings saw the king as a representative of God and with similar powers, subject only to God. King James VI and I made a speech to Parliament on 21 March 1609 in which he said *"The state of monarchy is the supremest thing upon earth...Kings are justly called Gods, for that they exercise a manner or resemblance of divine power upon earth."*

The prophets and many Christians have opposed these assumptions, but the role of religion has generally been to give support to a power in their struggle to gain and keep dominance. If opposing the enemy is given divine sanction or religious significance this helps to further unite the nation in its struggles. In the case of Britain most of the countries it opposed were Catholic and so a Protestant established church linked to a Protestant monarchy generally gave this support. The British historian, Linda Colley, suggests that a vigorous anti-Catholic Protestantism was a very significant shared element in forging a British national identity in the 18th. century. In Spain there seems to be evidence that the persecution of Protestants arose not just because they were heretics in the eyes of the Catholic Church, but that they were also thought to be traitors to the national cause or spies for the enemy.

Europe's belief in a world mission and its civilising role had a strong religious component. It is largely in the 20th. century that this essentially syncretistic relationship has been clearly exposed to the benefit of both European Christians and the churches in former colonies. The superiority of European Christian civilisation was often used as an excuse for conquering land and engaging in acts of barbarity against indigenous people. The Spanish conquest of parts of South America was sanctioned by the church. The Pope instructed the Conquistadors to recite a document to the Indians before using physical force. This demanded that they recognise the Church as *Governess of the World and Universe*. If they did not do so then the deaths and destruction that resulted would be their own fault. James Wilson in his book, *The Earth shall Weep-A History of Native America* writes that it was generally believed by the Puritan settlers in New England, after the Pequot War, that *the killing and displacement of Indians who resisted the English enjoyed God's sanction.* The continent of Africa also became the scene of land-grabbing by many European nations. Cecil Rhodes slaughtered Matebeli people and conquered what came to be called Rhodesia in the name of Christian civilisation but the search for diamonds was more than a side issue.

Alan Suggate relates how before the First World War religious people in Germany gave their unqualified support to the view that the German people must assert their superiority. Just before war broke out Ernst von Dryander, Chaplain to the German court, declared:

> *Looking to the state that reared us, to the fatherland wherein lie the roots of our strength, we know that we are going into battle for our culture against the uncultured, for German civilisation against barbarism, for the free German personality bound to God against the instincts of the undisciplined masses .. and God and German piety are intimately bound up with German civilisation.*

At about the same time the Bishop of London was saying:

> *I think the Church can best help the nation....by making it realise that it is engaged in a Holy War, and not be afraid of saying so. Christ died on Good Friday for Freedom, Honour and Chivalry, and our boys are dying for the same things.....Mobilze the nation for a Holy War!*

Rudyard Kipling seems to express a similar view that British civilisation must be shared with "lesser breeds."

> *If, drunk with sight of power, we loose*
> *Wild tongues that have not Thee in awe --*
> *Such boastings as the Gentiles use,*

Or lesser breeds without the Law --
Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,
Lest we forget -- lest we forget!

Protestants and Catholics in Ireland have used a sense of superior difference as a reason for trying to gain dominance over the other. The Protestant establishment of the 18th and 19th centuries certainly felt superior. Ulster Protestants when they take pride in being British also sometimes feel superior to those who do not claim to be British. Many of the imperialist generals were from Ulster stock. William Craig as minister of Home Affairs in the O'Neill administration, defended Stormont against the charge of discrimination against Catholic lawyers in judicial appointments on the grounds that they were *educationally and socially inferior.* This sense of superiority is a combination of religious, cultural and national feeling. It is often to be found amongst people who are individually very humble before God and other people.

After partition Protestants in the South of Ireland found themselves in a society in which the Roman Catholic Church was by far the most important institution. There was a pervasive Catholic ethos, sometimes enshrined in law and even in the constitution.

The motivation for the enforcement of the severely regulatory decree on **"mixed" marriages** by the Catholic Church in Ireland must have included a strong sense of being the true and superior church justifying controlling mixed marriages. When an attempt was made in Fethard on Sea, Co. Wexford, to oppose such regulations it unleashed considerable sectarian strife.

The ***apartheid system*** in South Africa was based on selected readings from the Book of Genesis suggesting that some tribes were forever allotted the position of *hewers of wood and drawers of water.* The whites believed that they were chosen to have the dominant position in society. Those parts of the New Testament that pointed in the opposite direction were ignored. Eventually even the Church which had supported these views came to regard them as a heresy.

There are many other examples of religious belief being used to justify the domination of one group by another. Bitter experience has taught some of the dangers of national feelings of superiority but there is also evidence that this lesson has still not been learnt. It is our contention that a rediscovery of Christian insights can help to lessen these dangers instead of increasing them.

PART 3. Christian Faith and Collective Superiority

The Christian Faith has often been intolerant and produced feelings of superiority in groups of people. We believe this should not have happened and that, on the contrary, the Christian Faith should expose feelings of superiority and set us free from them.

a. Israel according to the flesh (1 Corinthians 10:18)

The examples of self-righteous collective superiority which we have examined have this in common: the unity of the collective is created by comparison with, and exclusion of, or domination over, some other group. It is created in rivalry. At the time of the birth of the Church, there was rivalry between Jew and Gentile. Most Jews believed that if God was calling Gentiles it was through the Jewish people - i.e. Gentiles were first to *become* Jews before they could appropriate the promise made to Abraham. The movement away from such rivalry is illustrated by looking at Paul(Saul) in his identity as a member of the Jewish nation, Israel according to the flesh, before his experience on the Road to Damascus, and

Paul in his new identity as a member of the Christian community.

Until his ***call*** on the road to Damascus, Paul held the view that the Messiah would come to save and exalt the Jewish nation exclusively, but after his *call* he was convinced that the Messiah had come for all nations. We use the word *call* in preference to *conversion* because Saul was not converted from one religion to another but rather called to the specific task of bringing God's message to the Gentiles. Many Jews may have thought that what he was asked to do was a betrayal but Paul did not regard it in that way. He gives an account of his *call* in Galations 1:11-24. At verse 15, he says:

> *God, who had set me apart from the time when I was in my mother's womb, called me through his grace and chose to reveal his Son in me, so that I should preach him to the Gentiles.*

There are clear allusions here to the call of Jeremiah, (Jer. 1:5) and the call of Isaiah, (Is. 49:1). The word *conversion* has the meaning of a complete turn around to something contradictory. What Paul experienced was a radical re-understanding of views already within his Jewish faith. This point is important because the term *conversion* is often used in Ireland to describe what happens when a Catholic becomes a Protestant or vice versa or a Jew becomes a Christian, as if those who belong to any of these traditions must be in total opposition. People of different branches of the Christian faith are also described as of different *religions.* These words are used to exaggerate differences to the point where there can be no common ground between them. One result is that people avoid talking about these matters and so never find out what they have in common.

Paul, before his experience on the Road to Damascus**,** identified with the Judaism that had struggled against persecution and the erosion of their distinctive way of life by Hellenism. In fact he probably belonged to a faction within Judaism that outdid others in remaining faithful to their distinctive way of life. This took many forms but often focused on being circumcised, keeping strict laws about what to eat and what not to eat, and keeping the Sabbath; all practices that drew a boundary between themselves and the Gentiles, and marked them out as different. It was something to ***boast*** about as a collective. Feeling collectively superior merged into a feeling of collective hostility between Jews and Gentiles. This hostility had been inculcated with teaching such as this, found in Jub: 22;16:

> *Separate yourselves from the Gentiles and do not eat with them, and do not perform deeds like theirs, because their deeds are defiled, and all of their ways are contaminated and despicable and abominable."*

This is how collective superiority becomes an exclusion of other groups, in this case the Gentiles.

Paul described himself at that period of his life as full of ***zeal*** (Philippians 3:6). In other words he felt that he must keep his distinctive traditions alive and persecute any who were watering them down by getting involved in mixed marriages or fraternising with people who were not proper Jews. . The *model* Jewish zealot was Phinehas(Numbers 25: 10). Phinehas is remembered as the one who had maintained Israel's separateness by killing an Israelite who took a Midianite woman into his tent. This is also a phenomenon, that is known about in Northern Ireland. Many inter-church families in areas of tension in Northern Ireland have been persecuted.

Why had Paul persecuted the church? It was because of ***zeal*** to safeguard the privileges of Israel. Those privileges were seen as conferred on Israel through being chosen as a special people of God. Any group, such as the first Jewish followers of Jesus, who watered down the Jewish special identity by eating and fraternising with Samaritans and Gentiles was a danger to this special status of the Jewish nation and so justified being persecuted.

Then, on the way to Damascus, Saul experienced the executed Jesus as vindicated and raised from the dead, turned away from these attitudes and practices and felt commissioned to tell the Gentiles about the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Before Paul's *call* he was preoccupied with "works of the law" which were deemed to prove the superiority of his nation. That phrase, "works of the law," is now recognised as a special phrase used at the time of Paul . In the Dead Sea Scrolls (4QMMT) the expression refers to the particular practice of the law that distinguished the Qumran Community from other Jews and made them superior as a group. In Paul's case "works of the law" distinguished the Jewish nation or way of life from Gentiles. It marked a boundary around Jews and limited the grace of God to those within the boundary. It was a way of demonstrating superiority by excluding others. It was something about which to ***boast***. After his *call* Paul turns away from this attitude of emphasising boundaries to find a new identity in Christ that excludes none.

b. The new Israel of God (Galations 6:16)

Paul's *call* then was an event that changed his relationship to the Gentile people around him. After this experience he finds in Jesus the basis for a new identity that does not exclude. This new identity, a new Israel, the Israel of God, gives no grounds for one group to ***boast*** or feeling superior to any other group. All Christians are members of this new community that does not exclude, but inevitably they will also belong to some other social grouping. Paul did not disown his Jewish roots. To give priority to their new identity in the new Israel of God Christians do not need to cut themselves off from their other identities but they do need to be critical of them.

Unfortunately in our western over - concentration on the individual we have tended only to see Paul's transformation in terms of a personal experience, leaving out the new identity that it gave him in a new community or humanity that did not exclude.

If we are to see the relevance of the Gospel for community relations we must understand that it is good news not just for individuals but for the formation of a new kind of community that is not based on rivalry. Three examples in the ministry of Jesus illustrate the importance of the new community that is not based on rivalry and exclusion.

Jesus chose twelve disciples, a clear reference to the twelve tribes of Israel. On the night when he shared his last supper with his disciples he made it clear that the new Israel will be founded on his death. Jesus calls not just for individuals to follow him but for the formation of a new Israel, a new humanity.

When Jesus announced in Nazareth at the beginning of his ministry the *Year of the Lord's Favour* (Isaiah 61:1-3) (See also the year of *Jubilee* described in Leviticus 25 and Deuteronomy 15), the people approved of his gracious words. Then Jesus went on to tell of Gentile people who had received favour from the Lord and immediately the crowd, angry that Jesus should have included Gentiles, hustled him out of the town and would have thrown him off the cliff, but he passed through the crowd and walked away.

Jesus also attacked the purity codes that resulted in many people being excluded. He was strongly criticised for mixing with the "impure." Women suffered from the purity code and Jesus seems to have deliberately broken the purity rules. An example of this is found in Mark 5:25-34, where Jesus heals a woman who suffered from an issue of blood for twelve years. According to Luke 5:13, Jesus touched a man suffering from a skin disease and therefore impure. The man is also healed.

After the resurrection of Christ and through the work of the Holy Spirit a new community was brought together that did not exclude, a new Israel. People from very different cultural

and religious backgrounds, both Jewish and Gentile, formerly in rivalry, and boasting of their superiority for one reason or another, came together by faith in Christ. A fundamental Christian belief is that God in Jesus Christ became a victim of particular religious and nationalist ideologies. From that position of victimhood and vulnerability he offered us forgiveness and the possibility of a new form of belonging and coming together without domination. This is the opposite of a belonging and coming together that is forced, as we shall see when we look at exclusion. It is, as the Catholic theologian, James Alison says: "*a new human way of belonging, of being-with, without any over against.*"

Sociologists may say that such a community that is not over against another is impossible to conceive. Humanly speaking this may be so. It is nowhere suggested in the New Testament that this new community was without problems. There were times when relations became strained and sometimes one side indulged in boasting about their superiority to the other. Paul condemned this collective boasting. His condemnation of boasting has however often been interpreted as referring only to individuals, but he is in fact condemning the collective self justification of one group over against other groups.

When Paul finds that even within the new community of the Church disputes and zealous arguments between groups can break out he does not advocate separation, or that one group exclude another, rather, he advocates a *"welcome to anyone whose faith is not strong,"* and then adds the comment *"but do not get into arguments about doubtful points"* (Romans 14:2-3.). Paul takes as an example the conflict which arose out of different ways of keeping Jewish feast-days. Some will say these days must be kept holy by resting, others will say it is not necessary to stop working, and it is more sensible to labour on those days. Paul says both groups are free to choose their own way provided they do so "***in relation to the Lord***" (Romans 14;6.). One group honours God by resting, the other by working. Neither group should **boast** about being superior, because both in different ways are acting to honour the Lord. Paul also says the two groups should do more than just tolerate each other. They should accept each other in Christ.

This is the relational basis for genuine tolerance of different ways of honouring God. Some congregations in Ireland have experienced considerable tensions over the wearing of hats, the introduction of organs, the use of candles and the position of the altar. Paul in his letter to the Romans not only calls for tolerance on such matters of indifference (*adiaphora*), he calls on groups who differ "*to welcome one another*." That implies reaching out actively to include into one's circle others with whom we differ. It is an openness between persons, a readiness for **relationships**.

Many of Paul's letters are concerned with how God's new covenant could include people previously seen as excluded by the old covenant. It was a major problem for Paul that the Hebrew people regarded themselves as superior to Gentiles and exclusively privileged by God. How could the *inferior* Gentiles who had not the benefits of the civilising Law of Moses become full members of the new community of the Messiah without first becoming Jews? That was the key question. It was Paul's wonderful discovery that Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation, believed "before he was circumcised," in other words, before he knew the Law. It answers the question that was such a problem for Paul. Since Abraham was justified or made right with God by faith and not by keeping the Law there were no grounds for excluding Gentiles because Abraham had been like a Gentile who comes to faith.

As we said, there is evidence that even in the early Church this trans-national community, based on the self-giving of Jesus Christ, had difficulties in overcoming tendencies to exclude on the basis of superiority. These tendencies became much more prominent as ethnic and national rivalry developed over the centuries throughout Europe. Religion and nationalism became mixed. **Instead of a new Israel that excluded none some began to see their own nation as a new Israel over against others.** In lreland and in many other places the

maintenance of cultural and religious boundaries took priority over the new universal identity in Christ. It is also a terrible condemnation of European Christianity that throughout the years when imperial powers justified the domination of other ethnic groups on the grounds of their cultural and religious superiority, this was not sufficiently opposed by the churches. It is with shame that we have to acknowledge that Biblical justification was also sought for the system of apartheid in South Africa.

Within the church, a denominationalism, which sets one group of Christians over against another, is evidence that Christians are still tempted to exclude and find unity in one group by making comparisons with another. As we have seen, there is no ground for one group to feel superior to another. At the end of a millennium marked by Christians excluding one another it is time to make clear to a sceptical world that Christians can accept one another, differences and all. The image conveyed to the world of Christians fighting one another in Ireland can only be reversed when every opportunity is taken to bring Christians together from different traditions. Christians often underestimate how important such coming together is to create hope in the face of communal rivalry that appears to have no end.

This does not mean that Christians will cease to have any national or cultural identity, but it does mean that those identities must not dominate their lives.

It is our contention that the basis for the living together of different groups in society cannot be by the enforced ignoring of differences such as was tried in Tito's Yugoslavia because this does not heal relationships. The concept of a pluralist society in which any belief or culture is allowed provided it does not harm others is a considerable improvement, but without acknowledging a relationship with God that relates groups to each other in a way that brings healing, intolerance is always liable to return and result in further conflict.

The new Israel like the old is to be a blessing for the nations of the world. This does not mean that the churches have all the answers to the political problems of the nations. The Irish Presbyterian, Terence McCaughey in his book, *Memory & Redemption*, says that when Christians meet together the most they can do is to *"agree only on **directions**, not on an agreed list of directives."* The new Israel is to be a blessing not so much by giving advice to the world but by being a truly non excluding community that can disturb the nations in a similar way that mixed marriages can disturb those who like to live in exclusive communities.

The nations also require to be blessed by people of faith, faith that can move mountains, i.e. the mind sets that make obstacles to movement. José Miranda points out that the expression *"the last judgement"* means *"God's justice coming at last."* Paul's Gospel *"deals with the justice for which the world and peoples and society have been waiting*." This requires faith that God will not give up on people who have acted unjustly, that God will continue to work to bring **healing** to relationships that have gone wrong, that God desires the **reweaving of community**.

Just as within the new community of Christ, the new Israel, we often have to struggle to find ways to accommodate great diversity of opinion and practice so we need people who can work at reconciliation in and between the nations when the tide is flowing the other way. We need people who are concerned to find an **accommodation** in relationships rather than insisting on their own ideal of what is just. We need people who with enthusiasm carry out **obligations** arising from relationships that have been agreed. God it seems never leaves us without such people of faith for we believe that God has a greater plan for human life than never ending conflict, and that the new Israel has a vital part to play in that plan.

c. Justification. (Romans 3:27-31)

For some time a number of New Testament scholars have been moving beyond the old Protestant/Catholic disputes about the meaning of *Justification.* Does God count someone as righteous even though they are not, **"grace imputed**," or does God actually make the person righteous, **"grace infused?"** Or put more succinctly does the term *justify* mean *make righteous* (traditional Catholic) or *reckon as righteous* (traditional Protestant)?

These questions all arise because people largely thought in Greek/Roman ways about justice as some kind of entity on its own that could be conferred on or inculcated into individual people. On both sides it became a matter very much to do with the individual. Am I justified? Will I be saved by faith or through the sacraments? In the Greco- Roman view of justice, relationships can be ignored so as to pronounce an unbiased judgement. Those who do wrong must be punished for what they have done so that the *Roman law court scales* can be balanced. In Greco-Roman thought righteousness/justice was *an ideal* against which a person measured him/herself, hence the expression "justice must be satisfied." The image of a blindfolded woman, sword in her right hand and scales in her left, sums up this view of justice. If this view is correct then God is unjust because God in dealing with Israel never steps outside the covenant relationship to gain a detached (blindfolded) position. God does show partiality. It is the partiality caused by a relationship. Hosea pronounces God's judgement on the disloyalty of Israel, but it is the judgement of One bound to Israel in a covenant similar to that of a husband and wife.

In Hebrew thought justice is something a person has only in the context of social relationships. A person is just if they carry out the obligations that arise out of a relationship. The Biblical idea of **justice can be described as fidelity to the demands of a relationship**. God is righteous because he meets all obligations due to relationships entered into through creation, the call of Abraham, the covenant with Israel and the new covenant in Christ. People are righteous when they carry out the obligations laid upon them through their relationship with God and with the covenant community. Indeed the just individual is praised because he/she helps preserve the peace and wholeness of the community. People are righteous only when they meet claims that others have on them by virtue of their particular relationship. E.g. a king is righteous when he fulfils his responsibilities towards his people (1 Samuel 24:17). Our righteousness will be measured by how we as individuals and as a group fulfil our responsibilities towards others. What we cannot do is pursue an ideal of justice unrelated to others or unwilling to embrace others.

The relational and social character of ***justification*** is brought out in Paul's letter to the Romans where it is discussed in the context of the relationship between Gentile and Jewish Christians. In Rome, for a time, Jewish people were persecuted and driven out of the city under Emperor Claudius. When they returned the Gentile Christians had organised themselves in house churches. Observance of the three major practices that defined ethnic Jews - circumcision, food laws, and festival observance - would have lagged considerably. The returning refugees were disturbed by the changes wrought in their absence, and a crucial struggle began. Should they all observe the Jewish law? Why or why not? How can they get along together if they don't all agree? Probably power, status, and leadership issues were involved as well.

Paul decided to write a letter to them to deal with this issue. In the letter Paul is primarily concerned not with individual salvation but with corporately redefining the people of God so as to include both ethnic groups. In Romans 1:1-15 Paul introduces himself and the Gospel to Jews and Gentiles, Greeks and barbarians, explaining why he is writing. He begins with his main point in 1:16-18, that the Gospel he proclaims is powerful enough to bring salvation to both Jews and Gentiles on the same basis, that of faith. Everyone, both Jews and Gentiles, have sinned equally and deserve condemnation. Yet through the grace of God expressed in

the faithfulness of Jesus Christ, both Jew and Gentile may be made righteous (3:21-26). Consequently there is no room for boasting on anyone's part, neither those who are circumcised nor those who are not, i.e. boasting as a member of either group (3:27-31):

> *Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes of Gentiles also; since God is one; and he will **justify** the circumcised on the ground of faith and the uncircumcised through the same faith.*

The New Testament scholar, Markus Barth, in an article *Jews and Gentiles: the social character of justification in Paul* expounding Galatians 2:14ff, writes:

> *Justification in Christ is thus not an individual miracle, happening to this person or that person, which each may seek to possess for himself. Rather **justification** by grace is the joining together of this person and that person, of the near and far ... it is a social event.*

Justification means to cease scapegoating the other because both have sinned, having driven out (scapegoated) Jesus. To be *justified* is to be set right in and for that new relationship between Jew and Gentile made possible by faith in Jesus Christ. It is not possible to have individual justification without being concerned for just relationships with our neighbour and between communities, for that is the nature of God's justice.

