

## For such a time as this

RAY DAVEY

A few days ago I received a letter from a clergyman in England. While it was very courteous, it was easy to see that the writer was greatly distressed about events in Northern Ireland and he asked the really pertinent question: "What in God's name are you Christians in Northern Ireland doing?" I can well appreciate his perplexity. Our image in the Press and on TV is a most unhappy one. It shames us all with its violent demonstrations, baton charges, water cannons, and wanton destruction, its curses of hate and cries of pain. But where can I start to explain what it is all about?

Perhaps a most obvious point to make is that the great majority of Ulster Protestants are not the "militants" that so often hit the headlines. This extremist group have been directly responsible for the present troubles. They have been clever in following the usual extremist minority psychology, firstly by providing a "scape goat" in the Roman Catholic Church, then by branding all groups in opposition to them as Republican or Communist. They are close relatives to the Klu Klux Klan of America and the Fascists of Mussolini's Italy.

But it goes deeper than that. Such a group has to have something to feed on. In a real sense we in Ulster are the victims of history. From the Plantations of James I and the countless mistakes of the Westminster Government in its Irish policy, with all the obvious difficulties that must beset two very different peoples trying to live together on a small part of a small island, communal life here has always been difficult. The result has been that religion, politics, culture and race are so mixed up that it is almost impossible to be objective in assessing a situation, for it can be interpreted in so many ways. For instance, today the Civil Rights movement is described as "an I.R.A. or Republican Plot", "A

Roman Catholic cover to take over the whole of Ireland", "A Communist or Anarchist bid for control" or "a genuine concern for civil rights in Ireland". Indeed the behaviour and tactics of many of the marchers make it difficult to decide just where truth lies.

It is very foolish to predict how events will develop as so much is happening so quickly. Personally I believe — and I write before the election — that the key to the situation is still in the hands of moderate opinion. The response to the Prime Minister's dramatic television speech to the people of Ulster, just before Christmas, was a very powerful demonstration of the concern of the great

## EDITORIAL NOTE

*A hearty welcome to our large number of new subscribers, for this is the first issue of AUDENSHAW PAPERS to incorporate Christian Comment. It could hardly be a more timely one. Our author, the Rev. Ray Davey, is the distinguished leader both of the Presbyterian student community at Queen's University, Belfast, and the Corrymeela Centre. Their work is already a fine achievement.*

M.G.

mass of people for a new approach — with Civil Rights for everyone — a political debate in which politics will be lifted out of the sectarian slough and the real issues faced as to how best the country can be run to bring the good life to every member of the community. I believe this is what the great majority of Ulster people want. With us today —

“There are two worlds, the one dead

The other powerless to be born.”

This seems to me what this struggle is all about. Indeed this was how Captain O'Neill put it in his speech: “What sort of an Ulster do you want?” Can the better Ulster be born? Can moderate opinion win the day and out-flank extremism that comes from both sides?

### Christians have avoided politics

For the Christian this is a chastening time. Most of us are moderates; and unfortunately moderate opinion tends to be inarticulate. For too long we have avoided politics. “Politics is a dirty game,” we've said. So we've left the way open, with some exceptions, for careerists and “hard core” men whose motto still is “not an inch”. We would do well to take to heart John Dewey: “While saints introspect, burly sinners run the world”. Though we might not polarise it just in this way, yet we know that now we in Ulster simply must be involved.

For us there is no easy panacea for the sickness of our country. If the new Ulster is to be born there has

to be a long process of education and understanding. Reconciliation has to take place at every level. Mutual respect and trust have to grow. Protest Marches have their place. They are dramatic and exciting. But they are inarticulate, and only a very small part of the whole work that has to be done. The other part is discussion, education, encounter, writing and study. These are less dramatic but no less necessary and it is here that the Christian must take his place with others.

### Corrymeela

The day after I received the letter from England, I was present at a Conference at our Corrymeela Centre near Ballycastle on the lovely coast of Antrim. Only 70 young people of the 140 who had applied for places had been accepted on account of space. The main theme was *Communication* and the sub-themes *Civil Rights* and *Education and Christianity*. The group made up a spectrum of Ulster youth: Catholics and Protestants, Nationalists and Unionists, Civil Righters and anti-C.R's. It was one of the liveliest conferences I have ever attended. There was much hard hitting, and honest and mutually illuminating discussion. There was a real process of mutual demythologising as Protestants learnt what Catholics really believe and vice versa. The political exchanges were no less useful, and in addition to unemployment, housing and “one man one vote”. such issues as Spain, The Pill, Segregation of schools and the Ne Temere Decree were well aired.

Here there were great differences of opinion but a deep and common concern for the welfare of the whole country and an atmosphere of good humour and respect. Such occasions are all too few in Ulster and Corrymeela has come into being for just this purpose at such a time. For me this shows the way ahead for Northern Ireland.

### How we started

On a blustery afternoon at the end of November, 1965, about 300 people gathered in a large building overlooking the sea near Ballycastle, on the north coast of Ulster, They had come together to share in the official opening of the Corrymeela Centre. That day was made specially memorable by the presence of Tullio Vinay, who had himself pioneered the Agape Youth Village in the Alps and more recently Servizio Cristiano at Rieti in Sicily. No man could better incarnate our hopes and dreams for Corry-

meela, and he challenged us with the words: "I wish that with the help of the Living Lord this Centre may become . . . a question mark to the Church today everywhere in Europe, so that it may review its structures and may be free from its instinct of preservation to hear the time of God for its mission in the world."

