

Corrymeela: A Face-to-Face Community

**The Incarnation as the foundation of Corrymeela's response to
a divided Church and a divided society**

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by

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation focuses on the Corrymeela Community. The Reverend Dr. Ray Davey and a group of people dedicated to ecumenism, peace and reconciliation in Ireland and throughout the world, founded the Community in 1965. The dissertation looks at literature about the Community written by its founder, other members and a journalist. The dissertation argues that the life and work of Corrymeela is best understood from an explicitly incarnational theological standpoint.

As well as using Corrymeela literature as a source, a number of interviews provide an up to date picture together with the views of people who have been involved over the years in different capacities. Those interviewed included: one founder member, a former volunteer and staff member, a former leader, a son of a former leader, and a number of members from varied backgrounds and involvement in the Community.

Other literature provides a spread of theological insights that support the practical application of an incarnational lens to Corrymeela's life and work. Sermons of the David Stevens, a former leader, help to provide a contemporary understanding that underlies and inspires those who are part of this reconciliation community.

A picture of this community emerges stemming from the experiences of the founder as a chaplain in North Africa and prisoner of war in Italy and Germany during the Second World War. This experience along with the influence of other communities like Iona in Scotland, Agape and Riesi in Italy became the formative background for the original group who formed around Ray Davey.

The tense political situation in Northern Ireland in the decades leading up to 1965 also influenced the formation of Corrymeela. The outbreak of the 'Troubles' from 1969 onwards became the driving motivation for the practical reconciliation programmes at the Ballycastle Centre and in various parts of Northern Ireland. It was in that context that face-to-face relationships became so important for reconciliation.

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Abbreviations

- TW Trevor Williams (Former Leader of the Corrymeela Community)
- RL Rita Lane (One time Volunteer, a Volunteer Co-ordinator and Member)
- DC Desney Cromeey (A founder member)
- DM Duncan Morrow (A member)
- MB Marian Brady (A member)
- MC Mary Magennis Catney (A member)
- CT Colman Turley (A member)

INTRODUCTION

In this Dissertation, I show how the Corrymeela Community is a response to the challenge of ecumenism: Firstly, in an ecclesiastical context, and secondly, in a society severely disrupted by political, cultural and religious differences. The method will be to apply an incarnational theological lens to the vision, commitment and programme of a Community that is dedicated to the work of reconciliation.

To do this I have conducted interviews and undertaken a review of literature about Corrymeela and the topics of reconciliation and the incarnation to illustrate the ongoing response of the Community to changes in Northern Ireland and the world.

My contention is that Corrymeela is a *Face-to-Face* community and that the process of reconciliation is achieved by a face-to-face sharing across the barriers that divide people whether they are religious, political or cultural. I include the text of the interviews as Appendices¹ to the dissertation together with original source material by the late Dr. David Stevens, Leader of the Community, who sadly died while this research was in process. Other readers and researchers may approach this material to find relevant contemporary information.

The first chapter looks at the background and origins of the Community through literature written by people involved as well as two books by a sympathetic journalist. The chapter outlines the formation and the influences that contributed to the style and emphases that shaped Corrymeela. The political context is also part of the background as well as the developing ecumenical movement following formation of the World Council of Churches and the Second Vatican Council.

The second chapter is a survey of the responses of seven members who were asked for their own understanding of what Corrymeela stood for and their experience of how the

¹ Pages 59 - 135

Community responded to a variety of situations and changes in society.

The third chapter reflects on aspects of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ and at how these are carried through in the programmes of the Community, and their effectiveness for those who participated. At the end of this chapter, the concept of Corrymeela as a face-to-face community is opened up through sermons by the late David Stevens, Leader from 2004 – 2010. It finishes with a reference to the Statement of Commitment of the Community.²

I have added a short fourth chapter to the original dissertation with a view both to rounding it off and looking forward to new challenges.

² Appendix 8, page 84

CHAPTER ONE: CORRYMEELA – ORIGINS & CHARACTERISTICS

Introduction

This chapter will set the scene and give an overview of Corrymeela beginning with the context of the period in which the founder and first leader gained his formative experiences. This covers most of a momentous century of upheaval not only on the world stage but also in Ireland. It was also a period of change in the Churches and between the Churches – the rise of ecumenism and its challenge to the Churches. These factors exerted a great influence on the younger generations during and after the Second World War. The chapter will touch on these matters and show the combined effect on those who came together seeking to make a difference in their own place – in this case mostly Northern Ireland. It will show how the vision and inspiration that came from Second World War experiences, and the exposure of students to other insights and ventures elsewhere, played a formative role in the creation of this new community. The chapter will end with section on the development of the Community during very tumultuous decades in Northern Ireland.