If justification involves a joining together of people then we cannot take pride in our individual justification while others are excluded. Unfortunately the Greek word *dikaiosyne* can refer *to justification* or to *righteousness* or to *justice.* Many English translations reveal a bias towards *righteousness* and often the word *justice* does not appear at all in an English New Testament. Justice involves more than individual righteousness. There is an Italian saying, *traduttore traditore* - "The translator is a traitor." This particular translation into English has meant that many people think of righteousness as purely personal. This has resulted in many people thinking that they only have to think about their own righteousness without taking into account their relationship with others. However just as God's righteousness consists in his faithfully acting out of the obligations that follow from his relationship or covenant with us, so our righteousness consists in faithfully and with gratitude carrying out responsibilities that arise from membership with others of that covenant. Within the covenant our responsibilities to our neighbour are part and parcel of our responsibilities to God.

The Croatian theologian, Miroslav Volf, uses the word ***embrace*** to describe God's faithfulness in relating to us and his unconditional acceptance of us. That acceptance must involve us in accepting or embracing others.

Miroslav Volf puts it this way:

> ***There can be no justice without the will to embrace****..... My point is simple: to agree on justice you need to make space in yourself for the perspective of the other, and in order to make space, you need to want to embrace the other. If you insist that others do not belong to you and you to them, that their perspective should not muddle yours, you will have your justice and they will have theirs; your justices will clash and there will be no justice between you. The knowledge of justice depends on the will to embrace. The relationship between justice and embrace goes deeper, however. Embrace is part and parcel of the very definition of justice.*

All this is in contrast to self-justification which is always done over against someone else or some other group. Self justification and sectarianism are very similar. Justification is to be set in a new relationship with God and with others who are different with the obligations of the new relationship.

d. The Spirit of God (Acts 2:1-13)

At Pentecost, as recorded in Acts 2:1-13 an alternative to the imperial unity of Babel is created. Representatives of the nations are gathered in Jerusalem. All hear the apostles speak ***in their own language***. not in a single imposed language. Pentecost overcomes the confusion and ethnic rivalry of the world not by returning to a cultural and totalitarian uniformity but by advancing towards a harmony with cultural diversity. We are told that before Babel the whole of humanity spoke **one language**. After Pentecost people from "every nation under heaven" hear the disciples speaking in their "own tongue." Pentecost does not bring about a forced linguistic/cultural uniformity. People, while still from divers cultures, understand one another. In other words it is an alternative to the imperial, imposed unity of Babel. Earlier we mentioned many examples of imposed uniformity justified by imperial superiority. This event at Pentecost bears witness to a completely different harmony amongst the nations made possible by the Spirit of God. Paul uses the image of a body, with many different parts all of which are necessary for the functioning of the body as a whole, to describe the Church. In the letter to the Ephesians the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles is stressed but 2:15 makes it clear that this is not by ignoring differences. God's purpose is ....."*to create out of the two a single new humanity, thereby making peace*"....REB. To translate, "*instead of the two of them*" is inaccurate.

This is not something that can be achieved without difficulty. Soon after the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost there was tension between the Greek speaking Jews from the Diaspora, and the Hebrews- probably the Aramaic Jews from Palestine- as a result of the needs of the Hellenist widows being overlooked. These were two linguistically and culturally distinct groups. The apostles call the whole community together and representatives of the injured party are appointed to take care of all the widows. The meeting, prompted by the Spirit, of Peter and Cornelius, a Gentile, is crucial to the self-understanding of the early Church. However there is evidence that even Peter went back on what was revealed to him through this experience.

e. The language of the *Powers* (Ephesians 6:12)

Many people find the language of the *powers* in Ephesians either totally incredible or else ununderstandable. However, faced with communal conflict and the need to give expression to something that is more than the sum total of individuals in any collective, this language is coming to be seen as referring to something that is real and important. All corporate bodies- business corporations, cultural and religious organisations, nation states- have an outer material or structural aspect and an inner spiritual aspect. Both aspects - the material and the spiritual - are referred to in the Bible using the language of the *Powers*. The Orange Order and the Republican movement are more than the total of the individuals involved. They each have an inner spiritual ethos which we must discern.

Walter Wink in his book *Engaging the Powers* has done much to bring to our attention the importance of the *Powers*. He makes it clear that the *Powers* are not intrinsically evil, they can do much good in encouraging people to work for the general good, but when they get above themselves and demand total commitment (idolatry), they can generate exclusivity, superiority and domination. People can put themselves in bondage to them.

The *Powers* that put Jesus on the cross were in many ways admirable. There was the great Jewish religious heritage represented by Caiaphas. There was the power of the Roman empire that offered order and a Pax Romana, represented by Pontius Pilate. People, it seems,

on the whole accepted that the judgement on Jesus, made by these *Powers,* was for the general good. However the resurrection of Jesus after his crucifixion was God's vindication of him and showed up the danger of being in total bondage to these *Powers*.

Many people may not accept that they are in bondage of any kind by their loyalty to any *Powers*, orange or green, past or present. They fear only the bondage that might be imposed by the other side. In the introduction we referred to the fact that people cannot be simply argued out of fears and narrow loyalties for which they may even be prepared to give their lives. Such a situation requires a liberating act of God so that these *powers, mind sets, loyalties* can be exposed and put in their proper place, bringing freedom to those in bondage to them. We believe that the death and resurrection of Jesus was such an act. Tragically this whole aspect of the Gospel has been to a large extent overlooked.

Sometimes when people from different traditions actually meet, the myths they have learnt about the other group, their mind-sets, are undermined and they are set free to relate in a new way.

PART 4. Superiority and Truth

Truth is important. To say that it does not matter what we believe is not acceptable for Christians and people of many other faiths. Ignoring religious differences as if they were unimportant or saying a plague on all your houses, is no solution. Against this we can say a number of things.

a. Holding that truth is important does not necessarily imply that one religious group should feel superior to another.

How can we hold fast to what we believe to be the truth and yet remain free from feelings of superiority? Within Christianity it is specially important that we find an answer to this question because we believe in the revelation of the Truth. The Truth indeed stems from God. Nevertheless, revelation is not a one-sided event. God's revelation in Jesus Christ is characterised by invitation and response rather than monologue. Both God and human beings act and react, speak and hear. Therefore people can at no time claim to possess the absolute truth. Christian faith implies a testing of faith against experience and in relation to the views of others. Indeed it is possible to reject the views of other Christians without necessarily feeling superior. Because Christians believe that nothing can separate them from the love of God they need not be afraid to learn from and be enriched by the insights of others. In fact feeling so superior to another Christian that we do not listen to what they are saying, may well be a sign of an immature faith. Can one not say that the Christian faith challenges all religious claims to absoluteness and all church claims to absolute authority? God's truth cannot be totally possessed by anyone. We receive God's revelation only in *earthen vessels.* Absoluteness lies in God, not in us nor in our statements of faith nor in our institutions.

b. Truth presented in rivalry becomes a weapon to put others down. The result is to distort important truths.

Over emphasis upon a doctrine so as to claim superiority of belief, instead of liberating, can enslave. The doctrine of justification by faith has a wonderful power to free individuals from fear, but it can also become distorted if used to prove religious superiority over against others who are depicted as watering it down. The doctrine of predestination has the power to make people feel special in their relationship with God, but it has led Ulster Protestants to believe that because their destiny is in the hands of God, as a chosen people they do not need

to work at relating to other communities. Marc Gopin, says that it is a mystery to him how anyone can read the prophets of Israel and come to the conclusion that chosenness (election) means superiority. Rather it is like the chosenness of a child by a parent who loves all her children and gives each a special task to accomplish. Irish Republicans often hold a secular form of this doctrine that makes them feel that their day will inevitably come. In both cases it has led to taking less responsibility for working out solutions to their relationships with opposing groups. The term "Catholic" reflects a profound truth about the Church but even this term can be a source of pride that excludes others especially if the term "non-Catholic" is used. All Christians could usefully remind themselves that to say that the Church is *catholic* without its being inclusive is a contradiction in terms.

The vitally important emphasis on God's grace as the source of our salvation is fundamental to Christian belief, however, because of rivalry with Judaism from an early stage its Hebrew origins were often obscured and it was portrayed as being in opposition to Judaism. In fact, Jewish faith did not teach that salvation is earned through the merit of good works. This is a caricature of Judaism. Again and again the Jewish people believed that God had chosen them not because they were better or stronger than other nations but simply because God loved them. Obedience to the law, for Jews, meant that they were ***maintaining*** their side of the covenant, not ***earning*** salvation by keeping the law.

A leader of the Qumran Community, and contemporary with Paul, could write as follows:

> *As for me, if I stumble the mercy of God shall be my eternal salvation. If I stagger because of the sin of the flesh, my justification shall be the righteousness of God which endures for ever.....He will draw near by his grace.*

Despite the protests by many Jews about the Christian distortion of their beliefs, Christians up until recent years have not taken such protests seriously.

So too, many Catholics today strongly protest at the suggestion that they believe salvation can be earned. The following statement was issued recently by the Vatican regarding the doctrine of justification: "*Lutherans and Catholics share the common conviction that new life comes from divine mercy and not from any merit of ours."*

Holding on to beliefs about what others believe despite their denials can have disastrous consequences, however, this is always liable to happen when truth claims are presented in rivalry or with the purpose of putting down the other.

c. Holding that truth is important also means that we must continue to search seriously for the truth and not accept that long standing historical differences must be irrevocable.

1. In fact much progress has been made in reaching agreement on some Christian beliefs much disputed in the past. One of them is justification by grace through faith.

During the Middle Ages justification generally came to mean the act whereby God declared an individual righteous. Since medieval Catholicism was interested in the maturity and holiness of individual Christians it tended to see justification as happening at the end of the sanctification process. This created an anxiety in the minds of many as to what would happen to them if they died before having reached a state of righteousness. It led to redoubled efforts to attain justification by prayer, fasting, works of charity, frequent participation in the sacraments and ascetic practices of various kinds.

For the Reformers justification comes at the beginning of the sanctification process**.** When Luther finally realised that God justifies through faith he felt himself " *to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise."* It was a forensic or legally valid declaration of God's acceptance.

The old arguments of the Reformation are undercut when the **relational** character of God's righteousness is understood (See page17ff). Through Christ, God enters into a covenant relationship with us whereby we are counted as in a partnership even when we often fail and sin. The covenant partner being in a living relationship with the life-giving God can hardly fail to be transformed. Can, for example, any husband or wife ever say they are unaffected by the relationship? This implies that in this relationship with God status is conferred but transformation is also brought about. The New Testament scholar, Eberhard Jüngel, states that *" with this the alternative between imputed justice and efficacious justice in our understanding of justice is superseded."*

In the classical theories on the atonement, the work of Christ was not sufficiently related to God's intention to create a new humanity. Both the sola fideism (Faith alone) of Protestant orthodoxy and the sacramental-penitential practice of Medieval Catholicism relied heavily on the juridical image to explain the work of Christ. Either it is God's declaration of acceptance after a long process of sanctification, or it is a forensic declaration of a person's righteousness as if they were righteous. Either way it had little to do with the creation of a new humanity.

Justification and justice are interlocking concepts. It is not possible to have justification without justice. In the Catholic/Protestant disputes about justification both laid more weight on the judicial metaphor than Paul. After Constantine, when church and state became coterminous, the Roman law, which used terms like satisfaction and acquittal, became the metaphor for explaining justification. Today Biblical scholars are going back to the original Hebrew terms such as *tsedaqa and misphat* which point to a justice-making God**.**

It is due, at least in some part, to these new Scriptural insights that the **Lutheran World Federation and the Vatican have now reached *a consensus in basic truths of the doctrine of justification.*** For more details about this agreement between the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran Church see Appendices.

These two churches have struggled in their search for the truth and it appears that their efforts have been fruitful. If they had been content to regard their differences as permanent it would have shown a disregard for the truth. Differences between Christians should never be a reason for not meeting and continuing to search for the truth together.

2. There has also been some progress in recognising that important truths emphasised by one tradition cannot be ignored by other traditions without doing damage to the Church as a whole.

Gabriel Daly in a booklet entitled *One Church: two Indispensable Values- Protestant Principle and Catholic Substance* has highlighted two complimentary truths. The two indispensable values are **God's presence and God's word.** An emphasis on one or other alone leads to distortion. Gabriel Daly writes:

> *In a theology and spirituality of presence there is a danger that sacraments can claim holiness for themselves; whereas a theology and spirituality principally concerned with word can forget that God approaches us through the medium of symbols and that if we reject symbols merely on the grounds that they may promote idolatry, we may be blocking off the avenue between the invisible God and ourselves who live in time and space. In short, God too takes risks - including the risk of our idolatry.*

3. In other areas there has been little progress, witness the recent document, *One Bread One Body.*

There has been widespread disappointment amongst many Christians from all denominations on the publication of *One Bread One Body* by the Episcopal Conferences of Ireland,

England, Wales and Scotland, the teaching document on the Eucharist in the life of the church which presents general norms on sacramental sharing between Catholics and other Christians. This issue has been further highlighted by President Mary McAleese taking Communion at a Church of Ireland Service in Christ Church, Dublin.

It needs to be understood that there are important issues of truth involved in the area of worshipping together. The degree to which we are able to worship with people from another tradition shows the recognition we are able to accord to that tradition. Refusal to worship with them, or to limit worship with them, implies a negative evaluation-at least to some extent-of the other tradition. It can easily lead to a sense of superiority to people in another tradition.

The Catholic Church, along with the Orthodox Churches, sees eucharistic sharing as a sign of unity **achieved**, for to them eucharistic communion is essentially linked to full ecclesial communion and its visible expression. This eucharistic sharing can only take place then in the context of agreement on essential matters of faith and order, which we do not currently have. Thus agreement on the truths of the faith is profoundly important. Some evangelicals essentially take the same position-they cannot worship with Roman Catholics because there is not sufficient unity on the truths of the Christian faith. On these grounds a significant number of Presbyterian Moderators have been unwilling to worship with Roman Catholics.

This is a serious position and shows the importance of issues of truth. Issues of truth are matters of faithfulness. However, we must give an account to others of the hope that is within us, and thus the truth to which we witness (I Peter 3:15). This requires encounter and dialogue. But there can only be honest encounter and dialogue when there is the courage to explore, review and correct even those things which seem most certain.

In these matters we are in an evolving situation. Restrictions concerning participation in the Eucharist, where they existed between Protestant churches, have been gradually removed over a period of time. Michael Hurley points out in a review of the document in *Studies,*Volume 88:

> *the fact that Episcopal Conferences in other countries have not drawn the same disciplinary conclusions from the same doctrinal basis illustrates the secondary, changeable character of the latter section. For instance some other conferences do not, ... restrict the exceptional admission to communion of Protestants to "unique occasions", to "a one- off situation...*

The Eucharist is, however, both a manifestation of and a *means* towards that unity that is both Christ's gift and command. Enda McDonagh writes in *The Furrow*:

> *The Eucharist as expression and means of that unity should now be the focus of Church engagement. Preoccupation with difficulties should yield to concentration on possibilities. Agreed statements and occasional experiments should move to more systematic education and practice. At least this could be a millennial goal. After a millennium of Christian division and associated wars some deep transformation is called for if Christ's prayer for unity is to be taken seriously and if the world is to believe. ..... the move to inviting and encouraging Christians to share Eucharist could revitalise the participating churches and help overcome traditional, associated hostilities. It would loudly proclaim Jubilee and jubilation.*

d. It is only a living relationship with Jesus Christ-and continued serious open seeking of him-which will lead us into more of the truth.

For Christians there is certainty of truth in Jesus Christ and yet we are able to acknowledge, at every stage on the way, the provisionality of our current understanding of the truth. Faith then becomes a journey and a search-a search for and a journey towards fullness of truth and

abundant life. We go on that way with others who call on the name of Christ, who gather round the Bible and the Eucharist, and who are in communion with all those who have gone faithfully before.

How the Christian community is maintained in truth and how new formulations of faith are tested, are matters of vital significance. They raise the significant issue of authority within the Church which is the source of considerable disagreement between the churches. We are only able to note this here.

PART 5. Conclusions

a. All need to encourage positive feelings of identity

Before people can advance to new relationships of acceptance they need to be sure of their own identity. When our identity is strong and positive there is no threat produced in meeting the one who is different. On the other hand if there is a deep doubt or lack of vision as to our own identity, then we may find it necessary always to have an enemy. A negative identity needs conflict and misery to sustain it.

So, we need a strong sense of our own history, culture and denominational experience. Let us become more aware of the breadth of our heritage, not less, as some advocate. Look for and affirm the good things in it. Learn to take pride in the achievements of our own nation or cultural group without despising others. Cease creating a negative identity of our group by always thinking we are not like them. Let us not denigrate others through disdain, jokes, songs or attitude. Take an interest in the story of our neighbour. Look for and affirm the good things in those who are different. Try to build up their sense of worth as well as our own.

In fact most people have a mixture of identities. In the course of life the mixture can change because, as we have good experiences of other cultures etc., we take something of them into ourselves and thus expand our own horizons. We have to think of strategies for peaceful resolution of conflict in divided societies that enable people to enrich each other’s identity without undermining their own sense of identity. If we don't, a threat, perceived or otherwise, to group identity can create virulent sectarianism. Those caught in sectarianism cannot welcome the *strange other* while feeling that the very existence of their identity is under threat.

Christians have been given a new identity that is trans-national and trans-cultural. It is *elect from every nation, yet one throughout the earth.* It is belonging to a holy nation. This new identity will not mean the obliteration of all previous differences but in this new international community there can be no room for national boasting. Ethnic identity, while still remaining, must count for less than the new identity given to us by the gracious call of God.

This millennium has been marked by war and slaughter on a scale never imagined before and often by people carried along by a national fervour that assumed that God was on their side. After the experience of the slaughter of war many reflected on its futility. Wilfred Owen in his poem "Strange Meeting" expressed the feeling of many:

> *Strange friend,' I said, 'here is no cause to mourn.'*
> *'None,' said that other, 'save the undone years,*
> *The hopelessness.*

Many others became disillusioned with the Christian faith. Each nation thought that God was on their side. Disillusionment sets in when they realise that this cannot be. Many people

now say, "a plague on all religion" because it only supports division and conflict.

There is still in Europe far too strong a connection between Christian identity and national identity. National flags on church buildings are a sign of this. There can no longer be an equivalence between church and nation. Christians must begin to experience the thrill of belonging to a nation without land. Before the Falklands/Malvinas War the Pope brought bishops from England and Argentina together to share in a celebration of the Mass. In the past if Christians in Europe had felt a greater loyalty to their new identity in Christ and forged links with fellow Christians across all national and cultural boundaries this could have reduced the number of national conflicts. Instead Christians put loyalty to their own nation first and sought religious justification for extreme nationalism. As we approach the end of this millennium marked by ethnic struggle and cleansing it is hard to imagine a faith more relevant than one which gives people an identity that crosses national, cultural and ethnic barriers.

b. All need to have faith.

Abraham was a man of faith. He knew who he was-he had an identity- because he had a strong sense of being chosen by God. But he also knew that he was chosen to be a blessing to the nations of the world. He then in this faith took risks. He set out into the unknown, trusting only in God. That is still what faith means- taking risks confident that God will produce blessings for all from those risks.

In his commentary on Mark, *Binding the Strong Man*, the New Testament scholar, Ched Myers defines faith as **political imagination.** This political imagination is *the ability to envision a world that is not dominated by the powers.* It is the gift of being able to imagine a world that is different and then moving in that direction. It may mean moving into the politically unknown. Since this may mean acting in the face of seemingly insurmountable difficulties it requires faith. ***Faith*** in this context is undertaking the apparently impossible because God can be counted on. It requires political imagination to envisage a new community that is "for all peoples" and where there is mutual forgiveness.

Surely it is faith of this kind that is needed to make advances in a situation like Northern Ireland?

c. All need to repent.

All need to repent of feelings of collective superiority, whether based on power or a feeling of cultural, moral or religious superiority. The cross is a judgement not so much of obviously evil people but of *good* people motivated by religion or ideology or a desire for law and order at the expense of some other group of people. Unionist feelings of British superiority have led to intransigence in Northern Ireland as has absolutist Irish Republicanism which ignored the existence of Unionists.

We need to repent of the hatred that exists amongst so many towards the other side. We need to realise that hatred breeds more fear and only love can cast out fear.

Christians in particular need to repent of reducing the Gospel to apply only to individuals so that many who, feeling individually humble before God, are at the same time comfortable with feelings of collective superiority.

d. All need to welcome the stranger

In a modern pluralist society there is room for many religious and political beliefs. There is also a growing separation of Church and State. However, when- within such a free society- there is a growing number of people who are content, outside the work place, to live within their own circle of like minded people or people with similar interests then there can be a lack of a sense of a wider community. A further symptom of this may be a growing

disinterest in religion or politics. On the other hand in a totalitarian society such as the former Soviet Union and Tito's Yugoslavia the importance of the wider community was emphasised but at the expense of ignoring differences which were pushed into the background only to rise in more extreme form when the lid was taken off.

