

Address for the Re-dedication of the Croi

A text from Ecclesiastes 3

A time to weep, and a time to laugh;
A time to mourn, and a time to dance;
... A time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
... A time for war and a time for peace.

Thanks to all those who contributed to the remaking of the Croi: architects, the quantity surveyor, the builder, people who gave money and people like Helen Baird and Ronnie Millar who had a eye to detail.

The Croi was opened on the 16th of June 1979. Some of us who were there, now have less hair or grey hair. Some of us, like the Croi, have been well-weathered.

Thirty years of history have passed. We have seen the Hunger Strikes of the early 1980s – times of trauma. There was the euphoria of the loyalist and republican ceasefires and the Good Friday Agreement in the 1990s. We have remembered the victims of the Troubles on the Private Day of Reflection. There has been a weave of sadness and joy in this place.

The Croi is like an ear – a place of listening. Ray and the people around him were engaged in deep listening in the 1960s. They realised that things could not go on the way they were going in Northern Ireland.

Yes, we are in new times, but we cannot quite give up the old ways of doing things, cannot quite believe in new ways of relating together. The old ways have their seductions. So we need to listen for what these times are saying to us, to discern what it means to be a Christian presence in a still far from reconciled society. Frank Wright – that great political scientist and member of this Community – understood the realities of relationships on the ethnic frontier and how resistant they were to change. And it is right that we remember Frank and his family today – because it is a legacy from Frank's mother that has largely funded this work.

But Frank in his writings records little moments of something different – moments of cross-community co-operation. In the Croi there have been little moments of something different echoing the Gospels where Jesus brings something strange and transforming – a sign and signal of the presence of transcendence. The Spirit has descended. There has been a little bit of the healing of the nations.

Ray Davey in his address on June the 16th 1979 saw the Croi as a

'place of reflection where we can face the real questions. What does it mean to be a Christian presence in a broken society? Is it enough just to listen and reflect what the politicians, the social analysts, economists and sociologists say? Have we any special word to say or contribution to make? Is there indeed any Word from the Lord today and have we listened for it and had the courage to say it? Have we taken Bonhoffer, the German martyr-theologian's perennial question seriously: "What does it mean to follow Christ today?"'

Listening to God may bring us into new worlds to transfigure us and put all our strivings and nonsense into perspective, and help to remould us into being a Christian presence in a still broken society.

Ray also saw the Croi as a place of celebration and hope. He said:

‘All sorts of events will take place here – it will be a place where all sorts of people will celebrate their togetherness – meeting each other and getting to know each other; rejoicing in being accepted and feeling that they belong; it will be a place of joy and laughter; of song and dance; of music and drama – proclaiming the unity of God’s creation and the totality of life together. It will be a place where the bereaved and hurt will find comfort; where the lonely will find friends; where the threatened and insecure will find support, and where the young will find meaning and purpose. It is to be a place where we all find Hope.’

I think Ray’s vision has been vindicated over the last 30 years. May there be 30 more. Amen.