Setting the Scene

Any consideration of the life and character of the Corrymeela Community must involve awareness of the life and times of the Reverend Robert Raymond Davey, MBE. Ray Davey was born at the beginning of the First World War, so his life has spanned a period of great upheavals and change. World maps have been altered many times since. The people of Ireland have witnessed repeated unrest, violence and division. The Christian Churches responded to the ecumenical movement to varying degrees. A world missionary conference in Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1910, is the recognised beginning of this movement, though the Roman Catholic Church did not officially embrace this movement until the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s. In the meantime, in 1923, a number of Churches and

religious communions in Ireland formed the body that would later become the Irish Council of Churches. There were also a number of attempts to bring some Churches together during the 1930s. Then in the 1960s, the Church of Ireland, the Methodist and the Presbyterian Churches began conversations designed to work towards visible unity. This may give an impression of an ecumenical dawn. It was mostly at the level of central Church negotiations. At a local level, the individual denominations responded cautiously. There were accusations of ‘sheep stealing’ from time to time.

At the onset of the Second World War Ray Davey was an Assistant Minister in the Presbyterian Church. For Ray Davey, as for many people, the war changed everything. He offered for service with the YMCA and sailed to North Africa, as a Field Secretary. He was taken prisoner in 1942. His experiences with the troops, and as a prisoner of war, were to leave an indelible mark on his approach to the challenges he faced on his return to Ireland. The title of his first book, *Don't Fence Me In*,³ says a lot about the difficulty of adjusting to being home again. This book also indicates the importance of Christian community in the thinking of Ray Davey. He wrote:

Christian Community, in spite of all its lamentable divisions and failure, is the only hope for the world. Already it has outlived many cultures and civilizations. It has done this and will do it again because, in the last analysis, it is the only true community. All other communities, be they relatively good or bad, are transient, relative or sectional, appealing to one particular age, or one section or one race. The Christian Community transcends colour and class, its terms of reference and its motive power are from beyond, outside man himself.⁴

This quotation shows the importance of community for Ray Davey in his work as the first Presbyterian Student Chaplain at Queen's University, Belfast, It also indicates the kind of influence that led students at the University in the direction of a new expression of Christian community as they wrestled with the challenges of the time in Ireland and

³ Davey, *Don't Fence Me In*, Belfast, The Belfast News-Letter, Belfast, 1954

⁴ Ray Davey, *Don't Fence Me In*, 120

beyond. Davey's thinking about peace and community and his influence on students is also found in the same book.

Part of our trouble is that we entertain in our minds a very unimaginative and negative idea of peace. Usually we think of it as the absence of war, that which is created by treaties and conferences, primarily the concern of politicians, and beyond the range of the ordinary person. "What can I do about it anyway?" may not be what we say, but it is frequently what we think. ... Peace does not just happen – it has to be made and kept. Peace essentially means social wellbeing and wholeness ... In September, 1952, a group of Queen's students had the privilege of an hour's discussion with Professor Karl Barth, in Basel, and one of the students asked him what was the most important thing that they could do for the peace of the world, and he replied, "set your own house in order". This shows us where we can begin. Working for peace is not usually dramatic or spectacular and it begins with each one of us – where we are.⁵

The Challenge of Ecumenism

It became clear to Davey, as he began work as a university chaplain, that student attitudes had changed. They were no longer satisfied with cosy discussions but were eager to be part of the process of change as he says, "Many wanted the Church to be a 'creative minority' working for the underprivileged and marginalized at home and abroad".⁶ Due to the stimulation of speakers from other countries and denominations, the students availed of opportunities provided by ecumenical bodies in Europe. As Davey goes on to say:

The emergence of the Ecumenical Movement and the increasing desire for closer relationships between churches was growing in Ireland. Some of the students had been to international work camps run by the Youth Department of the World Council of Churches. Inevitably most of them came back full of enthusiasm to work for a wider vision of the Church. They began in the university organizing joint meetings and small groups to study differences.⁷

One of the seminal experiences for some students was a visit to Agape in the Cottian Alps, about thirty miles west of Turin, in 1952 with Davey. This is a Christian Youth Village some 3,000 feet up in the Alps. It was founded by Tullio Vinay, a Waldensian Youth Pastor, who Ray Davey had read about in a magazine. This community

⁵ Davey, *Don't Fence Me In*, 117-118

⁶ Ray Davey, *A Channel of Peace: The Story of the Corrymeela Community*, Marshall Pickering, London, 1993, 64

⁷ Davey, *A Channel of Peace*, 65

grew out of the horrendous experiences of young people during the civil war between the Fascists and the Partisans. As Davey says, “Agape was the sign of gratitude to God for the way they had been brought through such terrible times and a means of rediscovering the Hope of the Gospel for the future.”⁸ The Waldensian Church is the indigenous Protestant Church of Italy. A church with a history going back to the twelfth century whose people frequently had suffered martyrdom and persecution. The importance of this visit, and the relationship with Tullio Vinay that came out of it, is vividly described by Davey:

This Italian trip gave us all much food for thought. One night towards the end of our stay I found that I could not sleep. I kept on thinking of our situation in Ireland: our divisions, the complacency of so much of our church life, and how many social and political problems were ignored. Then I began to think of the young people at Agape: what so many of them had been through, and how they were attempting to face their problems in the light of the Gospel. Was there not something that we could do in Ireland? Could we have a meeting place where we might begin to work out our differences? At least here we had been given a vision of what could be done. Why not in Ireland?⁹

It was a few days later that the group met Karl Barth who answered the student’s question about what was the best way to save the world. His answer ‘set your own house in order’ rang in their ears in a very challenging way.