Paul in his letter to the Romans, according to the interpretations we have considered, is advocating that Christians should be committed to a different kind of society/community to either of the two described above. It is a community where, through meeting and sharing, healing takes place. It therefore requires its members to make a commitment to grow in their relationship with Jesus Christ and actively reach out to **welcome** others who come from a different community or tradition. It does not require the imposition of a uniformity which ignores differences. Welcoming requires **hospitality**. In South Africa some of those who opposed apartheid began inviting people of a different culture into their homes to have a meal with the obligation that those invited would arrange a similar meal with another family. This welcoming into each others homes had a remarkable effect as those who experienced it can vouch. Something similar is needed in Ireland.

This hospitality must also be a feature of church life. Where possible Eucharistic hospitality should be practised and other non-Eucharistic occasions of worship used more frequently for ecumenical worship so that people experience what they have in common and recognise differences in that context. The practice of *agape meals* could be revived.

Refusal to step out of one's own fold to listen to or speak to the other only confirms those within of the "rightness" and superiority of their own position or tradition. It is more than simply respecting others and then letting them stand outside. It is being ready at all times to relate to others who are different. It is to take positive steps to **welcome** others who are different on the basis that God in Christ has welcomed us all without demanding uniformity. Then, says Paul, glory will be given to God. God is glorified not with the victory of a "good" side over an “inferior” side, not by one side proving their superiority, but by people with differences accepting one another, because of their common relationship to Jesus Christ.

Appendices

JOINT LUTHERAN/CATHOLIC STATEMENT ON JUSTIFICATION

According to Peter Hunermann, President of the European Society for Catholic Theology, an historic breakthrough has been achieved by Lutheran and Roman Catholic theologians in producing an agreed statement on justification. Agreement on specific aspects of the doctrine and message of justification have been reached. For example *" by justification we are **both** declared and made righteous. Justification is therefore not a legal fiction. God in justifying, effects what he promises; he forgives sin and makes us truly righteous. "* LIRC, par 156.5

On 31 October 1999 in the German city of Augsburg 482 years to the day after Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the door of the town church in Wittenberg representatives of the Lutheran World Federation and the Vatican signed a joint declaration on justification. The following are some extracts from this joint statement:-

*3. **The Common Understanding of Justification***

14. The Lutheran churches and the Roman Catholic Church have together listened to the good news proclaimed in Holy Scripture. This common listening, together with the theological conversations of recent years, has led to a shared understanding of justification. This encompasses a consensus in the basic truths; the differing explications in particular statements are compatible with it.

4.3 ***Justification by Faith and Through Grace***

25. We confess together that sinners are justified by faith in the saving action of God in Christ. By the action of the Holy Spirit in baptism, they are granted the gift of salvation, which lays the basis for the whole Christian life. They place their trust in God's gracious promise by justifying faith, which includes hope in God and love for him. Such a faith is active in love, and thus the Christian cannot and should not remain without works. But whatever in the justified precedes or follows the free gift of faith is neither the basis of justification nor merits it.

26. According to Lutheran understanding, God justifies sinners in faith alone (sola_fide). In faith they place their trust wholly in their Creator and Redeemer and thus live in communion with him. God himself effects faith as he brings forth such trust by his creative Word. Because God's act is a new creation, it affects all dimensions of the person and leads to a life in hope and love. In the doctrine of "justification by faith alone," a distinction but not a separation is made between justification itself and the renewal of one's way of life that necessarily follows from justification and without which faith does not exist. Thereby the basis is indicated from which the renewal of life proceeds, for it comes forth from the love of God imparted to the person in justification. Justification and renewal are joined in Christ, who is present in faith.

27. The Catholic understanding also sees faith as fundamental in justification. For without faith, no justification can take place. Persons are justified through baptism as hearers of the word and believers in it. The justification of sinners is forgiveness of sins and being made righteous by justifying grace, which makes us children of God. In justification the righteous receive from Christ faith, hope and love and are thereby taken into communion with him." This new personal relation to God is grounded totally on God's graciousness and remains constantly dependent on the salvific and creative working of this gracious God, who remains true to himself, so that one can rely upon him. Thus justifying grace never becomes a human possession to which one could appeal over against God. While Catholic teaching emphasises the renewal of life by justifying grace, this renewal in faith, hope and love is always dependent on God's unfathomable grace and contributes nothing to justification.

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

This booklet is a reflection and evaluation of the changes that have taken place in a number of different time frames: changes in Britain and Ireland over the last 100 years; changes in Northern Ireland over the last 30 years; and changes brought about by the Good Friday Agreement and by devolution in the United Kingdom.

All these have had consequences for the identities of various states, nations and communities. Identities change over time; they do not remain fixed. Thus we reflect on Britishness, Irishness, Ulster Unionist identity and Northern Nationalist identity.

As the last paragraph suggests one of our central themes is that of identity. All identity is created in the encounter with others. How we meet others - respect them, give them a place - is the central challenge of all human existence. The Jewish theologian Marc Gopin suggests that the stranger - the other - is the essential metaphor of Biblical experience and a key to its ethical stance. The struggle of the Biblical God is to keep space open - open for the stranger, the weak, the vulnerable, the marginal - against all those who wish to write them out of the story.

The struggle of the Biblical God - at the deepest level - is also against the gods of nationalism who wish to exclude and the gods of empire who wish to consume. It has become increasingly clear that various forms of nationalism and empire are in fact political religions. They make something sacred, eg the Volk or the nation or the race; they celebrate sacrifice and the shedding of blood; and they offer secular version of revival and redemption.

Similarly, capitalism and consumerism take on aspects of religion as well. The dreams of consumerism are embodied in commodities, phantasmagoria constantly changing shape according to the dance of fashion, and offered to the crowds of ecstatic worshippers as the embodiment of their deepest desires. Through possession of things people define themselves, interpret their society and give their lives meaning. The language of logos and brands, of products and services, increasingly offers what religion once did - a common structure to living. The supermarket - rather than the church - becomes the central symbol of the culture, shopping the central act of 'worship'. This 'religion' attempts to define reality; it manufactures images, mystery and myth and produces sacrifices (the poor, the environment). The cult of celebrity also has elements of religion as well. Thus, the decline of traditional religion does not produce atheism; new facsimiles of the sacred arise with new worshippers.

Certain forms of being church were created in the 19th Century - both Protestant and Catholic. They created sacred canopies over nations and communities. This is starting to change; forms of religious life are starting to break up. However, we still need to reflect on the interaction between religious and communal/national identities.

Reconciliation in Christ is about being freed from anxiety about our identity: "If we are in Christ there is a new creation" (2 Cor 5:17). The Christian community is not built up and united by opposition to an external enemy. Instead, being with Christ, following him, allows a different world, a peaceable kingdom, to come into being. It is a space in which we can recognise and receive others, and be recognised and received by them.

But the Christian community finds its identity as a people of God among the struggling people of the world. Christian faith does not take us out of a particular culture, but a critical distance is required - in the world and for the world, but not of it (cf John 18:36).

In situations of communal conflict churches easily lose that critical distance. As the Croatian Pentecostal theologian Miroslav Volf says:

> *Churches often find themselves accomplices in war rather than agents of peace. We find it difficult to distance ourselves from our own culture so we echo its reigning opinions and mimic its practices.*

Faith is deformed to support political or communal positions. Theologies of enmity, superiority and conflict gain prominence. However, the subordination of Christian faith to human interest and animosity is, in the last analysis, idolatry.

Churches are part of communities and nations; they cannot be other. They are chaplains, reflectors, consciences, restrainers, discerners, givers of wisdom, custodians of memory and places of community belonging. Churches bring 'their' community before God. They are places where the 'specialness' and stories of communities and nations can be celebrated. Much of this is necessary and good, but there is another side. 'Specialness' can lead to exclusivity and a sense of superiority. Churches can be places where we are told - implicitly and explicitly - who does not belong to our community: by who is prayed for and who is not, by the contents of sermons, and by the symbols displayed or not displayed.

The church is a home for the community or the nation. And at the same time it lives by the story of a Jesus who died outside the camp (Heb 13:13) and who, while completely a Jew, did not belong to this world (John 17:14). Indeed, he was driven out of it by those who did not want to be disturbed by another way. All our 'homes' - personal, communal, national - are radically decentered by Jesus: "For we have **not** here an abiding city, but we seek after the city which is to come" (Heb.13:14). The church is a community where Jew and Greek, bond and free, belong (I Cor.12:13).

Thus, while **a** particular church may be in solidarity with a particular community or nation, **the** Church in its very essence transcends all social, cultural and national boundaries. It is in the true sense ecumenical.

The booklet shows that huge journeyings have taken place over the last 100 years, over the last 30 years, over the last 5 years. . . The Bible is rich with stories of journeyings, of people on the move. We seek to reflect on the implications of this.

Another biblical theme is that of moving through grief to newness; change can bring enormous pain, emptiness, lostness and insecurity. As we move through grief to newness we may need to find another story, to imagine ourselves and our world differently, we may find ourselves transformed . . . The last section is a biblical reflection on some of these themes.

IRISHNESS

Part of Irish identity has been based on opposition to Britishness, the British presence and British definitions of reality. In the period after the foundation of the Irish State a lot of the British legacy was removed. However, the relation with Britain continued to haunt the State. There were continuing economic and cultural ties; there was the running sore of partition.

In the last 30 years the relation with Britain has been transformed. Membership of the EU has been a significant factor in this. Europe has offered a way for economic dependence to be ended and for Ireland to finally get out from underneath the skirts of Britain. Britain and Ireland have been in an equal relation in Europe. Europe has also offered a way of dealing with the demise of significant aspects of the founding vision of the Irish State and the need for an alternative project and identity. The economic boom of the 1990s has increased self-confidence. Anti-Britishness has been fading away.

The two Governments have been working closely on Northern Ireland, particularly since the Anglo-Irish Agreement (1985). Northern Ireland is the last residual business of the old colonial relationship, where Britishness and Irishness have continued to meet in a pattern of destructive relationships and where the British Imperial State and its surrogates and the Republican reaction (and its dream) lock together in the last round of the tired old fight.

The Irish national project as it emerged at the beginning of the 20th Century had a vision of a separate, self-sufficient, Gaelic nation-state. This project involved the misrecognition of Unionists for it required them to fit into a nation they did not want to be part of and to abandon a way of life. Much of the vision had to be jettisoned or modified as the century went on. In particular, the attempt to construct Irishness out of cultural difference did not succeed, for example the Irish language has not been revived. However, the State was successfully established but on a 26-county basis. Southern Nationalists continued to see the island as a single entity, denied the legitimacy of partition and aspired to re-unification.

The South aspired to re-unification but was obliged to accommodate itself to partition. This accommodation took the form of a distancing from the North. The 26-county state built itself up and North and South went their own ways, re-inforced by their different war time experiences. A 26-county political community emerged with its own identity whose concerns centred primarily on the affairs of the South. At the same time the idea of a 32-county national community was kept alive through the provisions of Articles II and III of the Constitution.

The Northern Ireland conflict re-opened issues that had been put to one side. The distancing of the earlier period was no longer possible but close identification was also avoided. Political involvement in Northern Ireland, with the Anglo-Irish Agreement and the Good Friday Agreement, continued to grow.

There was a consensus on the Irish national project until the late 1960s/early 1970s. Since then the consensus has begun to break up. There has been increasing ambivalence about and questioning of traditional nationalism, partly brought about by the effects of the Northern Ireland conflict and by integration into Europe. Liberal and pluralist tendencies have increased. However, the sense of an all-island nation and the aspiration to unity have remained, but with consent and reconciliation with Unionists now being stressed. Some of this found expression in the work of the New Ireland Forum in the 1980s. And these understandings were put into in the amended forms of Articles II and III of the Constitution

which were passed following the Good Friday Agreement. The new Article III put an emphasis on a uniting of "all people who share the territory of the island of Ireland" and not on "the re-integration of the national territory" as in the old Article III.

Factors important in Irish identity in a largely rural and static society were land and place. As Ireland has become less rural these have become less important. Many people's sense of place has been transformed with the advent of motorways, shopping malls and suburban sprawl.

The huge emigration from Ireland and the creation of an Irish diaspora - Ireland's 'empire' - over the last two centuries has impacted on Irish identity. This relationship with the diaspora (an Irishness of the imagination and selective memory) has been complex but is important. Its importance has been recognised in the amended Article II of the Constitution.

An important part of Irish identity was Catholicism. The model and mode of being of the Catholic Church in Ireland in the 150 years between Catholic emancipation and the visit of the Pope in 1979 was located in the idea of a Catholic society alternative to the alienating British colonial (and Protestant) one. After Partition the Catholic Church was a powerful and pervasive presence in an overwhelmingly Catholic country; there was little space between Catholicism and Irishness. Mass attendance and homogeneity of belief were extraordinarily high. The church was of immense importance in civic society and in the intricate network of trust, recognition and obligation of local communities.

A way of being church that has existed for 150 years has begun to break up, precipitating a crisis of significant dimensions. There have also been a whole series of sexual scandals that have eroded the moral authority of the church and its influence in the public arena. . However, the crisis of the Catholic Church in the South goes far beyond recent scandals. It is fundamentally related to a far-reaching revolution in Irish Society going on since the 1960s. This revolution has involved, *inter alia*: a shift from a largely rural to a largely urban society; a move from a relatively closed and static society to an open and dynamic one; the opening up of the economy in the 1960s; entry into Europe in the 1970s; the influence of television as a primary definer of reality and shaper of values; the insertion into a global consumer society; an end to the moral monopoly of the Catholic Church; and a huge change in sexual mores. It is difficult to think of any country in which so many, and so great, changes have taken place in such a short period of time. All these developments have hugely impacted on the Catholic Church and created a sense of goodbye to the old Catholic Ireland. A further factor may be that the alternative Catholic society generated by a British colonial and Protestant presence - with a powerful church - is no longer required in a new situation of confidence and psychic freedom. There is an increasing separation of Catholicism from contemporary Irishness taking place.

Southern Protestants, after a traumatic period following Partition and a considerable diminution of numbers, have generally found their place within Irish society and within Irishness - the experience of Border Protestants may have been somewhat different. Protestants and Catholics had clearly defined spheres until the 1960s but this has substantially broken down. All this, however, raises a central issue of cultural identity for Southern Protestants (as it does for minorities generally): ambivalence between wanting to be different and wanting to be the same. While relationships are generally good with Catholic neighbours some problems remain. These centre around: isolation for some (particularly in rural areas); issues derived from the Catholic church eg interchurch marriage (although these have reduced); and some fellow citizens feeling that Protestants are not entirely Irish because they are not Catholics. Southern Protestants have shared in the

experience of the Celtic Tiger. Far fewer are leaving the Republic to find work and some are returning.

The economic prosperity of the 1990s means that the identity given by international consumer culture becomes increasingly important (at least to those who receive its benefits). The entry of Ireland into the global economy has successfully commodified elements of Irish culture, e.g. Riverdance and Irish pubs throughout the world. This economic success will also shift the balance of economic power on the island and will have profound effects in the years to come, e.g. politically, and in how Northerners (Protestant and Catholic) see themselves and see their relations with their neighbours.

Economic success, partly brought about by social partnership, has brought unprecedented prosperity to the Irish Republic. But it has brought new problems. There has been solidarity without equality. The gap between rich and poor is widening. The evidence of social alienation is made manifest in the poverty of the inner cities and the growing number of homeless people in the streets. This is the paradox of prosperity.

The Irish Catholic Bishops in their Letter *Prosperity with a Purpose: Christian Faith and Values in a Time of Rapid Economic Growth* (1999*)* - the latest in a line of significant documents going back to the *Work of Justice* (1977) - have raised important questions concerning human flourishing in the new Ireland that is emerging. In particular, does prosperity produce gratitude that leads to generosity and care for others or does it produce insecurity and selfishness that lead to exclusion? This parallels the two attitudes to prosperity described in Deuteronomy 8. One attitude forgets what has been given and worships the new prosperity; the new, more attractive, god who seems to have replaced the old one. The other attitude is marked by gratitude which evokes generosity to others. All this is framed within the context of a wider world of want which laps at Ireland's shores.

The arrival for the first time in the history of the Irish State of increasingly significant numbers of non-nationals from diverse ethnic, racial, religious and cultural backgrounds is launching the Republic on a path to a more pluriform society. Religiously this is leading to the increasing presence of Christians from Orthodox and black-led Churches and of other faiths. All this will raise questions about Irishness, particularly for those who see true Irishness residing in the 'native' people of the island. It remains to be seen whether the stranger will be welcomed or whether fear of the other will become a powerful force.

Part of an Irish society in transition has been the revelations in recent years of corruption and scandals which have shaken confidence in political, business and financial institutions. There has been a huge loss of innocence. Disillusionment with politics and politicians has increased. A decreasing number of people are voting in elections.

Diversity has replaced conformity in Irish society. No longer does one set of values permeate society's mores. There is a greater freedom and pluralism. But greater diversity, freedom and pluralism have led to fragmentation and individualism, which, in turn, has led to a loss of community and caring in many instances.

Ireland is a society in flux, with the old distinctiveness and stabilities dissolving. This is a speeded-up Ireland but little sense of destination. There is no single simple Irish identity any longer. The national narrative - Catholic and Irish - which dominated most of the 20th century - is more complicated and multiple.

NORTHERN NATIONALISTS

Pre-partition cultural and political nationalism integrated virtually all Northern Catholics into a single national community. Ulster had a distinct regional identity - even though between East and West there were differences - but it shared a common religious, political and cultural heritage with the rest of the island. The trauma of Partition for Northern Catholics lay in the fracturing of the perceived unity, the exclusion from the wider Irish Catholic Nationalist community and being made to fit into a British State. After Partition Nationalists continued to look to the South and struggled to retain their position as full-fledged members of the Irish nation. This concern was less than fully reciprocated in the South. The struggle for continued membership of the Irish nation and the lack of full Southern reciprocation are at the root of the ambivalence to the South that has marked Northern Nationalists since Partition. The gap between the two societies has continued to grow and has been exacerbated by the Troubles. However, the Irish Government has increased its political involvement in the North, particularly since the Anglo-Irish Agreement. Over time Northern Catholics evolved from a geographical category ('Catholics in the Six Counties') to a community ('Northern Catholics') reflecting its distinctive position and experience in a Northern Ireland with a Unionist majority and part of a British State.

After Partition Northern Nationalists kept a resentful distance from the State and became "a society within a society". The Catholic Church was the key institution in integrating the Community and clerical leadership was important. There was an intertwining of Catholicism, Irish culture and political nationalism. This has not yet started to unravel in the way it has begun to in the South. Northern Catholicism is in some ways different to Southern Catholicism: more orthodox, more devout and more strictly moral. Northern Catholicism has been pulled by two different religious cultures: Northern Protestantism and Southern Catholicism.

The enduring conflict between the main two communities, and its intensification over the last 30 years, has been an important factor in creating the identity of both communities. Each community has maintained its solidarity (and identity) in opposition to each other. The enduring conflict has also led to deformations of identity, caused by fear, suspicion, insecurity, injustice and resentment. All this can find expression on a very local and intimate level, in struggles over land, marches, marriage, etc. People in both communities have long memories and there are two separate, antagonistic and competing traditions of victimhood. Each community has threatened the other. But with their separate social, educational, religious and political institutions each community could find some precarious sense of security. In the interactions between the two communities there has been a "terrible circularity" (the historian Marianne Elliott): for instance, "Show you are trustworthy and we will act justly" (Protestants); "Act justly and we will show we are trustworthy" (Catholics).

Northern Catholics have traditionally been the subordinate community in Northern Ireland. A sense of dispossession, grievance, victimhood, exclusion and insecurity is important in Northern Catholic identity. Power was Protestant and British. The State was alien and biased. The equality agenda, parity of esteem between the two main communities, acceptable policing and the sharing of power are correspondingly important - this is a community in search of a state. The community has also had a sense of having the moral high ground.

This moral highground was threatened by the Republican campaign of violence. Republican violence created splits in the Nationalist community as never before: between those who

supported it (the minority) and those who opposed it (the majority). The Troubles shattered old certainties among Nationalists and led to a re-appraisal of nationalism.

Republican conflict with the British State has generated an increased sense of anti-Britishness and a reaction in terms of an increased interest in cultural nationalism among some, for example in the Irish language, paralleling what happened among Southern Nationalists at the beginning of the 20th century. However , in all of this Republicans are out of sync with what is happening in the rest of the island.

The Republican movement has gone through a series of quantum leaps in the last number of years which has transformed traditional Republican ideology: participation in a Partitionist Stormont Government; acceptance of the principle of Unionist consent; and the end of the Irish Constitution's claim to Northern Ireland. The British State is being remodelled in Northern Ireland but it has not disappeared. The Irish nation is also being redefined. (Many Unionists have failed to understand the radicality of the changes.) It is therefore not surprising that there are tensions within Republicanism with various splinter groups growing and claiming to carry the flame of the sacred nation. Further, decommissioning of weaponry before the achievement of the true Republic represents final apostasy - it cannot be done easily.

The last 30 years have changed the power relations in Northern Ireland. Institutional reform, demographic changes, political inclusion, Irish government and international involvement have improved the position of Northern Nationalists. There is no going back to the situation pre-1969. There is an increasing sense of self-confidence - sometimes moving into triumphalist mode, although with a continuing echo of the victim mode. Further changes in the internal power dynamics, increasing Irish Government involvement and Irish economic prosperity will continue to improve the picture for Northern Nationalists. However, taking responsibility for Northern Ireland institutions and particularly for policing may have its pain. This is a community and identity in transition.