But this really was the end of the beginning. So much had already gone before; the concurrence of several groups that had been thinking about such an experiment; the concern of those who visited such places as Iona, Taizé and Agape that something should be done in Ireland. Then the calling together of some 40 people in Belfast in September, 1964, followed by a series of seemingly abortive meetings until suddenly in February, 1965, came the chance of buying Corrymeela. This house had been built by the Holiday Fellowship about 30 years ago, accommodating about 50 people in the main house with chalets in which another 30 could stay. There are seven acres of land around the house, which looks away across to Rathlin Island and the Mull of Kintyre.

At this point we had no money, but we were sure that we had to go on and take Corrymeela, and within a fortnight, from many different sources, enough money did become available. This was only the start, as there was absolutely no furniture or equipment in the building and the fabric was in great need of paint and many repairs. It was remarkable how the right people kept turning up at the right time. A retired railway official, who could turn his hand to anything, and — even more important — loved people of all ages. Then a young lady who had expert knowledge of work camps, and then all summer an endless stream of people who came to lend a hand and transform the dull green building to the shining white house on the hill, Corrymeela — "the house above the water".

### Important work camps

Work camps became from the start one of the permanent features of the annual programme. Many of those who came there to enjoy the fun and do some work, became very interested in the whole conception of Corrymeela and have become members of the Group.

As one who has organised many of the regular type of conference with speakers, set topics and discussion, I am convinced that the work camp has

a greater appeal to many of the present generation of young people, including students. The work camps help to express the idealism, the desire to do something worth while for others, which is characteristic of this generation. The work experience is a unifying, inspiring, and, in its deepest sense, a spiritual one. Work itself is a great common ground on which all can meet, the articulate and the inarticulate, the extrovert and the introvert, the mature personality and the one who is unsure of everything. In communal work no one can dominate or steal the show. The shared work creates the confidence, trust and unity of a true family. In this atmosphere worship is completely real and natural, and people talk about real questions.

One sentence from the letter of an Irish camper from the Legion of Mary, sums up the potential of the work camp for Corrymeela. "If everyone in Northern Ireland could spend just one week at Corrymeela there would be no more bad feeling in our community."

The work of Corrymeela has often centred on such national concerns. One of the great occasions in our early days, which has set the pattern for many meetings after it, was at Easter 1966. This was the 50th anniversary of the 1916 Easter Rising in Dublin; and a time of dangerous tension in all of Ireland. We held a conference on *Community 1966*, with half of the participants Catholic and half Protestant. The key speech was made by our prime minister, Captain Terence O'Neill, in the form of a great and moving plea for better community relations.

The Centre is used by a good many organisations for their own conferences; but each year we are responsible for more and more projects of our own. Plans for 1969 include the following:—

1. A series of holidays and courses during the Easter Vacation for underprivileged children and for old people. These will be organised by students and younger members of the Corrymeela Community.
2. A Members' Retreat, led by Lord MacLeod, former leader of the Iona Community.
3. A meeting of university staffs on *Religion in the University*.
4. A conference on *The Church and the Social Worker*.

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5. A conference on *Alcoholism in Ulster*.
6. Another on *The Influence of Television*.
8. Another on *The Generation Gap*.
9. Five *Family Weeks*, for parents with young children, which will be 50% Catholic and 50% Protestant.

Apart from such groups in the main house, the Chalet Village in the grounds has a separate programme of work conferences and camps and conferences.

Our organisation is the responsibility of the Corrymeela Community, a group of some 50 people who mostly live in and around Belfast, although some have now moved to other places. There is an executive council which is answerable to the Community and deals with day-to-day administration. The members meet each fortnight in Belfast for a meal and worship, followed by business or a talk. It is mainly a professional group so far and is made up of clergy, solicitors, architects, doctors, social workers, teachers, civil servants, librarians, secretaries, students, farmers, housewives and others. This larger group is divided into three smaller groups on a geographical basis. One of these has taken over the running of a house for alcoholics in the dock area. Another has arranged regular meetings with a group of Roman Catholics.

We have recently begun to organise the "Friends of Corrymeela", that is those who are interested and want to keep in touch with what is happening. They are asked to pay a subscription; receive *Causeway* — the bulletin that we now publish four times a year — and they have the opportunity of attending any of our conferences that may interest them.

### Impatient radicals

All this so far sounds lovely, like a *Readers Digest* success story. But the Community does not

think that way about Corrymeela. There is so much to be done; and we have only touched the surface of things. Again, there are many tensions within the Community. On the one hand our radicals get impatient because they feel that the others are moving too slowly. These for their part feel that if we move too quickly we may lose touch with the Churches. Some emphasise social and political involvement and are impatient with what they call pietism; while others believe we must keep a personal commitment to Christ at the centre of our work. Again there is a lot of concern about some members who, because of other responsibilities, are now able to give little time to the work of Corrymeela.

But on the other hand there are great encouragements: the unfailing loyalty and enthusiasm of the staff at Corrymeela, who bear the real burden day in and day out, the exhilaration of working with a group of people who are able to bring such a variety of training and skills to the project, and the awareness that each person has his special contribution to make and is dedicated in his own way. Also we have learnt to recognise that tension is a sign of life and that when we lose it we will be standing still or moving backwards. Above all there is the inspiration and yet the agony of knowing that more and more people are looking to Corrymeela and expecting much from us. Often in discussion about the Church, what it ought to be doing in our situation, someone will say when pressed to mention any sign of hope, "But there's Corrymeela." It is then that we remind ourselves that we are but servants and say again:

Except the Lord build the house  
They labour in vain that build it.  
O Lord, do good in thy good pleasure:  
Build Thou the walls of Jerusalem.