This and other experiences created awareness and the desire to do something. For a number of years Ray Davey and a number of students and their friends sought ways to respond to the challenge of ecumenism and the divisions in Ireland. My first memory of hearing about this search for a way to respond to the challenge of ecumenism was in 1963. By that time I was involved in the Youth Committee of Irish Churches having attended the Lausanne Youth Assembly in 1960 and the Leicester Youth Conference in 1962. The Youth Committee was part of the Irish Council of Churches. Through this involvement I attended a conference run by the Irish Council of Churches in 1963 along with other youth delegates

⁸ Davey, *A Channel of Peace*, 67

⁹ Davey, *A Channel of Peace*, 68

with a similar background to my own. Some of them, who were part of Ray Davey's circle, began to talk about their hopes for setting up a centre sometime in the future. Within two years they were among the founder members of the newly formed Corrymeela Community. This became possible because a house and site near Ballycastle, Co. Antrim became available. This was a moment of decision for a group of people with no assets who were called to take a step of faith.

The Vision

The vision that inspired those who founded the Community stems from the experience and vision of Ray Davey. As we will see this shaped the approach and character of all that followed. Inspired by the selfless dedication of the men who during the Second World War "carried the fight to victory" Davey declared, "we must carry on from there and win the peace"¹⁰ He goes on to say that

Unless we are content to be passive sentimentalists or disillusioned cynics, we've got to bring the same qualities of courage and selflessness to the cause of peace as they did to war.

To do so we've got to have a much more penetrating conception of peace. Peace, then, is something both positive and dynamic. It is rather like health. No doctor believes that health is merely the absence of the various epidemics, diseases and ailments which are always in circulation. The healthy person is far more than merely the person who isn't sick. On the contrary, he radiates energy, power and vitality.

Peace is just like that, it is a very positive thing and has to be built up and maintained.¹¹

Davey's vision of community and his ecumenical perspective combine in his critique of the Church life and spirituality in Ireland, as he knew it. He states "[t]he rampant individualism of so much Christianity has blinded us to one of the most characteristic themes of the New Testament. It vibrates with the language and experience of community – togetherness and fellowship."¹² He refers to the importance of community

¹⁰ Davey, *A Channel of Peace*, 118

¹¹ Davey, *A Channel of Peace*, 118

¹² Davey, *A Channel of Peace*, 120

and ecumenism in the thought of the former Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple.

It is worth noting in passing what the late Archbishop Temple described as “the great new fact of our time”, and which has received far too little publicity and thought. It is simply the new awareness of Christian Community which has been slowly dawning on the world like a spiritual renaissance. It has been the motive power behind the worldwide movement for unity, which has recently found permanent expression in the World Council of Churches [1948]. I’ve seen signs of it in so many different places, on the sacred island of Iona off Scotland, in Mainz Kastel on the Rhine, and in the Cottian Alps in North Italy.¹³

Ruth Patterson tells how Davey’s vision and inspiration came across to her as a student at Queen’s University (1962-1966).

She recalls, “I was very much ‘in’ on the early discussions and stages of Corrymeela. Those were remarkable years to be a student, or to be working with students. The social awareness, the music, the sense of optimism that we could really do something to contribute to a better Ireland and a better world, and in our particular situation, the leadership, inspiration and integrity of a man like Ray Davey – all of this conspired to give us as young people a sense of vision and hope for the future.”¹⁴

In the Corrymeela Report for 1978, under the heading *signposts in a seeking journey*, the writer captures the process and vision that led to the forming of Corrymeela. This is told from a student’s point of view.

A handful of students at Queen’s University in the early 1960s felt strongly their vocation to be “members one of another”, sharing in each other’s lives and together serving God in the world. We felt the Church as we saw it in danger of losing sight of its foundation as a community - of believers bonded by love ... Sharing our enthusiasm with Ray Davey, who had personally inspired our search it was decided to call together a large group of people who were known to be interested in the idea of a community; some were ministers in the Church, most were laymen and women from varied backgrounds. Their maturity and experience were to balance the students’ enthusiasm. This group had been meeting for several months, thinking about the cellular pattern of the Church and beginning to come to grips with the practicalities of organising a community when Corrymeela came on the market.¹⁵

The reference here to “Corrymeela” is to the building, owned by body called “Holiday Fellowship”, which came on the market in the first half of 1965. Through a hurried fundraising process the group purchased the building on a cliff top near Fair Head outside

¹³ Davey, *A Channel of Peace*, 120-121

¹⁴ Alf McCreary, *IN WAR AND PEACE: The Story of Corrymeela*, The Brehon Press, Belfast, 2007, 65

¹⁵ Article, *signposts in a seeking journey*, in Corrymeela Report 1978.