BRITISHNESS

Much of what both Republicans and Unionists historically fought over is vanishing away. The Republican dream of 1916 - of a self-sufficient Irish nation - has gone. The British imperial State of the early 20th century -Protestant, at the heart of empire and in the vanguard of economic progress -which Unionists wanted to be so much part of and Republicans were so opposed to, has also gone. Republicans tilt at British windmills; Unionists wish that the windmills had the reality that Republicans ascribe to them.

The end of the British imperial State is working itself through in all four parts of the United Kingdom. Northern Ireland has been increasingly seen by 'mainland' Britain as not really "part of us". The Downing Street Declaration (1994) in which the British Government stated "that it had no selfish strategic or economic interest in Northern Ireland" is the climax of this. It is a truly astonishing statement for a government to make about part of its territory. It is even more astonishing that it was made by a Conservative Government, for the Conservative Party in the early part of the 20th century was prepared to support Ulster Unionists in their threat of insurrection against a legitimate British Government.

However, time has moved on. Northern Ireland Nationalists are no longer prepared, or able to be forced, to fit into part of a British State dominated by Ulster Unionists. Hence the need for the British and Irish Governments to work together and for the inventive institutions of the Good Friday Agreement which seeks to give expression to two identities while Northern Ireland remains part of the United Kingdom.

Northern Ireland is a place apart. Scottish and Welsh devolution may have more impact on the British State. Tom Nairn's recent book *After Britain* (note the title) is a perceptive account of how the British State has historically functioned. The British national minorities, Nairn argues, were too big to be simply ignored, yet too small to count naturally as equals or partners. They were instead subordinated through a system of informal hegemony, buttressed by empire. As the historian Linda Colley has shown in her book *Britons,* Britishness was a construction of the 18th century. One of the elements in its construction was anti-Catholicism - now left as a residue in Northern Ireland, but once a pervasive part of British society. Anti-Europeanism was another element. Being under threat from abroad has been deep in the British (and English) psyche. Contemporary defence of the symbols of Britishness from European 'attack', for example the pound sterling, has deep historical resonance.

By the end of the 19th century significant religious change in Britain had taken place. Popular Protestantism in Britain had almost disappeared (except in isolated pockets) and anti-Catholicism declined as a major factor in British identity. This change was significant in the distancing of Ulster Unionists from British identity. In the 20th century there has been a pervasive secularisation of British society and there is now a significant presence of other faiths.

Empire has vanished and Britain has been in long term decline as a world power. In the words of Rudyard Kipling, the great poet of imperialism:

> *Far called, our navies melt away,*
> *On dune and headland sinks the fire:*
> *Lo, all our pomp of yesterday*
> *Is one with Nineveh and Tyre!*

Britain is now part of the European Union. A sense of Britishness was enormously reinforced by the experience of two World Wars and the reality of external threat (thus the importance of Remembrance Day in transmitting Britishness). These wars are now but a memory, although significantly there is an enormous nostalgia for the Second World War when "we were all together". Post-war immigration has led to a multi-ethnic and a multi-racial Britain. There is a tendency for ethnic minority people to identify themselves as Black-British or British-Asian. Britishness and whiteness are no longer synonymous. Key institutions that carried Britishness, such as the monarchy, Parliament and the armed forces, have become less important.

The first rejection of British State subordination was the setting up of an Irish State in part of the island in the early 20th century. Ireland is where the imperial British State first faced failure.

Now, Scottish and Welsh - and possibly Northern Irish - devolution are moving the British State into uncharted waters. The UK periphery has been launched on a course of accelerated difference and novelty. Devolution cannot work without a renewal of the British State and this will raise the question of England. Britishness and Englishness - for the English - have been synonymous, but not to the nations on the periphery. Thus what are Britishness and Englishness today are becoming serious issues.

Devolution in Scotland and Wales has made the English more indifferent or even hostile to these countries, and certainly more nationalistic and inward looking. More people are describing themselves as English rather than British. The problematic around Britishness is a serious issue and it is a particularly serious issue for Ulster Unionists.

Northern Ireland Protestants differ in their reasons for valuing the Union and in what Britishness means to them. Some value the Union because they have a deep sense of belonging and loyalty and affinity with Britain - to its institutions, culture and people. They wish to be part of a British **world** or way of life. Others value **particular** British institutions and traditions or the British economic subvention. There are also those for whom the Union serves a defensive function: it is a **defence** of Protestant interests against Roman Catholicism and a United Ireland. For many there is a strong conditional quality to their support. For some being British is their primary identity; for others it is an addition to a more specific communal identity.

The British State and the idea of Britishness are changing. What it is to be British in a pluralist, post-Empire and new European context at the beginning of the 21st century is unclear. How Britain can remain a cohesive society with a shared national culture is a major question. What is clear, however, is that the meanings traditionally given to Britishness by many Ulster Protestants no longer have much purchase on reality. What is also clear is that the deep structure of British policy since 1920 has been to insulate Northern Ireland from British politics. One consequence of this is that there is an increasingly tenuous relationship with the wider British community. All this has created a sense of Northern Ireland being on the edge of the Union.

The deep insecurities and vulnerabilities of this position are a reality and the consequences have to be acknowledged, for instance the sense of precarious belonging. It is why the enshrining of the consent principle in British law and the Irish Constitution, as a consequence of the Good Friday Agreement is important. The fragile political base of their British identity is one reason which leads Unionists to resist any moves that would dilute the Britishness of Northern Ireland. It is why flags, emblems and anthems are so important:

they express and focus people's sense of belonging.

The historic problematic of Britishness for Irish Catholics has been around anti-Catholicism and the imperial and colonial modes of the British State in Ireland. Yet the British influence in Ireland and British definitions of reality have gone very deep. It is this fact that has led to a complexity of response and a complexity of relationships - hatred, love, resentment, rejection, dependence, aggression, infantilisation, inferiority. Increasingly, Britain and Ireland have found a new relationship. Partly this has been because of the end of the British imperial State, a maturity produced by Irish independence, and the fact of the European Union. But also because they have increasingly worked together on Northern Ireland. The residue of the historic conflict is now contained in Northern Ireland.

In Northern Ireland "British and Irish influences peculiarly converge and conflict and in the process get reworked in distinctive ways" (Norman Porter in *Rethinking Unionism*). The literary critic, Edna Longley, uses the metaphor of Northern Ireland as a "cultural corridor", open at both ends to the flow of British and Irish traffic. This complex reality has not been able to be dealt with in either traditional Unionism or Nationalism. Closing the corridor at either end will lead literally to a dead end. Ways forward in Northern Ireland must refuse exclusive choices such as: either Britishness or Irishness. The way forward is through both/and's.

The Good Friday Agreement is a serious attempt to grapple with the political and cultural complexities of the comminglings and clashes of British and Irish factors and local particularities, all of which have to be accommodated and reconciled. One example of this is that the Irish and British Governments have accepted in the Good Friday Agreement that Irishness and Britishness are not fixed categories determined by ethnicity (or anything else). In the Agreement both Governments "recognise the birthright of all the people of Northern Ireland to identify themselves and be accepted as Irish or British or both, as they may so choose." The British-Irish Council and the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference set up under the Agreement are further examples of the acknowledgement of the diversity of these islands.

ULSTER UNIONISTS

Insecurity and anxiety have permeated Ulster Protestant existence. Fear of annihilation has haunted, derived from settler/native opposition. So has fear of 'political popery'; anti-Catholicism has underpinned Protestant identity. These feelings have co-existed with a sense of superiority: religious superiority; of the Ulster Protestant community being imbued with divine approval; of Britain being more progressive than Ireland; of Northern Irish/British/Protestant values being superior to Irish Catholic ones. All this has led to a recognition of Catholic Nationalists based on fear and mistrust, which, in turn, has led to a relationship based on dominance and exclusion, and an absence of mutuality and equality.

As Irish Catholic power increased and the Irish national project developed in the 19th Century, a mode of Protestant strength and protection was sought. What emerged was Partition, and the protection of a British State and the control exercised as a majority in Northern Ireland.

After Partition the Northern Ireland State became the focus of Protestant communal identification and its policies helped to sustain community solidarity. Nationalist hostility and periodic Republican violence also helped to maintain solidarity (as well as anxiety). Community solidarity had to contain and manage considerable religious and class differences, as well as an East/West geographical divide.

The main cultural foci of the new State were Protestantism and Britishness. Indeed Protestant faith and Britishness meshed into one common fabric. The Government identified with a Protestant public culture and the Protestant churches in turn identified with the new State and supported it. The political manifestations of Protestantism, for example the Orange Order, were important and influential.

Identity was given a stronger British focus by the experience of the Second World War and by the post-war integration of Northern Ireland into the British Welfare State. But the benefits of the Welfare State were to provide some of the elements in the desire for change among the nationalist minority, which was to lead to Northern Ireland being transformed beyond recognition.

The crisis in Northern Irish society, precipitated in the late 1960s by the Civil Rights movement, led to the dismantling of the alliance between the Unionist community and the British State, culminating in the end of the Northern Ireland Parliament in 1972. After that date the British State sought a new approach to the government of Northern Ireland.

British policies deepened Unionist divisions. These political divisions and strains had always been there - between loyalists at one end of the spectrum to liberal Unionists at the other. But they intensified in the early 1970s with the creation of the Democratic Unionist Party at one extreme and the Alliance Party at the other.

Since the mid-1970s there has been a fundamental strategic question facing unionists of how the Union should now be protected. Was it through full integration with the rest of the UK or was it through devolved institutions over which Unionists might exercise some control? If it was the latter, should powersharing be accepted? If so, who with? No one view gained the upper hand. Political fragmentation and incoherence increased. Unionists also had to increasingly face the reality that while they could bring down particular political settlements they could not impose their own.

But at an even more fundamental level British intervention and policies widened Unionist divisions by discomforting a major aspect of Northern Irish Unionist identity - its Britishness. The signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1985 was a huge shock and added enormously to the discomfort and disillusion - "the defenestration of Hillsborough" in the words of the poet, Tom Paulin. It increased a sense of betrayal and abandonment by a British Government apparently unwilling to put down terrorism.

The response to the Good Friday Agreement when the Unionist community split almost 50/50 in its support of the Agreement has further added to the fragmentation, incoherence, and deep divisions, with families split down the middle and a fear of ever more unpalatable choices and no coherent alternatives.

Acceptance of state authority, law and order and support for the security forces, have been shown by almost all Unionists (except on the loyalist fringes). It is therefore not surprising that issues in relation to these, e.g. release of politically motivated prisoners, reform of the RUC, decommissioning of paramilitary weapons, have been and continue to be the most difficult issues arising from the Good Friday Agreement, as they go to the heart of what a state is.

There is a sense for Unionists of "everything solid melting into air", which the Good Friday Agreement is accelerating. The Agreement created a fluidity and malleability about the Northern Ireland State; the whole framework of society is altering. Further, the State and its institutions are being remodeled and this is most evident in the reform of the RUC. Reform of the RUC also raises the issue in its most potent form: who will protect us now? The release of paramilitary prisoners has offended a community's sense of right and wrong. The perception among many is that "unrepentant" perpetrators are rewarded and innocent victims of violence are not; that the sacrifices of the heroic protectors from unjustified violence are devalued; and that virtue and restraint are not given recognition. A party with paramilitary links is allowed to enter government. Thus, it appears, the moral universe is turned upside down.

Continuing paramilitary violence (although at a much lower level) and the refusal of paramilitary groups to decommission weapons means that the promise of peace has not come. There is the fear of a mafia society and of general lawlessness. Insecurity remains.

Of course it can be argued that the Good Friday Agreement has more firmly secured the Union than before; that Republicans have had to accept the reality of the Northern Ireland State and its institutions, and that violence is much reduced. Nevertheless many Unionists share the perceptions outlined in the previous two paragraphs. This has to be taken seriously.

The Unionist community has been profoundly disorientated by the Provisional IRA cease-fire - "all changed, utterly changed" as a result of it. Lives have been profoundly shaped by violence. The paradoxical solidarity created by violence disappears and the reality of the Republican movement - the hated enemy - will not go away.

Protestant economic power has declined significantly over the last 30 years and there has been a significant change in demography over the same period. There is a profound re-balancing of power and resources going on between the two main communities.

There is a painful process of adapting to change and the loss of dominance. There is the

challenge of the due recognition of the other and of relationships of equality and mutuality. Some want to return to imagined yesterdays, to retreat from a future which looks more and more unpalatable. Many opt out and seek to coast along in a private world of material prosperity (increasing number of Unionists in East Ulster no longer vote). There is defensiveness, pain, denial and numbness. There are increasing tensions within loyalist communities as a sense of hopelessness, abandonment and anger is turned inward, evidenced by internal feuds. Some lash out at the other community. This is an unsettled people challenged by the need to face the reality that security lies in positive relationships with Nationalists, not in domination, exclusion or separation.

A PEACE PROCESS IN TRANSITION

Background

All political arrangements are provisional and limited. They are not to be given ultimate value and they do not command absolute allegiance. The German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer made the distinction between the 'penultimate' and the 'ultimate'. Politics belongs to the penultimate; it is to do with our earthly imperfect, human reality. The ultimate is the realm of God's new world. It is revealed by God alone and this new world is not brought about by political action. In the light of this ultimate reality the last word we believe is not spoken by politics and power - the lions of this world; it is spoken by the love of the lamb.

The important ethical questions in politics are the relative questions of better and worse, of provisional good and limited evil. Almost every public policy decision contains some moral ambiguity. We cannot reduce political contests to a struggle between the forces of righteousness and the forces of evil. However, relative and prudential judgements can and must be made. And we make moral judgements in the awareness of the persistence of sin: in the champions of peace and justice as well as in their foes.

Political arrangements are of importance; positively because of the possibilities they give for human flourishing and the mediation of conflict; and, negatively, for the protection they give against violence and injustice. The task of politics is to promote justice and peace. Therefore, we cannot remain indifferent to politics and we must make moral judgements about politics. And it is why we pray for politicians and governments.

The Good Friday Agreement

The Good Friday Agreement has achieved legitimacy through referenda, North and South. That does not end issues of judgement about it. In coming to judgement there are pragmatic concerns, eg will it bring an end to violence? What are the alternatives? And there are also moral concerns.

A moral calculus for the Good Friday Agreement has the following positive aspects:

- there is the potential to end the conflict
- there is the potential for government and institutions substantially inclusive of the two main communities, and owned by them
- it provides for equality in economic, cultural and social rights as between the two main communities
- it offers the possibility of new relationships between the two main communities
- it enshrines the principle of consent
- it offers the possibility of a sharing of power and responsibility between the two main communities.

Northern Ireland since 1920 has lacked consensus. Its institutions did not have the moral authority they required to command the loyalty of the vast majority of citizens. That is what the Good Friday Agreement can achieve for the first time in Northern Ireland's history.

There are, however, certain negative moral aspects to the Agreement.

- The issue of guilt and responsibility for the conflict and for actions in the conflict has

been left to one side. It may be that pragmatically this is what political settlements and new beginnings require. We have, however, to acknowledge that there are moral issues to be faced.

A particular aspect of the issue of guilt and responsibility is that of the early release of paramilitary prisoners. It is understandable that this has caused genuine moral difficulties for many, as it seems that our sense of justice has been violated. However, the moral complexities of the issue of guilt and responsibility have to be acknowledged. As we said in our publication *Remembrance and Forgetting:*

> *Community conflict creates a context where there are all sorts of degrees and categories of guilt: that of the ideologues who promote hate and prepare the ground for violence; that of those who plan and direct acts of violence; that of those who plant bombs and pull triggers; that of helpers and supporters; that of condoners and bystanders; and so on. There is both moral and legal guilt. There are sins of omission and sins of commission. There are the sins of people who journeyed into the far country of violence. There are the sins of the people who stayed "at home", who remained law abiding but who have been consumed by anger, resentment self-righteousness and the refusal of generosity. There are the misdeeds of groups, eg the paramilitaries, and there are the misdeeds of the state, its agencies and agents. (p19)*

Issues of structural injustice are also a factor in this and David Trimble's acknowledgement that "we made a cold house for Catholics" is of relevance here. So are traditions of violence - of republican redemptive and purifying violence and sectarian revenge, of state violence and loyalist attacks on Catholics. (For further discussion of some of these issues see *Remembrance and Forgetting.*)

In seeking to move to a new future from a violent past there is a balance to be struck between the claims of punitive justice, of mercy and forbearance, of truth, and what is required to create the 'common good' of a peaceful democracy (see Ps 85:10). The early release of prisoners should be seen in this context. And, of course, the elements of risk, painful contradiction and ambiguity need to be acknowledged.

In the striking of a balance people may be left without justice and without any ending. New injustices may be created. There is the element of the tragic and the intractable in conflict situations.

Issues of guilt and responsibility, truth about the past and who has paid the price of the conflict are not going to go away and will have to be dealt with. But perhaps they can only be dealt with when peace is secure.

- The Agreement institutionalizes and freezes the present community division. No mechanism is provided for getting out of this system. We may be storing up big problems for ourselves in the future with all sorts of rigidities breeding dysfunction. There may, however, be no alternative at present.

Uncertainty

It is the uncertainty about the present situation which is most difficult to deal with. It is as if we remain hanging between the past - with all its siren calls - and the future - with all its

potential - in an uncertain present. It is the central task of political structures to give security, reliability and predictability to society. Their ritual and routine give stability.

Northern Ireland lies on a British/Irish fault line. The insecurity of this position has created much of the lack of trust, defensive living, injustice and violence. Thus, the two Governments have a central role in working together to bring clarity and help end insecurity and uncertainty. They are the guardians of the Agreement. It cannot be left solely to the Northern Ireland political parties.

Democracies are sensitive systems because they can only function when trust is granted and where politicians act in a fashion that generates trust. Satisfactory government depends upon a complex series of trust relations between political leaders and the population. If some sort of trust is not developed in the political system and the people operating the political system then there is persistent uncertainty and anxiety - often taking the form of feelings of suspicion, hostility, cynicism and betrayal. Everyone concentrates on self-defence. In such a low-trust environment as Northern Ireland politicians have a particular responsibility to act in ways that generate trust - in opponents and in the 'other' community.

Part of the prolonged uncertainty is related to the threat of violence posed by the continuing existence of paramilitary groups and the availability of large amounts of weaponry. Complicating the issue is a party in government with an association with a paramilitary organisation.

The goal is clear: to end the cycle of conflict by creating a peaceful democracy in which people live under the rule of law. This means the end of all paramilitary groups. How we get there is the issue. Involved in it are all sorts of inter-related concerns: acceptable policing, demilitarisation, the stability of political institutions, and so on. Making judgements (moral, prudential, etc) in this context is not easy (which does not mean that they should not be made).

Political transitions inevitably involve ambiguity and messiness, take time and are often very difficult. What we are trying to get is closure to the conflict. This involves focusing on:

- bedding down political institutions that will give stability and predictability to people
- creating an inclusive, integrated and just society
- working towards a state that has sufficient authority and acceptance to have a monopoly on force
- dealing with issues of forgiveness, repentance, guilt and responsibility and truth about the past, and finding appropriate ways of remembering without inducing feelings of anger, one-sidedness, humiliation and the desire for revenge
- seeking to find ways to generate trust, respect for others, goodwill and better relations
- a non-partisan attentiveness to the victims of the conflict **and** of the peace process
- repairing the damage to our social ecology produced by 30 years of violence.

What is required is a realistic hopefulness. As the American theologian Reinhold Neibuhr said:

> *Nothing that is worth doing can be achieve in our lifetime; therefore we must be saved by hope.*

CHURCHES IN TRANSITION

Particular forms of church emerged in the 19th century, which remained intact into the 1960s and later. At the same time linkages between Catholicism and Nationalism and Protestantism and Unionism developed. The churches provided much of the framework in which social and personal life was lived but it was a framework of separation and segregation - worlds apart. They also gained considerable social power and prestige. A particular and late flowering form of Irish Christendom developed with informal establishment. There were, of course, other themes playing as well, North and South: counter-themes of anxiety, pressure, vulnerability, marginalisation and exclusion.

The coming of partition in 1920 - one of the key political events in the 20th century - put very considerable strain on the Protestant churches, marginalising as it did for a long time the position of Protestants in the South. Church experience in both parts of the island has been very different and that has had its impact on the kind of churches that have emerged, North and South. The Troubles of the last 30 years have accentuated the strains.

The experience of the Roman Catholic Church, North and South, has also been very different. The Catholic Church in the Republic gained a special position in the Irish polity. The Catholic Church in the North became the key institution in Catholic nationalist society but found itself in a difficult and tense position in relation to the structures of the Northern Ireland State.

The Northern Ireland conflict has meant that socio-political matters have consumed a vast amount of energy in the churches over the last 30 years. The conflict has also consumed a vast amount of necessary pastoral care. Particular parishes and congregations have been profoundly affected by conflict and violence. The Troubles and a general insecurity have contributed to a general conservatism of church life in the province, for churches have provided safe spaces. A new situation for the churches is opening up; one which will bring far-reaching challenges.

The churches were one significant factor in preventing the society from going over the brink into chaos. They opposed those who espoused violence and the gods of nationalism. They have helped loosen the linkage between religion and politics. However, churches themselves have benefited in some ways from conflict and violence. The connection between religion and ethnic identity in Northern Ireland may have and kept churches strong. . The effect of an end to violence and of a political settlement on religious participation is worthy of thought. Many people have had a link with the church as a mark of tribal allegiance, to show clearly what they are not. Peace and stability will accelerate rapid cultural change.

