Transitions

The Christian call to overcome distrust - 17th November, 2001

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 appropriate and 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 a 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 and a sense of belonging. 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 developed in the 19th century - both Protestant and Catholic. Sacred canopies were also erected over nations and communities. This is all 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.

The Christian Community

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 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" (Heb13:14). The church is a community where Jew and Greek, bond and free, belong (I Cor12:13).

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 relationship 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 relationship 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 National Project

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 reunification.

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, reinforced 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 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.

Religion

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 were 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 farreaching 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.

Prosperity

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, eg 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, eg politically, and in how Northerners (Protestant and Catholic) see themselves and see their relationships with their neighbours.

Economic success, partly achieved through 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 o f 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.

Diversity

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-majority 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 with little sense of destination. There is no single simple Irish identity any longer. The national narrative which dominated most of the 20th century - the nation as being Catholic and Irish - is now 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 fully 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.

Identity and Conflict

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 high ground 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 reappraisal of nationalism.

Republican conflict with the British State has generated an increased sense of antiBritishness 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.

BRITISHIESS

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.

The British State

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 antiCatholicism - 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 o f 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 multiethnic 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.

Britain and Ireland

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 founded 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 since 1969

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. Some began a search for other sources of identity, eg Ulster Scots.

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, eg 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.

Melting into Air

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 remodelled 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. A community's sense of being on the high moral ground is not acknowledged. 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. Some have a sense of apocalyptic threat. 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 o f degrees and categories o f guilt: that o f the ideologues who promote hate and prepare the ground for violence; that o f those who plan and direct acts o f 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 o f omission and sins o f 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 o f generosity. There are the misdeeds o f groups, eg the paramilitaries, and there are the misdeeds o f 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 lowtrust 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: decommissioning, 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 and patient hopefulness. As the American theologian Reinhold Neibuhr said:

  Nothing that is worth doing can be achieved 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 Churches and the Troubles

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 widespread 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 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.

Facing the Reality of 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 Sean Mac Reamonn 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.

Diversity and Division

Since the 1960s 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 *a 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

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 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 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 scapegoated in the search for institutions and people to blame. fragmented and more incoherent.

The Churches and Sectarianism

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.

A Post-Christendom Church

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 o f such an institution, and even less sure i f we would actually like this sort o f 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 1: 10).

Trusting in Jesus The stories of the calming of the storm (eg 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 recognise 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. It is only through Jesus retelling the story of the history of Israel and through the way he breaks the bread - this action recreates the memory of the table fellowship, and thus their relationship with him - that they are enabled to recognise him. The disciples had to enter another story - the story of the Risen Lord - in order for them to `see' him.

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 as 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 11: 1).

Imagining Ourselves and Our World Differently

The Gospel offers us an alternative reality to fearful, 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).

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: Selfrighteous 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 appropriate and 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 diminishes the humanity of a minority, consuming them in one sense, can easily move on to their elimination, consuming them 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.