Ballycastle, Co. Antrim and looking out on Rathlin Island. The same article tells about the decision to use the name “Corrymeela” because “its beauty and uniqueness had an appeal”. Following on this decision and the preparatory period the ‘Queen’s’ group had to set about defining their aims. This led to the formulation of the first aims and purposes of the new Centre. Up to this time they had not felt ready to call their group, a Community. The first set of aims are as follows:

1. Training of Christian laymen¹⁶ to play a responsible part in society and the Church.
2. To give opportunity for retreat, that people under stress, or wishing to discover the meaning of life, may find quietness for readjustment.
3. To give opportunity to industrial and professional groups to meet for conference and study.
4. Through work camps to bring together craftsmen and voluntary workers in a realistic Christian fellowship.
5. Through youth camps to provide a meeting place for young people of this and other countries.
6. To provide a meeting point for reconciliation in working and life and in the Church.

Our aim as a group and our hope for the future of the Centre was more succinctly put at the official opening of Corrymeela in October 1965 by Tullio Vinay, the founder of the Community of Agape, when he said, “I hope that [with] the help of the living Lord this Centre may become a place of encounter and dialogue with all men; believers and unbelievers. We believers need the presence of unbelievers because they represent a criticism on our faith and life ... and unbelievers need us if we have real news to bring”¹⁷

Ray Davey, during an address to mark the taking over of the Corrymeela premises in June 1965, expresses his sense of direction and purpose for the venture.

I am sure this is one of the great things God is saying to us as we gather here today. Have more faith in me, understand the sort of God I am. If you want a place where people can get together to know me better, a place where they can learn to think about my world and my purpose for it, a place where Christians can come together, especially those from different fragments of my broken body and learn to love and trust each other – if you want that – I want it infinitely more. O you of little faith.¹⁸

The fact that Davey chooses these words to mark the twenty-first anniversary of the founding of the Community confirms the ecumenical thrust of his vision. His deep desire

¹⁶ In early writing about Corrymeela the use of ‘inclusive’ language had not yet become an issue.

¹⁷ Corrymeela Report 1978, Article: *signposts in a seeking journey*.

¹⁸ Ray Davey, *An Unfinished Journey*, The Corrymeela Press, Belfast, 1986, Part 1, 1

for peace and reconciliation which grew out of his war experiences and a new awareness of relationships in Ireland combine to bring a breadth of purpose to the new community.

Davey states his understanding of vision: “To me [vision] is where the divine and human meet. God works very closely in and through people. For the most part that inter-action goes on in the ordinary everyday events of daily life.”¹⁹ The importance of the ordinary, and God being found in and through it, is central to the work and spirit of Corrymeela. As the Community set out on the journey, to discover how to implement the vision, the need for awareness of this double aspect of everyday activities as the meeting place between the human and the divine was central to the character of this new community adventure.

Davey stresses this need for awareness. “Surely ... awareness is crucial. I often think of how D.T. Niles of Ceylon once put it, ‘God does not come to us through the skylight, but through the door’.”²⁰ This insight lies behind the importance of the reception area both in Ballycastle and in Corrymeela House in Belfast.

Building a Community of Reconciliation

The first period from 1965 to 1969 was an important time of finding ways to implement the vision. How were the words of Davey at the opening in 1965 to come to pass? At that opening event he said:

We know that there is no cheap and easy route to unity. We cherish and respect the separate traditions of each Church, but we are convinced that there are multitudes of things that are crying out to be done together, and it is high time we got on with them.²¹ We hope that Corrymeela will come to be known as ‘the Open Village’, open to all men of good will who are willing to meet each other, to learn from each other and to work together for the good of all.

Open also for all sorts of new ventures and experiments in fellowship, and study, and worship.

Open to all sorts of people; from industry, the professions, agriculture and commerce.

¹⁹ Davey, *An Unfinished Journey*, Part 1, 2

²⁰ Davey, *An Unfinished Journey*, Part 1, 2

²¹ This comment echoes the principle enunciated at the WCC Lund conference in 1952 ‘to do everything together except that which conscience would not allow’.