The late 20th century has proved to be a chastening time for the churches in Ireland. The Catholic Church in the Republic has been humiliated by successive sexual scandals. The Church of Ireland has had to face anguish over marches to Drumcree Parish Church. The careful examination of the issue of sectarianism, which has taken place in the 1990s, has shown that the religious capacity to develop and sustain community is not without its shadow side; and that our truth claims can lead to the negative evaluation and treatment of others. There is a humbling and a winnowing going on. The many hurts caused by dominant churches over the years have come to the surface. There is a general decline in numbers and attendance. There is a rapid move going on from a situation of social prestige, influence and authority to one where churches increasingly receive substantial criticism and have their views ignored.

There is a growing alienation from the churches, sometimes taking the form of anger but often of apathy. This is particularly acute among the young, among many women and in some urban areas. Weekly mass attendance is as low as 6% in some Dublin working-class parishes. The conclusion of a recent North Belfast survey was that:

> *…the vast majority of Protestant people in the urban community simply have not come to church on a regular basis for years.*

The gap between the emerging dominant culture and the faith community is becoming huge. The churches are being culturally disestablished. While there are continuing enormous strengths there is a sense of 'end-times' approaching for particular forms of Irish religion.

The crisis of the Roman Catholic Church in the Republic goes far beyond recent scandals. It is fundamentally related to a deep and far-reaching revolution, which has been taking place in Irish society over the last 40 years. It is, in fact, difficult to think of any country in which so many and so great changes have taken place within such a short period.

The religious commentator Seán Mac Réamonn says:

> *Clearly, the cultural scaffolding - of habit, assent, consensus, obedience, tradition or whatever - within which Irish Catholicism flourished for a century and a half, has collapsed.*

The new culture that is emerging makes it difficult for religious faith to flourish. The sheer rapidity of the revolution leaves all the churches uncertain how to respond. Ireland's particular form of Christendom is disappearing. It is a much more complex Ireland that is emerging, more multi-cultural, more diversified, more secular, and with the presence of other faiths.

All through the 20th century there has been a decline going on in the number of people attached to the mainstream Protestant churches. This has been due to the effect of secularisation on the one hand and a drift to more conservative churches on the other. Our religious situation is one of increasing diversity.

Diversity within denominations is also increasing. Irish Catholicism was characterised for 150 years by homogeneity and conformity in practice and belief. This is changing rapidly with a much more critical attitude to belief, church authority and leadership or an *à la carte* approach - the Protestantisation of Catholicism proceeds apace. In the Protestant churches there is often a vast difference in outlook, tradition, understanding and experience between one congregation and another within the one denomination. It may also be that the significance of the denomination itself is declining; for some people being Presbyterian, Methodist, Church of Ireland, or whatever is simply not that important. It is belonging to a particular expression of 'church' that they feel comfortable with which is important.

Divisions which cut across denominations are of huge importance, the most important of which is the liberal/evangelical one. Irish evangelicalism is a diverse and fragmented phenomenon but it is absolutely central to the Protestant churches. How it interacts with politics continues to be important.

We should also note the significant growth of Pentecostal churches and of the house church/charismatic movement. Among many there is a yearning for a vibrancy of worship

and a demand for a depth of religious experience.

People are searching for spirituality but this search is increasingly dissociated from clearly defined belief systems or corporate loyalties. In a consumer and individualistic world people shop around for answers to religious and moral questions; the attitude is one of 'pick and mix', of what is good (and true) for me. The spirit of the age is profoundly suspicious of institutions, particularly those that appear to be telling people what to do and how to live their lives. The world of options and preferences that we increasingly inhabit makes long-term commitments to anything odd and counter-cultural.

The possibility of a fuller ecumenism opened up by the Second Vatican Council and the onset of the Troubles in Northern Ireland almost exactly coincided. Thus the developing relationship between the churches has interacted with how the churches have responded to socio-political problems and issues raised by the Troubles. Peace-making, community relations and ecumenism have been tangled together.

Relationships between the churches have been transformed over the last 30 years but it is clear that in the Protestant churches there is significant opposition to structured relationships with the Roman Catholic Church, and, indeed, that there is a deep seated anti-Catholicism. This is not just a reality within one church. Ecumenism is a potent source of division within the Protestant churches. New possibilities are accepted by some and rejected by others, and these all echo political hopes and fears.

Insecurity, fear and anxiety have permeated the Protestant churches in Ireland. They have frozen traditions, produced a culture of suspicion, put an emphasis on sharp distinctions of doctrine and led to the search for theological formulations to bolster up communal identity. They have found an outlet in negative energies and negativity.

There is a danger that we will get religious communities of withdrawal (religion as fortress against the world). In Northern Ireland there are many battered, bruised and hurt people who are deeply unhappy about the way the province is going and fearful about the future. There could also be a hardening of confessional identity into defensive attitudes and self-justification. A duality could open up within the Protestant churches, into those willing to engage with a new political and social dispensation and those wishing to withdraw from it, or to oppose it. There are strong elements of ethnic Unionism in the Protestant churches because Protestantism and anti-Catholicism have been significant elements in Unionist community identity. One of the terrains of the battle between ethnic and civic Unionism is in the Protestant churches. If the British element in Unionist identity becomes more problematic Unionist identity may fall back on Protestantism to a greater degree and raise further difficult issues for the churches.

The Catholic church in Northern Ireland is also facing difficulties. The acids of secularisation are also affecting the faith community. There is also the intertwining of faith, culture and nationalism which will come under critical scrutiny in the future, and may begin to unravel. A self-sufficient world will become more fragmented and more incoherent.

If a new kind of politics for Northern Ireland is to become firmly established, it will need to be accompanied by movements toward a new kind of society. Without an effort to build positive relationships and repair the social fabric there is no basis for a healthy society or a better future as a community. Implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, political developments challenge the churches as to what kind of role they are going to play.

For the sake of church and society alike, the churches could offer no greater contribution than to redouble their efforts to address the legacy of sectarianism, a contributing factor in the conflict we have suffered and a potential stumbling block and pitfall on the road to a new society.

Over many years we have fed sectarianism by defining our own denomination's identity primarily in opposition to other traditions. Theological disagreement has often been animated and kept alive by the need to tell a story which justified exclusivity, separation and division. Building up our faith communities has helped reinforce community division. And at the same time the divisions of our particular communities have been reflected in our churches. We have often allowed the stories of nationalisms and cultural and political identities to overpower the story of the universal gospel. Political loyalties and exclusive traditions have been put before the God who will have no other god before him, even in the church. Divided churches have failed to be agents of healing and reconciliation in a divided society. We have largely been satisfied to be chaplains to 'our' communities. In speaking to the churches in Northern Ireland, *Sectarianism: A Discussion Document* (1993) said:

> *What has happened in Northern Irish society calls us to a profound change of heart (metanoia). The call is to face reality, to abandon our myths, to accept our part of the responsibility for what has happened and find new ways forward together (p100)*

Of course, describing a situation can be all too easy and giving prescriptions all too facile. Adherents of churches are also members of communities with shared interests and aspirations, and emotional identities which can in some circumstances be perceived to be literally matters of life and death, and are certainly often matters which give comfort and security. Clergy are also members of such communities. The freedom to do something different can be all too limited. Nevertheless, the attempt has to be made.

There will be a necessary judgement for what has happened in Northern Ireland and the churches will fall under that judgement. The churches will also be scapegoated in the search for institutions and people to blame.

The church is moving into a post-Christendom situation. What will it mean to be a post-Christendom church? Bishop Richard Clarke says that:

> *Our problem in Ireland is that we do not know what a non-Christendom church would be like from inside. We are not sure how to express membership of such an institution, and even less sure if we would actually like this sort of community which will inevitably have an acute vulnerability about it.*

The temptation is to turn inwards and away from risk. Whatever happens we are likely to be smaller, more marginal.

How can churches be in full engagement with the realities of the 21st century, with a contribution to make to public discourse and yet be distinctive faith communities that have Christ at their heart? How can we be signs of transcendence and ironic points of contradiction to the worship of consumerism and economic globalisation and the idols of nationalism, racism and sectarianism? These are some of the challenges facing the churches in Ireland at a time of transition and rapid change as we stumble into a much more secular

and pluralist future.

The call is to be a penitent church, which takes servanthood seriously. The churches at the beginning of the 21st century are at the beginning of fresh journeys where much will be cast off. Some at the margins of the church have begun the journey.

Fresh journeyings require a church that is a learning community which has the humility to listen to others, which takes them profoundly seriously. It is a church **with** others, having the conviction that Christ is to be discovered in the neighbour, in the crossing of boundaries and in the breaking down of racial, cultural, religious and social barriers. (For a further discussion of some of the issues involved see *Being Church in the New Millennium*, Irish Inter-Church Meeting, Department of Theological Issues, Veritas, 2000.)

Fresh journeyings require us to be sojourners and pilgrims, to learn to see ourselves differently, to imagine our world differently, to find other stories, to move beyond fear, to be transformed, to trust Jesus. . .

RESPONDING TO TIMES OF TRANSITION

It is important for Christians to reflect biblically on the world they are living in. In this chapter we seek to reflect biblically on themes that are particularly relevant to a society in a time of transition.

Moving Through Grief to Newness

There is no conflict, especially deadly conflict, that does not involve loss. And when worlds end there is often emptiness, loss, insecurity and a diminution of confidence in the future. We need to mourn for what is ending before we can let go and move on. And the danger is we may not wish to acknowledge what is happening to us. The prophet Jeremiah tells a story of grief - "Your hurt is incurable, your wound is grievous" (Jer.30:12-14) - for a people who do not wish to acknowledge what is going on. He finds the speech to articulate what the community wishes to deny. The prophet seeks to break the denial and numbness of the people. And he affirms that newness comes through grief. Only then can healing start and "a time to build and to plant" (Jer.l: 10).

Trusting in Jesus

The stories of the calming of the storm (e.g. in Mark 4: 35-41) and of Jesus and Peter walking on water (in Matt.14: 22-33) both involve Jesus calming the wind and the waves and his asking for trust in him. The wind and the waves are descriptions of chaos, the chaos we find ourselves in in the world, personal, communal, political: "Then it began to blow a gale and the waves were breaking into the boat so that it was almost swamped" (equals: we begin to lose ourselves in the chaos). Similarly, in the story of Peter walking on the water, he attempts to go across the water (equals: go across the chaos) "but as soon as he felt the force of the wind he took fright and began to sink" (Matt.14: 30). Jesus says "Do not be afraid" (Matt.14: 27) and (Mark 4: 40) "Why are you so frightened. How is it that you have no faith?" (equals: have no trust). So, Jesus is saying in both of the stories: In the chaos of the world do not be frightened, trust me, come with me, I will hold you.

Finding Another Story

After the Resurrection, on the Road to Emmaus (Luke 24: 13-28), two of the disciples meet the Risen Jesus but cannot recognize him. They remain blinded by religious/nationalist expectation because they had all along fundamentally misrecognised him: "But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel" (v.21). Jesus had failed because he had not ended the Gentile domination of Israel. Only the retelling of the story of the history of Israel by Jesus and the way he breaks the bread - the memory of the table fellowship, and thus their relationship with him is recreated by this action - enable them to recognise him. The disciples had to be recentered - given eyes to see - to revision life. They had to enter another story - the story of the Risen Lord.

The Risen Lord returns as stranger, having been killed by the religious and political powers, given up by the crowd and abandoned by all. It is the stranger who finds the disciples on the

road - disillusioned, blinded by religious and nationalist expectation, deserters of Jesus - and enables them to find their lost selves. Thus the Risen Lord comes in acceptance, mercy and forgiveness.

Neither are we lost in our betrayal of him: in our complicity in victimisation, exclusion, violence and structures of sin. Jesus is alive; he is there to be encountered again, to be learnt from afresh. Part of the learning can derive from our recognition of this complicity - whether active or passive - and our awareness that we are, in various ways, 'crucifiers'. Thus we are led to humility and repentance.

Further, the betrayals and failures of the disciples did not set the agenda for the future. Jesus rose above all these things and went before them into Galilee. He invited the disciples to join him there, to go into a new future. So we too can go into a new future.

Knowing Ourselves Sojourners and Pilgrims

As human beings we need security, stability, boundaries, firm identity, belonging and safety. We need to be placed, to have a home, to have sacred ground. But as Christians it is equally imperative that we know ourselves as pilgrims, wayfarers, sojourners in a foreign land.

"Leave this place", God said to Adam and Eve in Eden. "Go forth to a land I will show you", God spoke to Abraham and Sarah. "Lead my people out of Egypt", God commanded Moses. The historical books of the Old Testament follow the movements of the people of Israel, from region to region, in and out of slavery and captivity, in good times and bad. "Whenever the cloud rose, the Israelites would set out on their journey ... whereas at night, fire was seen in the cloud by the whole house of Israel in all the stages of their journey" (Exodus 40: 38). And there is the constant temptation of wanting to turn back - of wishing for the supposed security of the past rather than facing the risk of the journey into the unknown (see Exodus 14 and 17).

The theme of journeying resumes in the New Testament. Mary set out in haste to travel to her cousin Elizabeth. Joseph and Mary were en route to Bethlehem when Jesus' birth took them unprepared. Where do you stay? was the first apostles' way of asking Jesus a whole range of questions. Jesus' ministry was a pilgrimage, into the desert, from village to village, across borders into Samaria and Judea and, ultimately, to Jerusalem. Leave your nets, Jesus said, leave your homes, and even your dead, leave behind the thought of possessions and security. The Human One has nowhere to lay his head. Take up your cross and follow me. And later: Go into the whole world with the message of the Gospel. Become a pilgrim people, renew the world through which you move. Remain free to follow your migrant leader.

Christians are resident aliens: "By acknowledging themselves to be strangers and foreigners upon the earth, they showed that they were seeking a homeland" (Hebrews 11: 13-14). No homeland here - personal, communal, national - can have a final claim. A tented people, we are always on the move; travelling by faith into God's future, even if it is not known (Hebrews ll: 1).

Imagining Ourselves and Our World Differently

The Gospel offers us an alternative reality to fear, frozen and defensive living. It invites us to imagine ourselves and our world differently. We are called into the house of Christ - the place where we think, speak and act in the way of Christ, where fear becomes trust and hurt permits healing. Our identity becomes formed in Christ, not in opposition to or rivalry with others. Christ breaks down the middle wall of partition and invites us all into a space created by him to find people who were previously our enemies. New conversations are opened up with liberating possibilities. The present becomes a place for risk-taking and for participation in the transformation that God is working on the earth.

Learning to See Again

The story of Saul and his conversion makes it clear that some people will resist the Spirit of truth (and the change it represents) and seek to persecute those who represent this truth. And as the truth becomes all the more clear, it will be resisted all the more fiercely. Saul's violence -"breathing threats to slaughter the Lord's disciples" (Acts 9: 1) - seeks to remove the source of the truth, for this truth is a profound threat to his present identity. On the road to Damascus Saul discovered the truth through his victim, the person who he was trying to persecute - the Lord. Such was the profundity of the change required Saul had to learn to "see" again: a new reality was brought to him through the truth of his victim.

Times of change bring new possibilities and new 'truths'. Often they will be fiercely resisted because identities are based on old 'truths'. Violence is a way of driving out new possibilities. We often have to be converted to new truths, to learn to see reality in a different way.

Being Transformed

The story of Jacob in Genesis 30-33 involves a person who wants to be a winner and is a deceiver and a clever schemer. He cheats his brother Esau out of his birthright, and thinks that by being a sharp operator he can find security. And at the same time he is full of insecurity and fear of what his brother will do to him - he is possessed by the dark. It is not surprising, therefore, that he finds himself wrestling with a mysterious figure in the dark (Genesis 32). This figure is at one and same time:

- himself and his fears and his past
- his brother Esau: the person whom he has wronged and misrecognised as a rival
- God - for Jacob wishes a blessing, he wants divine approval and he has always wanted this.

Jacob wins, he gets a blessing, but he loses his old identity, his old name. He receives a new name - Israel - and thus a new identity. He gets security but it is through a new relationship with his brother.

The story shows that real winning and security come from transformation and new relationships. They do not come through clever manoeuvring and sharp practice. Transformation does not come without conflict, pain and a permanent woundedness (or memory of woundedness). Jacob - now Israel - limps towards reconciliation with his brother and a new relationship. He has become vulnerable and he makes himself vulnerable before his brother (Chapter 33).

In Conclusion

We are being required to go on huge journeyings at this time of transition in Ireland. Old worlds are breaking up. We need to use the resources of biblical faith to confront the new realities we are facing - political and religious. New opportunities of political engagement have come. We have the opportunity of playing our part in developing a new political society in Northern Ireland. We have the opportunity to be part of a church **with** others, having the conviction that Christ is to be discovered in the neighbour in the crossing of boundaries, and in the breaking down of racial, cultural, religious and social barriers.

POSTSCRIPT

Much of the foregoing has been to do with issues relating to identity and the recognition we give to others. The need for secure identity is a profoundly powerful force in human life. In a globalising world the hunt for identity is becoming ever more acute. Uncertainty about identity can have various outlets: confusion, anger, depression, envy, scapegoating of others, fundamentalism and the getting rid of threatening neighbours. Xenophobia and violence can be used to generate solidarity and identity.

All group identity is created by encountering what is different. Such encounter involves a **recognition** of the other. A recognition of the other can be based on fear and mistrust and/or a sense of superiority. The identities engendered in such situations are often negative identities, based on opposition to the other.

Negative identity involves a need to abuse the other, emerging out of one's own experience of abuse, fear, loss or powerlessness. If the rule of positive identity is "love your neighbour (the other) as you love yourself" (Leviticus 10:18) then the role of negative identity is "do unto others what they have done unto you, or do it unto them again". One of the deepest resistances to peace in many situations is the stubborn commitment on all sides to the negative identities formed over and against each other. We need our enemy because of the identity they give us. We may desperately seek to continue the conflict because we cannot envision ourselves in a future which would include positive relations with the other. Periods of transition are particularly difficult for identities formed in opposition to others. Positive changes require a new recognition of the other and ourselves, new ways of relating, and ways of honouring both particularity and belonging together.

There can be different negative responses to the strange 'other'. The other can be separated from or driven out or destroyed (the other recognised as threat). This is the response of **exclusivist particularity** (see our earlier document *Boasting: Self-righteous Religious Superiority as a Source of Conflict)*. But there can also be another form of misrecognition of the other where particularity is not respected, where the other is not let be and their boundaries are violated. Certain forms of nationalism, ethnicity and religion can seek to **consume** the other, giving them no space to be themselves, forcing them to fit into alien space, setting the terms for engagement, seeking to assimilate them, etc. Often ethnic cleansing and physical violence are not far behind. A society that dehumanises a minority, consuming them in one sense, can easily move on to getting rid of it, consuming it in another sense.

How to meet the other - respect them, give them a place - without consuming them is the central challenge of all human existence. The Jewish theologian Marc Gopin suggests that the stranger - the other- is the essential metaphor of Biblical experience and key to its ethical stance. The stranger is loved, is given a place, but not consumed, absorbed into sameness. The stranger continues to be different, boundaries remain. Jesus in his meeting with people did not consume them, but instead nurtures their particular humanity. And Jesus becomes the ultimate stranger - the other - who dies "outside the camp" (Hebrews 13:13) and yet who is welcomed home. Welcomed home but not consumed within the relationship of the Trinity.

Tolerance and positive acceptance of co-existence are, therefore, essential - even religious - virtues in a world in which not everyone is like us, ie a world of strangers.

PUBLICATIONS

Breaking Down the Enmity (1985)
Understanding the Signs of the Times (1986)
Towards an Island that Works (1987)
Towards Peace and Stability? (1988)
Remembering Our Past: 1690 and 1916 (1991)
Burying Our Dead: Political Funerals in Northern Ireland (1992)
(All the above, together with a new introduction were published as
Breaking Down the Enmity in 1993)

The Things that Make for Peace (1995)
Liberty to the Captives? (1995)
Forgive us our Trespasses (1996)
Doing Unto Others (1997)
New Pathways (1997)
Remembrance and Forgetting (1998)
Boasting: Self-righteous Collective Superiority as a Cause of Conflict (1999)

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A TIME TO HEAL

Perspectives on Reconciliation

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INTRODUCTION

Since its beginning in 1983 the Faith and Politics Group has been concerned about the meaning of reconciliation in a Northern Ireland context. It has sought to envisage what a politics of reconciliation might mean. This search has been carried out in a spirit of sober realism because the work of the political scientist Frank Wright - briefly a member of the group - has told us that by and large national communities that co-exist on the same soil develop in rivalry with and antagonism to each other. We have been aware that national conflicts do not normally end up with reconciliation of the antagonists. More commonly they are concluded by final victories or forced separations. Thus we were and are under no illusion about what might happen if a politics of reconciliation were not attempted or were to conclusively fail. Nevertheless, we dared to hope that things might be different.

Conflicts within States

Frank Wright taught us that Northern Ireland conflict was not unique. One of the things happening in our world is that conflicts **between** states are being overtaken in frequency and perhaps in importance by conflicts **within** states. The force of globalisation and homogenisation which threaten a sense of community on the one hand and the (re) assertion of identities - cultural, national, ethnic, religious, social - on the other hand, bring about situations of tension and conflict between communities. In such contested 'spaces' there are certain key areas of critical importance: the different communities' relations to the State and, in particular, to the law and justice systems; issue of symbolic expression, eg how events are publicly remembered and celebrated, flags and emblems; recognition of cultural diversity; issues of power relations and, in particular, how power is shared within a democratic order; issues of equity between communities; and how communities are to belong together. In contested spaces we are always trespassing against each other. We live with the 'other' in a mutual fear-threat relationship. We easily become caught in a cycle of conflict in which the actions and behaviours of one set of participants reinforce the actions and behaviours of the others, and the conflict keeps going. The result is a deep-rooted insecurity, antagonism and enmity and identities shaped by conflict and violence. Communities are caught in destructive patterns of relating together.

The diplomatic procedures inherited from the 19th Century which were designed to effect reconciliation - or at least political settlements - between States are ill-adapted to deal with the issues of reconciliation within and between communities. Here reconciliation becomes much less abstract and more face-to-face. People who have been deeply hurt, whose loved ones have been killed and devastated by injury, actually have to come to terms with the presence on their streets of individuals who did these things to them. It is not surprising that in this context issues like prisoner release and the decomissioning of paramilitary weapons cause significant difficulty. We need to learn about the possibilities and dynamics of reconciliation because of the increasing incidence of conflicts within States. In several of our documents we gave extensive consideration to how a Peace Process might develop (see Appendix One).

Overcoming the Past

Examination of the example of Northern Ireland suggests that reconciliation is not easy. We have a precarious political agreement. Much of the elements of that Agreement were foreshadowed in our documents - not that we can claim that our influence was significant. A political agreement is vital but it only provides a starting point for moving forward. We are all too aware of the continuing intractabilities of sectarian hatred; the undertow of hurt, pain and resentment; the competitive victimhood; many people's sense of loss; the way the conflict mutates into new forms; and the increasing segregation. This is not a society yet at ease with itself. Reconciliation remains elusive. All of this points to the need for social and spiritual transformation which will change people's views of each other and how they relate to each other.

Societies in course of transition have to struggle over how much to acknowledge, how to deal with perpetrators, victims and bystanders and how to recover. The American writer Martha Minow says

> *"A common formulation posits the two dangers of wallowing in the past and forgetting it. Too much memory or not enough; too much enshrinement of victimhood or insufficient memorializing of victims and survivors; too much past or too little acknowledgement of the past's staging of the present; these joined dangers accompany not just societies emerging from mass violence, but also individuals recovering from trauma."*

There are a whole series of potential goals for societies responding to collective violence (see Appendix Two). What is important to note is that there are tensions between them. Much of this document is taken up with discussing some of the issues involved.

It is also important to note that the transition from inter-community conflicts to sustainable peace requires a minimum of 10 to 15 years, or longer. Societies coming out of long and violent internal conflict experience problems every bit as serious as those experienced at the height of the conflict. Transitions precede transformations. Thus, people need to be sustained by hope: hope that situations can and will be transformed and renewed, that life can and will be changed, and newness can and will come.

The Meaning of Reconciliation

'Reconciliation' has a particular resonance in situations which have undergone extensive conflict where we need to make good again, eg in South Africa with its Truth and Reconciliation Commission, while in Northern Ireland the logic of reconciliation is intrinsic to the Good Friday Agreement. It remains hard, however, to give the word meaning and practical content. Perhaps that can only be done in particular situations.

It also has to be admitted that reconciliation as a word has been shamelessly misused, to slide away from issues of injustice and rightful disturbance. It has been used to quieten people down and lead them away from the reality of their situation. There are also forms of 'reconciliation' which are about making people fit into predetermined 'solutions'. There is also a tendency in discussion about 'reconciliation' to downgrade differences. Not all differences are reconcilable. In our understanding of reconciliation we have sought to talk about "living together in difference" which both emphasises difference and living together and links them . We also understand reconciliation in terms of the inter-related dynamics of forgiveness, repentance, truth and justice. Another helpful way to understand reconciliation is to see it as a place - a space - where the different conflicting parties meet and face together

the claims and tensions between truth and mercy and justice and peace (see Appendix Three).

Living Together in Difference

Living together in difference and diversity - racial, cultural, social, religious - is an increasingly challenging issue facing today's world. It raises profound issues about community, identity, recognition and how we meet the other. Often there is dis-ease in the presence of difference and differences have been dealt with by belittling, dehumanising and demonising, overlooking, avoidance (polite or otherwise) and by making people fit in (sometimes through overt pressure). The possibility of people having real meetings where there is honest conversation, respect and mutual regard is narrowed in such situations and they become hostage to wider communal fears. For instance, there is evidence that Bosnia's earlier tradition of tolerance was based only on politeness.

All group identity is created by encountering what is different. Such encounter involves a **recognition** of the other. A recognition of the other can be positive but it can often be based on fear and mistrust and/or a sense of superiority which lead to attempts at separation and domination. The identities engendered in such situations are often negative identities, based on opposition to the other. Asserting such identities also serves to increase an awareness of difference and separateness. An identity politics of antagonised division often emerges. Positive change requires a new recognition of the other and ourselves, new ways of relating, and ways of honouring both particularity and belonging together.

Negative identity involves a need to abuse the other, often emerging out of one's own experience of abuse, fear, loss or powerlessness. If the rule of positive identity is "love your neighbour (the other) as you love yourself" (Lev 10:18) then the rule of negative identity is "do unto others what they have done unto you, or do it unto them first". One of the deepest resistances to peace and reconciliation in many situations is the stubborn commitment on all sides to the negative identities formed over and against each other. We need our enemy because of the identity they give us. We may desperately seek to continue the conflict because we cannot envision ourselves in a future which would include positive relations with the other. Periods of transition are particularly difficult for identities formed in opposition to others. For transitions to go in a good direction there needs to be a movement away from constructing identities over and against others to developing identities that through positive relationships respect others and leave room for difference. Thus re-defining identity is a fundamental step towards reconciliation and people need to have the confidence to engage in a journey which explores who they are and what they might become.

People have a fundamental need for security. In societies governed by fear-threat relationships wisdom suggests that security comes from deterrence or getting your retaliation in first or from living among your 'own'. We all know about the threat from the 'other'; much harder to acknowledge is the threat we pose **to** the 'other'. Conflict situations generate endless justifications, blame and self-righteousness. There may, however, come a time when significant sections of different communities are ready to find a way out - they can be helped by external parties to the conflict co-operating together and facilitating positive movement. These *kairos* moments have to be seized and confidence-building steps entered into. The realisation may dawn that there cannot be security for one without security for the other; that security comes from transformation and new relationships. We have to take the other into account and meet their needs as well as our own. For all of this to happen we have to 'see' the other - and ourselves - in a different way. There has to be new recognitions.

A Christian Vision of Reconciliation

'Reconciliation' is a word on many people's lips today, including politicians. This must be significant. However, Christian theology has used this word with primary reference to the atoning work of God in Christ -"God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself " (2 Cor 5: 19). How does the classical Christian understanding of reconciliation connect with the concerns of a conflictual humanity?

In our first document *Breaking Down the Enmity* we emphasised the enmity generated in conflict situations and the circle of violence and counter-violence. The New Testament shows a God who wishes to overcome breakdowns in relationships. There is a deep solidarity of God with suffering humanity. The enmity between God and human beings is overcome through Christ's loving embrace of us on the Cross - "He is our Peace who has made us both one and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility" (Eph 2:14). There is a mending of brokenness and we are brought to a new place ("there is a new creation" 2Cor 5:17) where we are able to make space for the other because Christ has made space for us. While we are made one in Christ particular identities are not abolished but they are relativised and subordinated. This new identity in Christ leaves no room for individual or collective claims of superiority or self-righteousness. Reconciliation in Christ is about being freed from anxiety about identity. We do not have to shore up our own selfhood or self-esteem. We are to trust in the goodness and grace of a faithful God.

God's loving forgiveness opens the way to repentance (for example the story of Zaccheus in Luke 19: 1-10). Issues of justice and truth are not ignored. Thus love operates within a moral order which involves truth and justice.

All of this has social implications. Christians are the visible fruits of God's reconciliation in Christ. They are called to make this reconciliation visible - visible in terms of a quality of relationships, visible in terms of openness and hospitality. This visibility should serve the same purpose as Christ's visibility, namely to reveal God and His reconciling love. This is true holiness and is the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:19). Similarly, the Church is a community of reconciliation and is called to make this visible to the world.

The innocent victim Jesus protests against a world in which violence is met by violence and the message of the Resurrection is that the destructive powers of the world will not prevail. Such a vision of reconciliation speaks of something given us, of remade humanity, of the cost of love, of suffering vulnerability. It makes us increasingly sensitive to victims. It is a world which politics cannot bring into being. However, faith in a renewed world gives us courage to be persons of persistence and creativity in the midst of politics, for we recognise that the world of politics is a place of encounter between humanity and God.

Violence demands its victims - its sacrifices. Peace and reconciliation may also demand 'sacrifice' though of a different sort: that involved in a commitment to a loving and non-violent God and by a commitment to stop the scapegoating and blaming that exists in a devious and violent world. It is a way of "living sacrifice" (Rom 12: 1), led by the memory of Jesus.

Churches and Reconciliation

As Christians we were aware that Christian faith challenges all exclusive claims of tribe, tradition and political commitment. The Gospel invites us into the space created by Christ and to find there those who were previously our enemies. It therefore seeks to break down the enmity between us: enmity caused by different traditions, and national, political and religious loyalties. The Gospel opens up for us a view of wholeness, justice and living in right relations which sees the whole world as potential brothers and sisters; a nourishing and fulfilment of the human. This is a vision of a new humanity reconciled in Christ and living together in a new community.

At the same time we knew that churches are part of communities and nations; they cannot be other. They are chaplains, reflectors, consciences, restrainers, discerners, givers of wisdom, custodians of memory and places of community belonging. Churches bring 'their' community before God. They are places where the 'specialness' and stories of communities and nations can be celebrated. Much of this is necessary and good, but there is another side. 'Specialness' can lead to exclusivity and a sense of superiority. Churches can be places where we are told - implicitly and explicitly - who does not belong to our community: by who is prayed for and who is not, by the contents of sermons, and by the symbols displayed or not displayed.

The Church is a home for the community or the nation. And at the same time it lives by a story of a Jesus who died outside the camp (Heb 13:13) and who, while completely a Jew, did not belong to his world (John 17:14) and was driven out of it by those who did not want to be disturbed by another way. All our 'homes' - personal, communal, national - are radically decentered by Jesus: "For we have not here an abiding city, but we seek after the city which is to come" (Heb 13:14). And the Church is a community where Jew and Greek, bond and free, belong (1 Cor 12:13).

The Church lives in a tension: in the world, but not of it (cf John 18:36). The danger is that in situations of communal conflict the tension collapses and as the Croation theologian Miroslav Volf says *"…Churches often find themselves accomplices in war rather than agents of peace. We find it difficult to distance ourselves from our own culture so we echo its reigning opinions and mimic its practices."*

This was our experience in Northern Ireland. Religion and politics had become so tangled up that politics had taken on some of the dimensions of a religious crusade; political positions had been absolutised and exclusive commitments had been demanded of people. Political loyalties and exclusive traditions had been put above the God who will have no other god before him. Idolatry had led to conflict and violence. Christian faith had been compromised; two communities had called upon their religious traditions to sanctify political and cultural traditions to a greater or lesser extent. Faith had been deformed in the process. Theologies of enmity, superiority and distorted recognition of others had gained pre-eminence. Northern Ireland, in our opinion, was a place under judgement and judgement begins in the household of God (I Peter 4:17). We were also all too aware that churches who were unable to achieve reconciliation among themselves were not well placed to preach reconciliation to politicians and others. We lived in a world of painful contradiction between a faith vision and reality.

In many of our documents we spoke about tasks for the churches. In particular, we have been concerned that: churches free themselves from over-identification with particular political-cultural formations; while not glossing over theological differences they meet and

co-operate with other churches in work for the common good of society, and they become agents together of peace and promoters of truth, justice and love. We have also been concerned that churches face and acknowledge their particular responsibility for the conflict.

The Metaphor of Healing

Healing is a way of understanding reconciliation and there is a rich tradition in Christian tradition of using the metaphors of sickness and healing, particularly in Eastern theology. Jesus can be seen as the "wounded healer" who uses his own wounds to heal the wounded hearts of others - suffering vulnerability becomes redemptive.

The metaphor of healing is often applied to post-violence situations. The healing paradigm casts the consequence of collective violence in terms of trauma, sickness, brokenness, hurt and pain. A society has been gravely wounded and the goal is recovery and the restoration of relationships. Further, an analogy is being drawn between the psychological and physical needs and the therapeutic responses appropriate to individuals and issues involving entire groups of people and even societies.

Some of the limitations of this metaphor need to be understood. To talk about the needs of particular victims is fully appropriate but, for instance, healing is an absurd notion for those who have died. Not all the wounds inflicted can be healed. To talk about an entire society recovering from the consequences of violence has its appropriateness but we need to appreciate that we are moving by way of analogy. And we have to ask the question: what do we mean by 'therapeutic' processes for collectivities?

The Importance and Limitations of Politics

We were always clear about the importance of politics and the limitations of politics. Political arrangements are of importance; positively because of the possibilities they give for human flourishing, for enabling people to live together and for the mediation of conflict; and, negatively, for the protection they give against violence and injustice. However, politics cannot establish the Kingdom of God and a relative peace, justice and reconciliation is all that is obtainable in a disordered world - the world of the 'penultimate' in the words of the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, where politics belongs.

The Christian tradition has always been clear about the need for the order of the State and that this order depends on violence (Romans 13, St Augustine, etc). It has also been clear about the potential for diabolic violence lying in the State (Revelation 13). The State always uses violence to drive out violence. This 'legitimate' violence is governed by the rule of law and assent to law, and seeks a monopoly for itself within the territory of the State. We cannot do without the order of the State or its 'necessary' violence - this is the darkness at the heart of order.

At the same time there is a biblical concern for justice (understood as living in right relationships) both in the New and Old Testaments. This concern refers to securing and guaranteeing the livelihood, well-being, freedom and dignity of every person in the community. Thus the upholding of social order must be challenged and constrained by a concern for justice. Rulers are answerable to God and are to be called to account. Power must be exercised within limits.

All of this suggests that it is important to understand reconciliation in an eschatological perspective; it always in its fulfilness lies beyond us. And there is the hope and dream of a world *"on the far side of revenge"* (Seamus Heaney). We live in the tension between our hope and dreams and what can realistically be expected in this fragile and fractured world.

The Faith and Politics Group

The Faith and Politics Group began when a motion was passed at the 1983 Greenhills Ecumenical Conference calling for the setting up of a Christian Centre for Political Development to analyse the relationship of churches to politics in Ireland. A steering group was set up and a number of people co-opted in an individual capacity. It quickly became clear that a Centre was not a realistic goal and the best role for the group was as an unofficial think-tank. Around 30 people have been involved for varying lengths of time since 1983. Here is what we were and what we experienced:

- all sorts of mixes: clerical/lay; male/female; North/South; Protestant/Roman Catholic. Some were parish clergy, some worked for ecumenical organisations, some were academics, some were members of communities of reconciliation, some were involved in practical peace work, some were theologians
- a mixed group of Christians focussing on real faith/life issues
- there was a discipline in meeting together
- we left the tendency of always speaking from and to 'our own' side, but we had tentacles into different communities; we were not without roots.
- we told each other about our experiences and worked on their meaning
- there was no holding back - it was honest and engaged
- differences in the Group were tolerated and even valued
- agree, disagree and live with, that's what we wrestled with
- an important sounding board at a time of crisis
- we sought to discern 'the signs of the times' in events and politics
- the 'other' was present in the writing of our documents
- we were influenced by a lot of different people from both inside and outside Northern Ireland. We learnt a lot from the work of the political scientist Frank Wright and the Croatian theologian Miroslav Volf.

We were, in a small way, a laboratory of reconciliation. The Group has always contextualised its theological thinking in the particularity of the Northern Ireland conflict. This present document is not such a contextualisation but arises from a context. It uses the Group's thinking and reflection over 20 years to offer some perspectives on the meaning of reconciliation. In particular, it uses material from two documents: *Doing Unto Others* (1997) and *Remembrance and Forgetting* (1998). It is a 'thought-experiment'. an exploration, a journey, offered in the hope that others may find it of value in their situation. It is particularly offered as a contribution to the World Council of Churches' Decade to Overcome Violence.

BELONGING, MEETING AND EMBRACE : A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

Encountering the Other

God has made human beings in His own image (Gen 1: 26); all humankind share equal dignity and are owed equal respect. However, in the biblical vision there is no humanity without relatedness. The image of God in human beings is bound up with mutual inter-relationship and inter-dependence (Gen 1:27). In this picture we are not individuals on our own but persons in community who collaborate with God. This community of persons extends to social and political units. The creation stories in Genesis do not end with the creation of humanity in Chapters One and Two but with the creation of the tribes and nations in Chapter Ten. God is the author of our common humanity and of our diversity.

The first two chapters of Genesis affirm the goodness of creation. However, what follows is the story of the Fall and, leading from it, the beginnings of human conflict and violence. At the heart of this account (in Gen 3:5) there is a primal moment of human misrecognition: the false and envious perception that God is someone to be rivalled with. This rivalry means that human identity - rather than being given - establishes itself over and against God (and our fellow human beings). Such an identity always has something of violence in it.

The story of the Fall does not conclude with the story of the exclusion of Adam and Eve from the Garden; instead it concludes in Genesis Eleven with the confusion of tongues at the Tower of Babel and the scattering of the nations, as the nations too rival with God.

Fundamental in the Genesis story is how alienation from God brings a deep insecurity into human affairs. Fear of the neighbour, rather than trust in God, becomes a governing factor in human relations. We live in cultures estranged from God. In this insecurity we do two things: we create our own substitute 'gods' or idols, which belong exclusively to us and seem to offer the security we need. And we use our differences from others to give ourselves esteem and identity as individuals or a group. Our group is purer and inherently superior: we are what we are because the 'others' are not what we are - and therefore not so good as us. At the same time they excite our envy, our fascination and our fear. By their presence they question and limit us. These attitudes involve self-deception, misrecognition of others, self-hatred, hatred of others, rivalry, exclusion and victimisation. Inevitably our victims, when they can, victimise us in return.

So we live defensive lives, dominated by the 'realism' of fear. This realism says that we must always retaliate when offended, that we must always look for revenge, that we must always be ready for war, that we must dominate or be dominated. If we cannot dominate or eliminate the threat, we may accept the 'peace' of mutual deterrence, or we may separate ourselves from the other. The weight of our threat or the distance between us and the other become the measure of our security. Such 'solutions' lessen the possibility of violence. Nevertheless they are ways of life based on fear of the neighbour. Stories of what the other has done to us, or will do if we don't defend ourselves, become our controlling narratives. Stories of trust or co-operation are forgotten or not believed.

What does Christian faith have to say to this? The Gospel offers us an alternative reality to fearful frozen and defensive living. It invites us to imagine ourselves and our world differently. Reconciliation in Christ takes us to a new place - the house of Christ - where we think, speak and act in his way where fear becomes trust and hurt permits healing. Christ breaks down the middle wall of partition and invites us all into a space created by him to find people who were previously our enemies. New conversations are opened up with liberating

possibilities. The present becomes a place for risk-taking and for participation in the transformation that God is working on the earth.

All identity is created in the encounter with the other. Therefore, how we meet the other - give them recognition, respect them, give them a place, find ourselves in them - is a central challenge of all human existence. The Jewish theologian Marc Gobin suggests that the stranger - the other - is the essential metaphor of Biblical experience and the key to its ethical stance. The Hebrew Scriptures say that the vulnerable 'other' - including the resident alien and strangers - shall be protected (eg Deut 10:18-19; Lev 25). For, in a fundamental sense, "You [ie the children of Israel] are strangers and sojourners with me" (Lev 25:23). This is taken up by Jesus in the parable of the sheep and the goats when he says that how the vulnerable 'others' - the hungry and thirsty, strangers, the destitute, the sick, those in prison - are treated becomes a test of our real attitude to him (Matt 25:31-46). Thus we are 'decentered' from self and our 'normal' home to the world of others. The ethical implication of all of this is that the positive acceptance of co-existence is a necessary virtue in a world where not everyone is like us. Co-existence makes possible the sharing of a space in a way that offers everyone the possibility of having their identities and traditions acknowledged and given a place.

A Vision of Embrace

We need distance and we need belonging. Group identities offer us homes in which we can belong; a sense of pride, a space where we are among our own, a place of nourishment and security. And at the same time they can become *"fortresses into which, we retreat, surrounding ourselves by impenetrable walls dividing 'us' from 'them'. In situations of conflict they serve as encampments from which to undertake raids into enemy territory."* (Miroslav Volf). Thus group identities are profoundly ambivalent: *"havens of belonging as well as repositories of aggression, suffocating enclosures as well as bases of liberating power"* (ibid.).

Cultural and group differences cannot and should not be removed. We cannot live without differences and boundaries - even if we know that differences and boundaries can be dangerous. We can, however, open ourselves to be enriched by our differences. And, at the same time, different traditions, cultures and languages are cultivated. There is respect for boundaries. But boundaries must be porous; the other is to be welcomed in and embraced. There is respect for difference and diversity, but not sectarianism and exclusion.