This is at least part of our vision. We know we are only at the beginning, and there is so much to be done.²²

This statement sets out the principles, character and breadth of the task ahead for the new Corrymeela Community. Where to start and what to do first were similar but different challenges. To respond to the challenge it was important that the concept of the “Open Village” be shown in practical ways. For example, the initial group that formed the community were largely Protestant and essentially Presbyterian. It would need to be made clear that this new community was open to all. In a Corrymeela *Bulletin* (October 1965) Davey wrote:

[A]ll Christians must be involved, that is why we emphasise the place of the laity. Finally, if the world is to listen to us, we as Christians, and as such the Church, must stop living for ourselves, but live for the world. These may be theological statements, but Corrymeela has come into existence because we desperately want to find out from experiment what they mean in practical terms for Ireland today.²³

Love goes on to state that

Here we have a clear statement that ‘all Christians must be involved.’ Thus Corrymeela was open to all the Christian traditions and not just the Protestant side. For 1965 this was indeed breaking new ground as Corrymeela was stating that their Community was for all Christians and not just clergy; it was to involve the laity too, and it was to encompass the whole of Ireland.²⁴

This deliberate move to inclusiveness is confirmed in an article by Davey in 1971 six years after the opening:

Corrymeela is officially linked with no church, but seeks to work with all. It originated among students and graduates of the University. At the beginning it was entirely Protestant but has long since passed from that position and is open to all who are committed Christians.²⁵

After the official opening much work still needed to be done to the house and around the site. The main impetus for getting on with the work was the first political

²² Alf McCreary, *Corrymeela: Hill of Harmony in Northern Ireland*, Hawthorn Books, Inc., New York, 1976, 34-35

²³ Ray Davey, Corrymeela Bulletin, October 1965 in Mervyn T, Love, *Peace Building Through Reconciliation in Northern Ireland*, Avebury, Ashgate Publishing, Aldershot, England, 1995, 88-89

²⁴ Love, *Peace Building Through Reconciliation in Northern Ireland*, 89

²⁵ Ray Davey, Corrymeela is not an island, *Community Forum*, Vol. 4, No.2, 1971

conference which was to be held at Easter 1966. The title of the conference was *Community 1966* and the main speaker was the Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, Terence O'Neill. In his speech he outlined the polarised nature of society and laid down the limitations facing those who harboured thoughts of political change. Here is part of his speech:

The Ulster community is a place in which two traditions meet: the Irish Catholic tradition and the British Protestant tradition. By and large these religious traditions have also been synonymous with political views. Disagreement has been centred not around the activities of the State but around its very existence. The constitutional position is not a matter on which there can be any compromise now or in the future. We in Ulster have much to work for and much to hope for. If we cannot be united in all things, let us at least be united in working together – in a Christian spirit – to create better opportunities for our children, whether they come from the Falls Road or from Finaghy.²⁶

This illustrates the political climate at the time. The context for the forming of Corrymeela was not only one of sterility and introversion in Church circles but also the political situation was filled with discontent and frustration on one side and the fear of change on the other. Having served as a Church of Ireland curate in Christ Church, Derry from September 1966 to April 1968 I can vouch for the sense of unease throughout the community. One anecdotal comment: I was visiting Dublin during the Christmas period in 1966 – a friend asked about the situation in Northern Ireland. I clearly recall replying that I considered it a 'diseased society'. That was only after three months living and working in Derry. The point in mentioning these matters is to show that the founder members of Corrymeela also would have been aware of the underlying political instability and the potential for communal unrest.

There were other political conferences as well as theological discussions in the early years. The Centre was used for clergy gatherings like one that I attended along with clergy from the Protestant denominations in Derry – Church of Ireland, Methodist and

²⁶ Davey, *Unfinished Journey*, Part 1, 13

Presbyterian. Ecumenical training events for those involved with youth leadership were organised by the Youth Committee of the Irish Council of Churches.

It was not too long before political turmoil erupted and violence broke out. From 1969 onwards, the real test of Corrymeela began. Would the Community be able to adapt to the new circumstances on the ground? Love draws attention to the way that members changed their priorities from an emphasis on community to a primary emphasis on reconciliation. His research shows that

the founding members appear to have been convinced that the ‘power of community’ lay in the ‘message of acceptance and forgiveness’; it was about ‘learning through the sharing of experience and dialogue and encounter’; it was about relationships and working for ‘justice in love, in order to remove the barriers which prevent reconciliation.’ ... The founding members of the Community appear to have realised that it had become necessary to move its aim of commitment to forgiveness and reconciliation from number six on its list of priorities to become its major priority. In this the founding members appear to have been far-sighted and ahead of their time both with their ideals and their practice.²⁷

This conscious change of emphasis in the aims of the Community does not mean that there was any dilution of the community aspect of its life. The work camps were vital to the creation of the initial Community as a tangible reality and the emergence of Cell Groups played a role in fostering the community spirit as the years went on. These are to be found in different localities, including Dublin. The Dublin Cell Group was formed in 1971. An account of the Dublin Cell Group gives a good idea of what a cell group is and how it functions. The group formed as a result of *Corrymeet* 1970. *Corrymeet* was an annual event for young people in the Christmas holiday period. That year there was “a fairly large contingent ... who either work or study in the Republic, thirteen of whom are in Dublin”²⁸ This group consisted of “six boys from Milltown Park, one from the School of Ecumenics, one from U.C.D. and five girls from T.C.D.” Following an initial meeting

²⁷ Love, *Peace Building*, 109-110

²⁸ Unknown author, *New Dublin Group*, Causeway, Corrymeela, Belfast, June 1971

where they discussed ways of putting a shape on their meetings, such as, who would lead the discussion of a topic and who would lead in prayer. They met again and two others joined them. The writer of the short article describes how their discussions progressed.