Jesus, while remaining completely a Jew, cut across the boundary markers between Jews and Gentiles. He set aside food taboos. He went into Gentile houses and healed (eg the story of the healing of the daughter of the Syrophoenician woman (Mark 7:24-30); he went into the country of the Gentile Decapolis and healed the Gadarene demoniac (Luke 8:26-39)); and he engaged in a profound dialogue with the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4).

Paul persecuted the early Christians because he felt the sacred boundaries, which made the Jews special, to be threatened. Paul's encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus changed his whole life. Without wishing to destroy Jewishness he turns away from an attitude that emphasises sacred boundaries to find a new identity in Christ that excludes none. He sees the dividing wall of hostility between Jew and Gentile as being broken down through the cross (Eph 2: 13-16) so that the other can be welcomed in.

Volf describes his vision of what should be through the metaphor of 'embrace':

> *"In an embrace I open my arms to create space in myself for the other. Open arms are a sign that I do not want to be by myself only, an invitation for the other to come in and feel at home with me. In an embrace I also close my arms around the other. Closed arms are a sign that I want the other to become a part of me, the other enriches me. In a mutual embrace none remains the same because each enriches the other, yet both remain true to their genuine selves.*
>
> *Embrace, I believe, is what takes place between the three persons of the Trinity, which is a divine model of human community. The Johannine Jesus says: 'The Father is in me and I am in the Father' (John 10:38). The one divine person is not that person only, but includes the other divine persons in itself; it is what it is only through the indwelling of the other. The Son is the Son because the Father and the Spirit indwell him: without their interiority of the Father and the Spirit there would be no Son. Every divine person is the other person but he is the other person in his own particular way."*

But it is a genuine embrace based on justice and respect for truth. Not everything that everybody does is to be accepted uncritically.

Such a vision respects borders and boundaries but welcomes the stranger in. It allows for difference but provides for positive and life giving relationship. The vision of embrace is an aspect of the love of the neighbour. There is a close link between the vision of embrace and an understanding of reconciliation.

A vision of embrace seeks to break out of the vicious circle of seeing the 'other' side as always to blame, and ourselves as always the righteous, the innocent and the good ones. We have to learn that the 'others' are human like ourselves, with a good and a bad side, and people to be lived with, even if we have significant disagreements with them. We need to learn about the threat we pose to and the fear we induce in the other; that our fears and insecurities help to create and maintain our enemies: "The judgement we give is the judgement we get" Matt 7:1); that the problem is ourselves (the beam is in our eye) as well as our 'enemy'. The others, although different, are human like us and worthy of respect (respect is the social analogue of love). They, too, have their fears, interests and desires and want to pursue them and, therefore, we should treat them as they would want to be treated by us (Matt 7:12). We do not want to be victims, therefore we must not victimise others. The other is our neighbour with whom we must learn to live.

Embrace is a risk. I open my arms, make a movement towards the other and I do not know whether I will be misunderstood, despised, even attacked, or whether my action will be appreciated, supported or reciprocated. But it also opens the way to surprising encounters, enriching conversation and transformation.

SOCIAL RECONCILIATION

Social reconciliation means people finding a way of living together in difference. It means the restoration of broken relationships. It means wanting the other to be with us and not wanting to destroy, dominate or separate from them. It means being able to take others into account and sharing power, responsibility and resources. It means going beyond the 'right' and 'wrong' of the conflict - the vicious circle of action and reaction - to create new, creative and just relationships *"on the far side of revenge"* (Seamus Heaney). It is the painful forging of a shared world. Reconciliation in this world is not some finished state. It does not abolish conflict or the friction of living together. It may be and often is partial and incomplete; and it does not remove the intransigent presence of evil.

Reconciliation is not just about an accommodation of various interests and aspirations (a political settlement). It is about the social reconstruction of a society and thus it is also about the rebuilding of the moral order. It is about social transformation: it deals with the hurts, resentments and enmities that exist (the task of repair and healing) and seeks the transformation of relationships with all that implies at the spiritual, psychological, social, economic and political levels. An understanding of reconciliation is necessarily built on the interlocking dynamics of forgiveness, repentance, truth and justice. It both deals with the past and looks to the future. Reconciliation takes people to a new place.

The German philosopher Hannah Arendt was clear that there were two primary requirements for people to live together: (1) the willingness of people to be bound together by promises and agreements, and to keep them, ie they create a moral order together; and (2) the willingness to set aside the past - its enmities and the vicious circle of action and reaction - and start anew; this is where the possibility of forgiveness and reconciliation arises.

The willingness of people to be bound together by promises and agreements, and to keep them, is necessary for order and trust in human life. But the imperfection and sinfulness of people mean that we frequently fail to keep promises and agreements. Therefore, we have to find some way of setting aside the past with its failures and enmities in order to keep human life going in a satisfactory way. Our very imperfection and sinfulness make this hard to do - particularly in our communal life.

Dealing with the Past

Important in all of this is how people remember and how they deal with past. How people remember profoundly affects how they behave in the present and significantly affects their politics; thus in Northern Ireland the politics of historic grievance and the politics of siege. Our accumulated history – *"the debris we carry with us, each, of hurt and counter hurt"* (the American poet Amy Clampitt) - is part of today's reality. It pushes people back to standing by their 'own' and against their enemies. Unhealed memories can enslave and condemn us to a seemingly endless living out of the past. In the words of the Scots poet Edwin Muir:

"… loves and hates are thrust upon me by the acrimonious dead".

Grasped by the ghosts of the past we are unable to imagine a different future.

Because the past can so possess us it is important that we find ways of letting go what has happened. The following are some of the ways this can take place.

Grieving

We may need to lament and grieve for what has been lost and done, and acknowledge anger, bitterness, pain, resentment, loss of identity and uncertainty. For this we need a language; our feelings need to be released into words. The resources available in the biblical language of lament and the ritual actions of the faith community could be of help in this.

An important biblical theme is that of moving through grief to newness. There is no conflict, especially deadly conflict, that does not involve pain, emptiness and loss. But endings can also be beginnings and we may be able to move through grief to newness. In that movement we may find ourselves reviewing the story we tell about ourselves and imagining ourselves and our world differently. However, in a conflict, our story is not the only story. . .

Telling our Stories

Stories make sense of a community's experience. They use and express values, beliefs and commitments. They give reasons for action and they build community and self-identity. In divided societies stories often conflict; the same events are understood from a radically different perspective. We need to tell our stories to each other and listen intently to what we are told – which involves reaching beyond the words - feeling the pain of the other as transmitted through the 'memory' of their community. This is 'felt' history. Thus, we begin to see from the perspective of the other. We practice what the Croatian theologian Miroslav Volf describes as "double vision", seeing both "from here" and "from there".

The German theologian Geiko Mueller-Fahrenholz describes an exchange of stories between the former German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt and the Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev, during Brezhnev's visit to Bonn in March 1973:

> *"On one evening there was a meeting in the residence of Willy Brandt, who was then chancellor. The atmosphere was cordial until Brezhnev began to recall in great detail some of the atrocities committed by Nazi troops in Russia. Everyone was listening with a mixture of respect and dread, because it was obvious that the Soviet leader had to free himself of these oppressive memories. His words had to be understood as an indication of what it had cost the Russians to come to the capital of Germany – the heart of what had been their most bitter enemy.*
>
> *Brezhnev spoke for some twenty minutes. Then Schmidt, who was minister of defence at the time, responded by telling his own story, for he had been one of the German soldiers stationed in Russia. He spoke of the schizophrenic situation of German soldiers who did not adhere to the Nazi ideology but had been educated to be patriots and thus felt bound to defend their country. In recalling this encounter nearly 15 years later, Schmidt comes to a revealing conclusion; he writes that this 'exchange of bitter memories greatly contributed to the mutual respect' that existed between him and Brezhnev despite the fact that the two found themselves in opposite camps from that evening up to the end of their terms of office".*

Dealing with the past may mean walking through our history together, particular visiting together those points that continue to have a painful sting, as Schmidt and Brezhnev did. It may help us recover what we have forgotten, denied, covered up and silenced.

It may mean looking at our symbols – anthems, rituals, songs, festivals, special occasions – and the stories and memories in these symbols. What do they say about the 'other' side? What do they say about us? Is this what we want to say now?

Honest discourse about the past – particularly in the presence of the other – may provide resources for a more hopeful future. The danger is that we refuse to do this and instead we search for people and institutions to blame for what has happened. We make ourselves "whited sepulchres" (Matt 23: 11) who hide our guilt, responsibility and hypocrisy in proclaiming that we are radically different from the people we blame.

Dealing with the Wounds

People and communities must be given a way of dealing with their suffering, wounds and grief. There is a need for opportunities for the past to be addressed symbolically, ritually and liturgically, and for spaces to be *"provided for people to express to and with each other the pain and injustices experienced. Acknowledgement and mutual recognition of the legitimacy of their experience is decisive in the reconciliation dynamic"* (the US Mennonite conflict expert, John Paul Lederach). If hurt, pain, anger, guilt, and loss are not dealt with effectively they will be driven underground, sure to surface in unexpected and harmful ways.

Forgiveness and acknowledgement of wrongs (including apology) are interrelated ways of dealing with what has happened, which may be deeply transformative and necessary at key points in a reconciliation process.

Forgiveness in Situations of Conflict

Those who have been directly affected by wrong or by violence may be able to forgive. That they have been able to forgive is a sign of grace. They, however, cannot be burdened with the demand that they forgive. Nor can anyone forgive on behalf of those who have suffered. We cannot impose forgiveness on people but conditions can be created whereby forgiveness becomes at least a possibility.

Victims have their particular needs: for justice, for the seriousness of the harm to be acknowledged, for apology and repentance from those who have done them wrong, for their stories to be heard, for compensation, for practical support. They have a claim upon our respect, to be remembered and allowed to remember. The past cannot be put right, but we can seek to ensure that it is not repeated. This is one form of memorial to the victims of violence.

What is also required is that the larger community – battered, hurt and damaged by what has happened – be prepared to enter into a more general process of being able to set aside the past – with all its enmities and demands for revenge – and start anew, accepting the existence of the other. This is something in the nature of forgiveness. As the former Zambian President, Kenneth Kaunda, said, forgiveness is not so much an isolated act but *"a constant willingness to live in a new day without looking back and ransacking the memory for occasions of bitterness and resentment"*.

Such a process of communal forgiveness takes what happened seriously; thus, truth seeking and telling are important. It does not trivialise or condone violence and injustice. Guilt and responsibility remain. What such a process does do is seek to bring peace to the past for the sake of the present and the future. The goal is healing and a move forward into new relationships. It is about rebuilding what has been torn to pieces, creating trustworthy and sustainable structures and providing secure social spaces for people. Such forgiveness is made easier when there is evidence of people acting in new ways, eg decisively moving away from violence or being prepared to negotiate new and just political arrangements, or when regret or apology is expressed for what has happened.

If we fail to forgive we will hand on our bitterness to the next generation. The conflict in the former Yugoslavia is an example where bitterness was handed down; not only from memories of atrocities committed during the Nazi period, but going back generations before that, even to the wars between Christian and Turk. And, if the politics of grievance is not given up, the past keeps everyone in its grip. Either we find ways to forgive or else we separate from, or seek to destroy, each other. Thus, forgiveness is a practical necessity for continuing to live together.

Acknowledgement of Wrongs and Apology

People have to live with what they have done or been involved in. It is in this context that repentance arises: stopping what we are doing; recognition, examination and acknowledgement of wrong doing; finding another way; seeking forgiveness; and seeking to repair the harm done. Repentance involves turning and changing one's ways.

Clearly we are not responsible for, or guilty of, acts we have not done, or in which we have not been directly involved. At the same time, we belong to groups, communities and nations that have done things which were wrong, in the distant or more immediate past. Our history has often imposed suffering on others and often brought benefits to ourselves. We cannot run away from this history and its consequences, for we are caught up in it, even if we are not personally guilty. The past affects present realities and relationships. Thus, there is a solidarity in sin, which involves the living and the dead.

Acknowledgement of wrongs done and hurts caused represents a facing of the reality of what a particular group, community or nation has done. Our acknowledgement of what has happened, our willingness to review the story we tell about ourselves, our sense of regret and our disapproval of past actions by our group or community are forms of respect for past generations and present day victims. They open up the possibility of conducting our relationships in the present in a more generous and just way.

Acknowledgement of wrongs done and hurts caused may take the form of apology. Apology is the verbalised face of repentance. It opens up the possibility of reconnection with the other. For instance, the Stuttgart Confession of Guilt in 1945 recognised the Evangelical Church in Germany's share of the responsibility for the terrible things done during the Third Reich. It paved the way for an honest approach to what had happened and for that Church's re-entry into the ecumenical community.

Apology – clearly and publicly expressed – is one way of saying to people that we wish to make a break with the past. Of course, apology has to be followed by or linked to, an

attempt to undo wrongs and act differently – to establish a new justice and a new relationship. And it involves risk and vulnerability.

Public rituals of atonement are important to help individuals come to terms with the painfulness of their societies past, for their healing and for reconciliation. As the Canadian political commentator Michael Ignatieff says about one example of such symbolic politics:

> *"When President Alwyn of Chile appeared on television to apologise to the victims of Pinochet's crimes of repression, he created the public climate in which a thousand acts of private repentance and apology became possible. He also symbolically cleansed the Chilean State of its association with these crimes."*

But symbolic actions - particularly actions which express human vulnerability - may be more important than any words; for instance the West German Chancellor Willy Brandt falling to his knees at a monument to those who died in the Warsaw ghetto rising. Brandt witnessed to a world beyond power and politics, and the need for atonement.

It has been shown in many situations that it is important for a public account to be rendered of what happened and who was responsible. Wrongdoing and injustice are publicly acknowledged. Thus Truth Commissions have been established in such countries as South Africa, Chile, El Salvador and Guatemala. In Northern Ireland the Saville Inquiry has been looking into the events surrounding Bloody Sunday in Derry/Londonderry in 1972.

Rendering a public account of what has happened and who was responsible does not free us from conflicting interpretations, clashing memories, etc, about the past. Focussing on specific events may bring its own distortions and community anger. (Why this event? Why not this one? etc) 'Truths' about the past may continue to be disputed. Nor does truth-telling necessarily lead to healing and reconciliation (certainly not at once). What may be hoped for is that the range of permissible 'truths' may be narrowed and that particular lies, silences, fictions, myths and denials are effectively challenged. What all of this points to is a longer term need for work to be done on the reconciling of stories and memories, so that there is a recognition of the inter-dependence of our histories and of what we have done to each other. New realities, critical and moral reflection, spiritual transformation, changed relationships and time may open up the possibility of some shared truth being established.

Restitution

Restitution is the restorative aspect of justice. We can never undo and make good the evil that has been done; in this sense strict restorative justice is impossible. We can seek to repair the damage that has been done, where that is possible. However, restitution should be seen more as an act of compensation that fulfils certain functions in the present: firstly, as a sign of recognition of the seriousness of what has happened; secondly, as a sign of the seriousness of repentance; thirdly, it meets some need of the victim; and fourthly, it aims at facilitating a more human future. Recognition and respect are given to the victim, or their memory.

The idea of restitution has become increasingly important in national and international politics, for instance in relation to the Holocaust, the treatment of indigenous peoples in Australia, New Zealand and the United States, and the internment of Japanese Americans during the Second World War. The process of negotiating restitution agreements has involved a process of dialogue - a social conversation - between victims and perpetrators

about the meaning of events. It brings new recognitions about intertwined pasts, about inclusion, about injustices and the need to right wrongs - if only partially. Such a process opens up the possibility of reconciliation.

Punishment

Punishment is the punitive aspect of justice. We cannot do without some form of punitive institutionalised response to wrongdoing, no matter how inadequate and imperfect it may be. Punishment of the perpetrator is a statement that the injured person matters. Through the criminal justice system the perpetrator is called to account and held responsible for their misdeeds. The truth of what happened is hopefully revealed and there is the possibility of the victim's story being told. The perpetrator pays for what they have done and this is reflected in the seriousness of the sentence. Punishment is one way respect is shown to the victims (and their families). And punishment helps restore the moral order of society.

Punishment necessarily individualises guilt. In the context of community conflict (former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone) the pursuit of justice through the legal system is an ambiguous and frustrating activity - for instance, difficulties can arise from selective prosecutions and this can undermine perceptions of fairness. The courtroom focus on specific individuals and specific events can distort. Important issues such as why something happened, the chains of responsibility, the hidden cultural or social triggers can be lost within the confines of the courtroom. Trials of particular war criminals can too easily close off the past with broader issues of responsibility not faced up to.

Community conflict creates a context where there are all sorts of degrees and categories of guilt: that of the ideologues who promote hate and prepare the ground for violence; that of those who plan and direct acts of violence; that of those who plant bombs and pull triggers; that of helpers and supporters; that of condoners and bystanders; and so on. There are sins of omission and sins of commission. There are the sins of people who journeyed into the far country of violence. There are the sins of the people who stayed "at home", who remained law abiding but who have been consumed by anger, resentment, self-righteousness and the refusal of generosity. There are the misdeeds of groups, eg paramilitaries, and there are the misdeeds of the state, its agencies and agents.

An aspect of all of this is the systemic – the transindividual - reality of evil - something particularly evident in conflict situations. This reality generating its own momentum and logic. Part of the dynamic is the seductiveness of violence and its endless justifications, and the fear, dread, hatred, excitement and frenzy which carry people along, "the diabolic forces of violence" in the words of the German sociologist Max Weber.

This is not to say that we make no distinctions between actors, actions and activities – for this we **must** do. Clearly some have suffered far more than others. Some individuals, groups and institutions have killed and injured far more than others, and thus carry more guilt and responsibility. Horrendous actions are **not** automatic, or even 'understandable', responses to someone else's behaviour, or to injustice, or to history, or to the 'system'. Human beings remain moral agents. Conscious options for violence are made. What we **are** suggesting is a moral complexity – a tangled web – of which we are all part.

Part of the complexity is the issue of the punishment of perpetrators. On the one hand the perpetration of violence and injustice demand punishment and this is why the granting of amnesty in many countries in South America was greeted with outrage by many. Impunity

means that the past and what happened are not faced up to. There is no accountability and no justice.

On the other hand political necessity and prudence may argue for amnesty, amnesia, forbearance and mercy, so that a new start may be made. Managing a peaceful transition requires deals to be made and the loose ends of history to be left dangling. For instance, De Gaulle managed the transition in postwar France by pretending that all French citizens had been outstanding patriots. The sorry history of the Vichy regime and collaboration was swept under the carpet. What happens is that the issue of blame is avoided or displaced elsewhere and instead the emphasis is put on responsibility for the future. The exigencies of politics and the balance of forces may well push the issue of how the past is to be dealt with in a particular direction.

A Christian account suggests that there has to be a remembering of and a reckoning with the past. It will, however, seek a certain kind of remembering: remembering the past in order that we do not repeat the past's destructiveness, so that we become different people. It will also seek a certain kind of forgetting: forgetting not as amnesia but rather as a release from the full weight and burden of the past. It will also seek a reckoning, but a reckoning that will put an emphasis on creating a new moral order where people belong together in a context where injustice, antagonism and desire for revenge have been taken out of the situation.

Other Dimensions of Justice

Important in the restoration of a moral order is the strengthening of the law and assent to law. Thus issues of policing and reform of the legal system are central to issues of social reconstruction. In contested societies conflict often focuses on the law and order system. In a new dispensation it has to become a common authority above all groups and citizens.

Issues of distributive justice and dealing with inequalities are also of vital importance. Justice is about having a place, being included in the community, being given what is needed to make a contribution, participating, being taken into account, and being treated as human. Talk about reconciliation is hollow unless there is real change for those who are socially and economically excluded. Authentic reconciliation involves justice.

But the attempt to solve conflicts by simply establishing justice alone or by saying first justice then reconciliation will not work. One of the complexities of enduring conflicts is that the issue of justice gets blurred and deformed in the vicious circle of action and reaction. The pursuit of justice creates more injustices. Because of disagreements about the past there is no agreement about what constitutes justice and equality in the present. It also has to be recognised that groups do not simply lose their histories by the fact of structural change. Resentful histories and mistrustful relationships may simply continue unless people imagine themselves and their relationships afresh. The struggle for justice has to be placed in a context of a wish for recognition of the other, social conversation and even co-operation, ie a perspective of a desire for reconciliation.

Trust

There is a link between a stable normal society and trust. Some degree of trust is required to share a society together. This trust allows a give and take - a form of practical mutual forgiveness - within the limits of political consensus. Failure cannot always be met by blame and retribution.

Political institutions can only operate where there are relationships of trust. They can only function when trust is granted and where politicians and political institutions act in a fashion that generate trust. At the same time the structuring of society and its institutions deeply influences who you can trust.

Satisfactory government depends upon a complex series of trust relationships between political leaders, political institutions and the population. Politics can only work when politicians use power forbearingly; where they sustain the fabric of the community and allow a place for opponents; and where electorates give room to their politicians to give leadership, recognise the burdens which politicians carry and the forgiveness that they require.

It is the central task of political structures and the law and order system to give security, reliability and predictability to society. Their ritual and routine gives stability and offers the possibility of social trust. Institutions acceptable to the vast majority of citizens are of vital importance because they provide the possibility of social conversation, debate and negotiation of difference taking place in all its messy conflictual reality.

The issue of trust points to a further issue, that of belonging together. In democracies legitimate government is based on the consent of a whole people who acknowledge their common bond together. Behind this consent, however, lies a deeper and often unstated acknowledgement and acceptance that despite our differences we belong together, ie there is a solidarity in which there is an inter-dependence and a common good. Inter-dependence and a common good require a shared community where we can belong together.

Trust also requires a re-establishment of connection between people, a re-weaving of the social fabric. Political agreements and institutions, while vital, are not enough in themselves. Connections between people and social institutions need to be made; connections which involve understanding, familiarity and relationships with the other, acceptance, empathy and co-operation. In all of this there is an important role for civil society: churches, business, trade unions, schools, voluntary and community groups, backed by a series of strategies involving government and other public bodies.

Inter-dependence requires a shared community where we can belong together and co-operate on common activities and in common institutions. In a divided society it is not enough to attend to issues of equity and diversity; issues of belonging together, of a shared community, of inter-dependence, of mutuality, must also receive consideration. They are vital to social trust and a key to reconciliation.

Reconciliation and Issues of Symbolic Expression

Nationhood is about the shared story we tell of ourselves and our forebears. It is also how we are described by a place, sometimes by a language, by historic events, by parades, remembrances, ceremonies, celebrations and monuments, by a flag and an anthem. In a

'normal' state these are the things that people have in common and that bind them together. In a contested space the same things are often in dispute and pull people apart. What belongs to one community is often hated by the other. These symbolic expressions engage the affective part of ourselves - our emotions - and are profoundly important.

Reconciliation has to be expressed at the symbolic level as well as the institutional level. It will not be enough to create a neutral public or state space. A symbolic deficit will be created which will inhibit a sense of a shared community. Some 'transcendent' symbols and rituals are required to express inter-dependence and a shared community. Symbols and rituals 'work' when they represent something real, so they cannot simply be artificially created. We have to work at 'growing' common symbolic expression as well as developing real relationships of inter-dependence. We also have to recognise that communities require security at the symbolic level as well as at the institutional level.

Individual Reconciliation

Social reconciliation requires reconciled individuals, people who have undergone personal change and conversion. Behind every collective effort at reconciliation stands certain highly motivated persons whose conviction has been created through important personal experiences and who have become reconciled individuals. Faith communities can help produce and sustain such reconciled individuals, who may be able to play a key role as go-between people in politics and civic society.

Being a Community of Reconciliation

Faith communities can also be communities of reconciliation and as such offer a 'space' in the world for those who believe that human society can , if only in anticipation

> *"overcome its violent origins, its continuing resentments and mistrust and come to realise its true calling to become the beloved community envisaged in the biblical story. The Churches exist to hold open a social space in which society's structures and practices can be seen for what they are and in which human community can be articulated in a new way"* (Lewis Mudge). .

Some of us are members of a community of reconciliation in Northern Ireland - the Corrymeela Community. Corrymeela has learnt the importance of

- belonging together in a community of diversity
- reconciliation being a practice, and a journey, not a theory or a strategy or a technique
- a safe space where people can come and meet each other, where there is an atmosphere of trust and acceptance and where differences can be acknowledged, explored and accepted
- presence and accompaniment - of people who can give time and attention
- a community of faith being able to bring healing, of being a "touching place"
- encounter and relationships; it is only in encounter and relationships that words like trust, reconciliation and forgiveness become real
- the importance of acknowledging and sharing our vulnerability
- people telling their stories and listening to other peoples' stories. Our identities and lives are based strongly on the stories we tell about ourselves, our families, our communities, our countries. Thus we need places where memories are explored and untangled.

- not writing people off as incorrigible baddies no matter what they have done - this is not to trivialise evil or say wrong does not matter
- the avoidance of self-righteousness and an awareness of our own hypocrisy
- surprise and the unexpected; reconciliation is something given as well as a practice
- taking small steps
- being sustained and nourished by hope and a vision of a different future
- being involved for the long haul

The practice of forgiveness and reconciliation in the faith community may radiate out into the wider society and have its influence there.

In Conclusion

Hope, forgiveness, reconciliation, acts of repair, the reweaving of the human fabric are signs of transcendence, that the world can be different and there can be a peaceable kingdom.

APPENDIX ONE

FUNDAMENTALS IN DEVELOPING A PEACE PROCESS

(adapted from *New Pathways*)

1 LOOKING FOR SOME OTHER WAY

When we begin to suspect that conflict or the present situation cannot give us what we need or hope for or is unsustainable, then we are open to the possibility of looking for some other way.

When it becomes clear that neither force of arms nor force of numbers will get us what we want we may be open to find another way.

Politicians have a vital role in moving communities forward. They are figures who represent communities with all their concerns, hurts, fears, enmities and aspirations. At its best this can mean a politician accepting responsibility for the well-being of a community with a focus on "the future and the responsibility towards the future" (the German sociologist Max Weber in his essay 'Politics as a Vocation'). In the same essay Weber speaks of politicians requiring above all "trained relentlessness in viewing the realities of life, and the ability to face such realities and to measure up to them inwardly". This facing of reality and acceptance of responsibility for a community's future can mean reassessing where a community is and seeking to find new ways forward, leading to new political agreements.

2 FINDING A PARTNER

Looking for another way means that we need to find a solution with the people with whom we are in conflict. Fundamentally this means facing the reality of the situation and giving the other recognition, respect and acceptance. We stop making people fit into our version of peace. They have interests, fears, aspirations and need for security which have to be taken into account too.

Albie Sachs describes a process in South Africa where first there was an increasing recognition that change was needed. A second component of the change was the growing ability of people to learn "to look into each other's eyes" and acknowledge the fears and needs of the other. Sachs suggested that all were forced to recognise the common humanity that people shared, and he believed from this a growing understanding and mutual respect developed between people who had hitherto been adversaries.

A real peace process requires a partner. As Shimon Peres said of the Palestine/Israel conflict:

> *"I think what is really important for a peace process is the creation of a partner, more than a plan. Because plans don't create partners, but if you have a partner then you can negotiate a plan."*

Similarly, Nelson Mandela said of F W de Klerk:

"To make peace with an enemy, one must work with that enemy, and that enemy become your partner."

Thus we need the other to find peace. We have to develop a relation with those with whom we are in conflict. We have to be as inclusive as possible in the search for peace. We have also to involve al levels in different communities; peace is not just a deal between elite groups.

Developing a relationship with those with whom we are in conflict raises the issues of trust and reliability. Trust and reliability are necessary for people to be able to live together. Part of trust and reliability is the willingness of people to make promises and agreements, and to keep them.

3 TRUST

Some degree of trust is a necessary precondition for everything else: for sharing a space together, for sharing power and responsibility, for reconciliation. Without it nothing is possible.

What is required to create trust? Some of the factors required are:

- a willingness not to destroy the other (essential to this is the decision not to use violence);
- an acknowledgement of the other side's pain and suffering and a recognition of a common humanity;
- a willingness to understand the fears and sense of threat that the other community has of us and to seek to take them into account, even if they are thought to be groundless;
- a willingness to make conciliatory gestures and actions;
- a willingness to do things that will reduce fear and threat and provide reassurance;
- showing by signs, words and actions that we want the situation to change;
- a willingness to treat the other side with respect and to avoid humiliating them;
- a willingness to meet, to listen, to talk;
- a willingness to be bound by promises and agreements (implicit and explicit) which we will seek to keep. We have obligations towards the other community and we need to show there is reliability in the keeping of promises and agreements.
- a willingness to take the interests and identities of the other community into account;
- a willingness to provide for the security and well-being of the other community;
- some shared ground or togetherness that will enable conflict and differences to be dealt with;
- a willingness to develop a relationship with other groups, parties and individuals and to co-operate where possible (eg on economic and social issues)

Trust is often tentative and it grows only gradually. It is usually imperfect which is why groups require protection and external guarantors. Trust is a risk. Completely satisfactory guarantees can never be obtained that the other group and their leaders are trustworthy. Political agreements always involve risk and uncertainty.

Confidence-building is a precursor to the development of trust. It offers the possibility of trust growing. Thus in a conflict situation finding appropriate confidence-building

measures is very important.

The issue of trust points to other fundamental issues - those of consent and belonging together. These underlie the workings of democracy and poliics. They are, therefore, fundamental to a peace process.

4 CONSENT

A majority's right is relatively - but not totally - uncontroversial in a stable state, ie one where the vast majority give their consent to its political arrangements. However, a divided society cannot work without mutual consent or agreement. Thus the **winning** of consent and the development of cross community consensus must have a high priority. And this is a fundamental part of a peace process.

5 BELONGING TOGETHER

In democracies legitimate government is based on the consent of a whole people who acknowledge their common bond together. Behind this consent however lies a deeper and often unstated acknowledgement and acceptance that despite our differences we belong together. Thus, fundamental to a peace process is the envisaging of a mutually shared future.

APPENDIX TWO

POTENTIAL GOALS FOR SOCIETAL RESPONSES TO COLLECTIVE VIOLENCE

1 Overcome communal and official denial and silence about the past and gain public acknowledgement;

2 seek to memorialize the past and educate about it

3 obtain the facts in an account as full as possible in order to meet victims' need to know, to build a record for history, and to ensure minimal accountability and visibility of perpetrators;

4 end and prevent violence; transform human activity from violence - and violent responses to violence - into words and institutional practices of equal respect and dignity;

5 forge the basis for a domestic democratic order that respects and enforces human rights;

6 supports the legitimacy and stability of a political accommodation or a new regime;

7 promote reconciliation across social divisions; reconstruct the moral and social systems devastated by violence;

8 promote psychological healing for individuals, groups, victims, bystanders, and offenders;

9 restore dignity to victims;

10 punish, exclude, shame, and diminish offenders for their offenses;

11 express and seek to achieve the aspiration that "never again" shall such collective violence occur;

12 building an international order to try to prevent and also to respond to aggression, torture and atrocities;

13 accomplish each of these goals in ways that are compatible with the other goals.

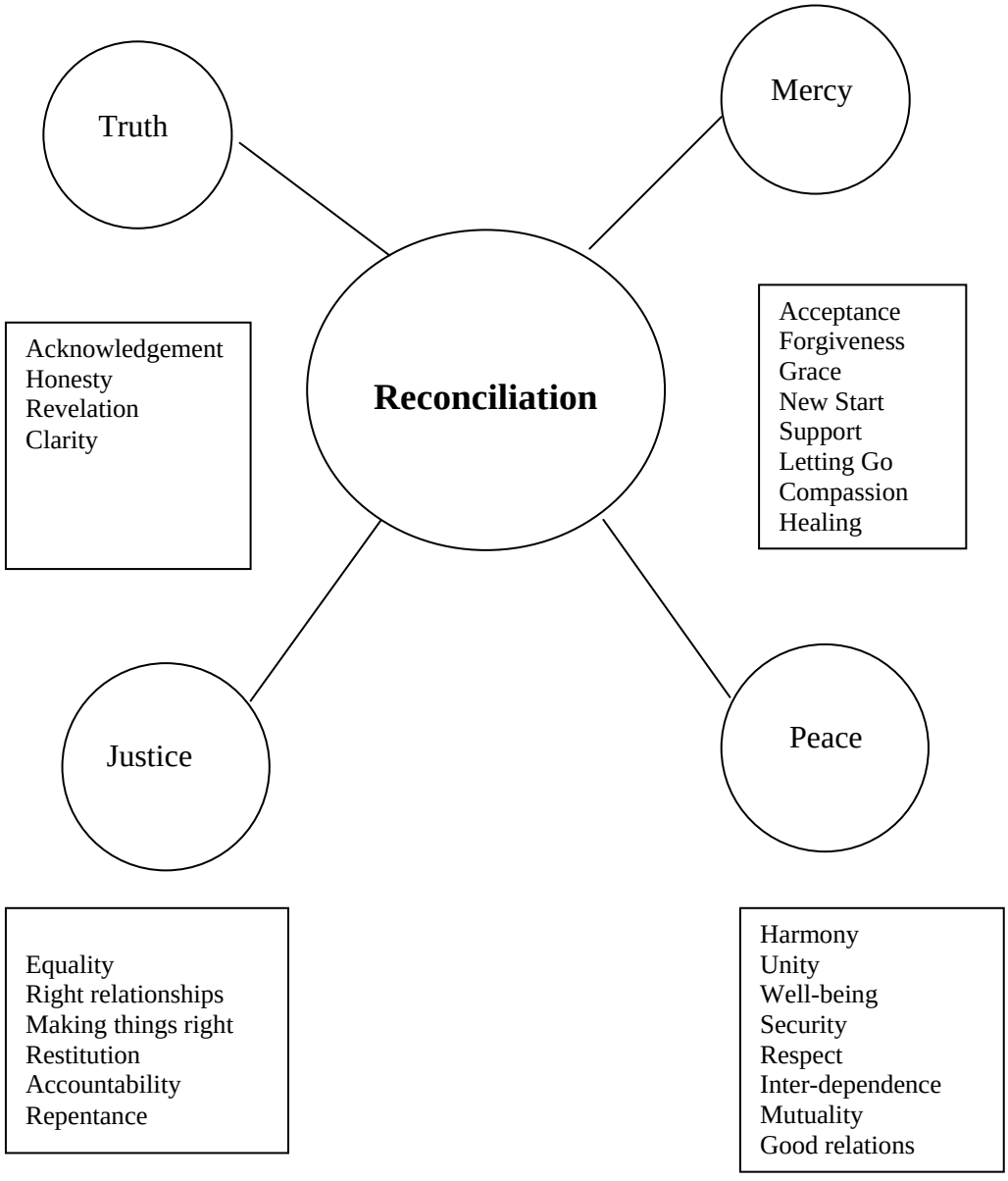
Adapted from Martha Minow *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness: Facing History after Genocide and Mass Violence*, Beacon Press, 1998.

APPENDIX THREE

THE PLACE CALLED RECONCILIATION

"Truth and mercy have met together; peace and justice have kissed" (Ps 85:10)

This text brings two paradoxes together: the claims of truth and the claims of mercy may conflict; and the claims of justice may conflict with the claims of peace. The place called reconciliation is where the different conflicting parties meet and face together the claims and tensions between truth and mercy and justice and peace.



Adapted from John Paul Lederach *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in a Divided Society*, The United National University (1995)

APPENDIX FOUR

FORGIVENESS - A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

(adapted from *Forgive Us Our Trespasses?)*

Central to the Gospel was Christ's teaching on unconditional forgiveness. Modern scholars agree that in relation to forgiveness Jesus only departed from the practice of his time in one aspect: he forgave unconditionally. The Dutch Dominican theologian André Lascaris says:

> *"When Jesus started his public life, he only brought about a seemingly minimal change: he accepted people into his company who were sinners and were not able to fulfil the demands of the Torah. He forgave unconditionally. He offered communication to people without asking anything from them beforehand. He transcended the fundamental law of justice, the law of reciprocity. According to St. Luke Jesus forgave his enemies on the cross 'for they do not know what they are doing' (Luke 23:34). This same power to forgive unconditionally he gave to his disciples (John 20:23)."*

This change is at the heart of Christianity. Jesus offered a way back into the community for people who had no way back because they could not fulfil the demands of the Law. He did this through offering unconditional forgiveness.

The phrase from the Lord's Prayer "forgive us our trespasses…" meant originally "forgive us our financial debts". In Jesus' time, as today, there was huge poverty because of debt. The remission of debt offered a way back into the community for people who were being crushed by it. The demands of the Law and the demands of debt were major oppressive realities at the time of Jesus, and Jesus was concerned about both.

Clearly a legal or a banking system cannot be run successfully if people always know that they will get off or avoid paying their debts. But if we do not allow people a way back when the legal or financial system is oppressing them, we are in essence saying that we prefer them to be destroyed.

The God revealed in Scripture wishes to offer people a way back to Him. He seeks to provide a new future and a way forward for people dominated by the past and its consequences. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ is the sign and promise of this. When the divine reality of forgiveness and new life is given, experienced, grasped or even glimpsed we have the possibility of forgiving others. We are able to be forgiving because we ourselves have been forgiven.

This is why forgiveness has the priority, why there is always inclusion before exclusion, and acceptance and grace before judgement. The Lord's Prayer asks us to ask forgiveness of God only to the extent that we are willing to offer it to others.

In being injured the person is caught up both with the injury and its consequences and with the perpetrator and what they have done. Forgiveness involves coming free of the power of the past and finding ways to a different future and is usually a long and difficult journey. Forgiving the person who has done the injury lies beyond that. It does not mean ignoring or forgetting the past and giving up all claims on the perpetrator. A journey of forgiveness involves different dimensions: words (spoken and unspoken), actions (made and not made)

and emotions (felt and overcome). Forgiveness is often discovered, not willed. Stories of forgiveness and repentance may help, as may the liturgical and community life of the church.

Forgiveness is not Reconciliation

There is a difference between forgiveness and reconciliation. Forgiveness is our side of the process: we forgive someone who has injured us. Only we can forgive; no one can do it on our behalf. It may and often does lead to reconciliation. But not always. Why? Because the other party may not say "sorry", may not repent, or is not willing to accept our forgiveness. Forgiveness seems especially impossible when the wrongdoer does not acknowledge what they have done. In that case we may have to follow the practice of loving our enemy.

Repentance means turning and changing one's ways. The person who commits wrong has to do more than say "sorry". He or she has to turn towards the person they have wronged, acknowledge what they have done, accept responsibility, express remorse and try to make amends. That is what the Bible means by repentance. It involves a willingness to enter into new and just relationships. Repentance, like forgiveness, rarely happens at once. It is important to keep space open for little glimpses of repentance and change, for repentance involves risk and vulnerability.

Reconciliation only happens when both aspects – forgiveness and repentance – come together in a new and more just relationship. Reconciliation can be seen as the fullness of forgiveness, where both parties are set free.

The Inter-personal and the Social

Individuals cannot be compelled to forgive or repent, even if there is a communal disposition towards forgiveness, repentance and justice and a political settlement broadly acceptable to a large majority of people. These may facilitate interpersonal forgiveness and repentance, but they do not guarantee it. Some may not repent and others may not be able to forgive. Not all the ends can be tied up.

There is a limit to what communal effort and politics can achieve. There always remains an area of transcendent activity and concern which takes us beyond the world of politics. This is particularly applicable in the case of forgiveness. The presence of forgiveness points to the transcendent concern and activity of God. It shows us the world on the *"far side of revenge"* (Seamus Heaney).

ANNEX

LEARNING TO FORGIVE THE UNFORGIVABLE

A story of forgiveness involving a former member of the Faith and Politics Group, Una O'Higgins O'Malley, whose father Kevin O'Higgins, the Irish Free State's Minister for Justice and External Affairs, was murdered in 1927 and her grandfather before that.

No one ever spoke to her about forgiveness, she says; it was "imprinted" in her. The men who shot her grandfather in his home for being the father of Kevin O'Higgins were almost certainly neighbours and known to her grandmother. Yet she would never identify them and insisted on forgiveness and no reprisals. Four years later, when Una was five months old, her father was shot on his way to Sunday Mass. During his five conscious hours, he too chose not to identify his killers, speaking only about forgiveness.

Sixty years later, it would be revealed that Kevin - with eight bullets in him - had managed to speak to his assailants on the roadside, telling them that he forgave them, that he understood why they had done it, but that this must be the end of the killings. There was some doubt that this occurred, but later, one of the attackers, Bill Gannon - who told this to his son - would only speak of O'Higgins as a "very misunderstood man" and would no longer carry a gun.

But what of another of the gang, Archie Doyle, who had danced on her father's grave? "I discovered about that while leafing through Uinseann McEoin's book in an airport bookshop in 1987 and I got seized with this awful, awful unforgiving cloud, that I hadn't ever felt as badly before. I couldn't stop it, it was like this lava pouring from a volcano . . . I had so often gone to that grave. That happened on Holy Thursday and I thought 'so much for Holy Thursday and Jesus Christ and all that'. I wanted to throw the whole thing out there and then. But on Good Friday, I made my way back to the church somehow and as I put my foot on the church porch, I had this thought - 'Have a Mass said for them all'. And that was when I felt normal again . . ." And so it happened that 60 years after the murder of Kevin O'Higgins, his daughter arranged a memorial Mass in Booterstown church for him and his killers, including Archie Doyle.

FORGIVENESS

So there he stood upon the shore
with everything in waiting.
The fire was going well,
fresh fish were grilling
and they would bring some more
(this would confirm their own importance).
And at that Easter breakfast
he would hear from Peter
just how much he loved him.
No decommissioning of the past
nor rank betrayals would be mentioned
simply ‘Bring more fish’ and ‘Do you love me?’

Today as mists clear from the Agreement,
hammered in Belfast last Good Friday evening,
a voice speaks from far South Africa
of truth and reconciliation
and puts a definition on forgiveness:
‘It is’, the bishop says,
‘a way of dealing with the past
so as to plan the future’.
Poor Peter’s past had been disastrous
but he was asked to bring along his gifts
of fish and loving;
nothing more was needed
to complete this paschal sharing
and look towards the future.

Una O’Higgins O’Malley

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A Declaration of Faith and Commitment by Christians in Northern Ireland
(The Declaration was not initiated by the Group but members were involved in its drafting)

Towards an Island that Works: Facing Division in Ireland (1987)
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*Breaking Down the Enmity: Faith and Politics in the Northern Ireland Conflict (*1993))

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KEY DATES

Anglo-Irish Agreement	1985
IRA and Loyalist Ceasefires	1994
Good Friday Agreement	1998
Patten Commission Report on Policing	1999
IRA decommissions some of its weapons	2001
New Policing Board established	2001

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