We talked about the roles that we were expected to play in our lives and what forces and motivations affect the way we behave. Leading on from this, the next time we met we discussed Responsibility and how it affected our lives. These discussions I found very valuable as we regard problems from many different aspects – male and female, Catholic and Protestant, celibate and non-celibate, philosophical, theological and ‘sociological. ... The peculiar fellowship that we share is the same as, or an extension of, that which we all experienced at Corrymeela.²⁹

A good summary of what the Corrymeela Community seeks to embody is found in Ray Davey’s own words:

Now I want to attempt to describe just what Corrymeela is ... I believe there are three foundation stones, and each is essential to the whole, and they are contained in the simple statement: CORRYMEELA is a CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY dedicated to RECONCILIATION ... So we must briefly look at each word ... The word “Christian” immediately brings us to Christ. He is at the very centre and we start with him. This is made very clear at the annual Dedication Service each January, when we solemnly kneel and affirm together “our faith in God who has reconciled the world to himself in Jesus Christ, and later on “We surrender ourselves to the spirit of Jesus to overcome our divisions and make us instruments of his Peace.” ... So Corrymeela is a diverse group of people, divided by age, background, denomination, social and political convictions, Yet all bound together by a common faith in the One Christ ...

A Christian COMMUNITY ... [The] search for community was very widespread in western society ... This [search] was very much in keeping with the thinking of those who came together to plan and initiate the Corrymeela experiment. They were very conscious of the individualism in the religious life of this country, and the very widely held belief that this part of life was very private and entirely between each individual and his Creator ... They saw with new clarity that the divine purpose was not just for individuals here and there, but for the whole human race ... we all believed that the time was ripe to try to make visible and real, what we had discussed for a long time ...

I pass on now to the third foundation stone of Corrymeela. As a Christian Community we are committed to RECONCILIATION. It is hardly necessary to say this, as it is the very essence of being a follower of Christ in the world. It is stated in passage after passage in the New Testament ... This in fact is the Christian thing ... To claim to be a Christian and not to be a reconciler is a contradiction in terms, like the sailor who has never been to sea.³⁰

Corrymeela Literature

²⁹ Unknown author, *New Dublin Group*, Causeway, Corrymeela, Belfast, June 1971

³⁰ Ray Davey, *TAKE AWAY THIS HATE: The story of a search for community*, The Corrymeela Press, Belfast, 1985, 100, 102-103, 111-112

This section looks at Corrymeela Literature and other resources that stem from Leaders and others who have commented on the Community over the years. The earliest writing is by Ray Davey beginning with *Don't Fence Me In* (1954). The first edition published in 1946 was not available to me. The main body of the book tells the story of Davey's wartime experiences. George McLeod, founder and first leader of the Iona Community in Scotland, wrote a forward for the second edition in support of Ray Davey's project at that time. He was promoting a new Presbyterian student community centre at Queen's University, Belfast. McLeod, who had visited the old student centre, reports on the style and breadth of community towards which Davey was working.

The 1954 Postscript is the most interesting part because it contains a summary of Davey's thinking about community following his wartime experiences. It also gives an insight into his thoughts about peace and the importance of responding to need through concrete action. The reader can find here the basis for all that was to follow in his work with students and in the formation and style of the Corrymeela Community.

Twenty years after the founding of the Community Ray Davey wrote *Take away this hate: The story of the search for community* (1985). This book charts his life through his younger years and on to his wartime service with the YMCA as a Field Secretary in North Africa and as a prisoner of war in Italy and Germany. It tells about his return to Northern Ireland and becoming the first Presbyterian chaplain to Queen's University, Belfast. He highlights the people who influenced his thinking and attitudes leading to the formation of the group that formed what became the Corrymeela Community. Ray sketches the early years of the Community and introduces some of those who worked with him to develop the Community.

Also in 1985, Ray and Kathleen Davey issued a short pamphlet *40 Years On Germany Revisited 1945 – 1985*. This includes their visit to Dresden where Ray had been

as a prisoner of war and had just avoided been present during the air raids that destroyed it and many thousands of people.

In 1991 the Corrymeela Press published a volume by Ray Davey called *The Pollen of Peace*. This is a collection of short pieces like ‘Thoughts for the Day’ telling about a great variety of experiences related to Corrymeela and general incidents in his life.

The next publication by Ray Davey is *The Channel of Peace: The Story of the Corrymeela Community* (1993). Davey tells about his own background growing up in a Presbyterian Manse in Dunmurry outside Belfast. The influence of his family and specially his mother feature largely in forming the one who was to become the founder and first leader of the Corrymeela Community. It also covers some of the wartime period. The book goes on to outline the formative influences of those days and the adjustments he had to make on returning to Northern Ireland. His role as a student chaplain that gave him the opportunity to use those wartime experiences which had left an indelible mark on his life. Being chaplain brought him into contact with students who responded positively to the wide range of experiences that he organised for them. These included a visit to the Agape community in the mountains west of Turin, and the vision of its leader Tullio Vinay, for whom the kingdom of God was a key focus. Another major influence was George MacLeod, the founder and leader of the Iona Community in Scotland.

It is clear from this that Ray Davey is at one with George Macleod’s unremitting emphasis and application of the Incarnation as the key to living the Christian faith and practising reconciliation.³¹ Davey illustrates this focus by many examples of people, who, in the caldron of strife and suffering found ways, both to survive, and also, to rise above the forces of hate and sectarianism in Ireland.

Then for Corrymeela’s twenty-first anniversary he produced *An Unfinished*

³¹ See George F. MacLeod, *Only One Way Left: Church Prospect, The Iona Community, Iona, 1964*

Journey: An Anniversary Anthology of the Corrymeela Community 1965-1986. It is a compilation of articles by the author and members who tell about those who influenced the life and spirit of Corrymeela down the years. These articles, pictures and poems give an inside view of what the Community is and does. The list of leaders, centre directors, staff and volunteers tells a story of involvement and input that has enriched the whole project.

In the year 2000 *Six of the Best* appeared. These are a collection six letters to each of the Daveys³² nine grandchildren. In these he shares wisdom stories from his varied and eventful life. Anyone could benefit from reading them.

The War Diaries is his latest book (2005). This book gives an insight into the formative events that prepared Ray Davey for the rest of his life and ministry. The interactions with a great variety of people from vastly different backgrounds provided the context in which Ray Davey developed a distinctive style and a creative way of relating to people with a very different upbringing to his own. These diaries provide insights into the kind of influence Ray Davey was to become for all who are part of Corrymeela.

The Reverend John Morrow, a founder member, became the second leader of Corrymeela on the retirement of Ray Davey. In his book *Journey of Hope* (1995) John Morrow surveys the many influences that have shaped the ongoing development of the Corrymeela Community and its leaders. The main idea running through the book is that of a journey. Among these influences were George MacLeod, Mark Gibbs and Jean Vanier. Each brought an important contribution to the Community. He also includes the contribution of a member the late Peter Tennant whose gifts combined the pursuit of justice with finding what trees would grow on the windswept cliff top site to provide cover and shelter. Contributions from South Africa, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East as well as

³² The missing person in this dissertation is Ray's wife, Kathleen. She not only supported Ray in all that he did but was in herself an embodiment of Corrymeela's spirit. Her presence was always a blessing.

the USA gave a sense of what the struggle for peace and reconciliation entailed in diverse conditions. The final chapter, which is written by Ray Davey, pays tribute to Tullio Vinay and the communities at Agape (Italy) and Riesi (Sicily). Vinay's commitment to the message of "reconciliation, service and love", lived out in solidarity with all in need, left its mark on those who were part of the gestation period of what was to become the Corrymeela Community.

On the Road of Reconciliation (2003) by John Morrow is an account of his experiences from his early years, through his time as Leader of the Corrymeela Community and on to his work for the Irish School of Ecumenics in Belfast. A striking aspect of this account is the way that he reflects the conditions on the ground in his various roles. Always the context matters wherever he found himself. This perspective illustrates very well the underlying theology of the Incarnation in, both, the expression of his faith, and in fulfilling his varied roles.

John Morrow's successor as leader was the Reverend Trevor Williams who is now the Church of Ireland Bishop of Limerick. Trevor Williams has not yet published anything about Corrymeela. XXXX ref. David Stevens memorial lecture !!!!!!!!!!!!!

David Stevens was the fourth leader of Corrymeela and wrote two books. The first of these is *The Land of Unlikeness: Explorations into Reconciliation* (2004).

David Stevens introduces the topic of Reconciliation through his own upbringing and later experiences until he meets Ray Davey and finds the kind of openness that he craved but did not find in Church life. He explores the need for and the nature of reconciliation in political and theological terms. In the course of these explorations he looks at some biblical texts that have a bearing on conflict and reconciliation. The Church and the Churches are examined for their role in the pursuit (or hindrance) of peace and reconciliation. His second book *The Place called Reconciliation* (2008) is a collection of

studies of biblical texts explored in the light of the journey of the Corrymeela Community over a period of forty years. The introduction sets out the influences and the vision that were foundational for the Community and its work. The influence of Dietrich Bonhoeffer on Ray Davey is acknowledged. From the point of view of biblical interpretation, the work of Rene Girard on the connection between religion and violence plays a major role. Two people from the Netherlands, Roel Kaptein and Fr. André Lascaris OP, brought Girard's insights to Corrymeela.

Mervyn Love is a member of the Corrymeela Community. In 1995 he produced a study *Peace Building through Reconciliation in Northern Ireland*. This is an analysis of the part played by Reconciliation groups in Northern Ireland paying particular attention to the Corrymeela Community. The main subject is reconciliation and its many forms and meanings. There are two chapters on Corrymeela. One chapter presents the story about the origins of the Community not forgetting some of the views of unsympathetic outsiders. It also deals with the criticisms that have arisen within the Community. He surveyed other reconciliation groups for their views and objectives. Thirty-one groups were included in this part of the exercise. He concluded that, with limitations, reconciliation groups are useful instruments in the work of building reconciliation.

A Belfast journalist, Alf McCreary has produced two books about Corrymeela and assisted with others. The first book *Hill of Harmony in Northern Ireland* (1976)³³ is his account of the formation of the Corrymeela Community against the background of the sectarian and political conditions in the early 1960s. This edition was for American readers. It has an opening chapter on the situation in Northern Ireland at that time. There is an informative piece about Ray Davey's early life and experience. This is a useful summary of key Corrymeela people. Through stories of individuals who came to Corrymeela during

³³ The Irish edition was published in 1975 under the title 'Corrymeela: A Search for Peace'.

troubled times McCreary conveys what Corrymeela is and does. He also brings out the tensions that exist for people who try to maintain both their Church and political affiliations, and at the same time be part of the Corrymeela Community. This book brings the story up to 1975.

McCreary's second book *IN WAR AND PEACE* (2007) was written after the Community had passed its fortieth birthday and over thirty years since his first account. The difference between the two books is quite marked. Even though the writer's style is similar, the perspectives are different. Forty years' experience brings a new tone to the accounts of those who have been involved. That said there is still the freshness of real life experiences that bear witness to the essence of what Corrymeela is.

In telling about the early years including how the Community was formed he repeats material used in *Hill of Harmony*. The interviews with those who have been involved in the intervening years give insights into the challenges faced and the on-going challenge in a new climate of opinion and new funding difficulties.

One of the major ventures in the 1980s was "Summerfest". At first this was a weeklong open event to which people could come on a daily basis or for the full time. The inspiration for this was the German Kirchentag which is a mixture of festival and conference and Christian Agency marketplace.

The new material in this book takes up the story in the context of the Leaders who followed Ray Davey: John Morrow, Trevor Williams and David Stevens, and also of the succession of Centre Directors who played a key role in developing the life and work of Corrymeela. The difficulties that arose in the day-to-day running of the Centre at Ballycastle are honestly stated and the tensions between staff, volunteers and members appear as part of a 'warts and all' account.

Other resources consulted are in the Bibliography.

Conclusion

This chapter has set the context for the emergence of the Corrymeela Community in response to the ecumenical challenge to the Churches and all Christians. It arose during a century of international crises, and, in terms of Ireland the recurring tensions over national identity particularly in the North. It is a story that involves, in a remarkable way, the influence of the Second World War, the growing desire for progress in relations between the Christian Churches and the eruption of communal violence in Northern Ireland. Central to the response by those who formed the Corrymeela Community was a vision inspired by the example of people in different European countries. These people had set about providing opportunities for action and reflection in the wake of the most horrific circumstances of war and ethnic cleansing.

The setting up and development of the Corrymeela Community was a direct response by a body of young people in Northern Ireland under the inspiration and leadership of Ray Davey. This was to involve them in an even greater challenge from 1969 onwards when people, especially children, had to flee from serious neighbourhood arson and violence. The next chapter will look at other perceptions of the Community through the eyes of members who come from different places, traditions and periods within the life of Corrymeela.

CHAPTER TWO – EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to examine the responses of a cross-section of present members to a set of questions aimed at eliciting the main characteristics of the Corrymeela Community. Also, I sought to obtain their understanding about the formation of the Community and the implementation of its vision and purpose.

Seven Corrymeela members agreed to participate. I conducted five personal interviews and recorded them on tape. The other two responses, for reasons of time, place and availability, were returned by email and by letter. All of these interviews were completed between the middle of June and the middle of July 2010.³⁴

The questions³⁵ seek to establish, or modify, the received perceptions gained from the various written sources. They cover: Corrymeela's relationship to the Churches and the influence of ecumenism; the impact of the political context at the time of formation and in the wake of the Troubles from 1969 onwards; how the Community responds to social issues; how it has dealt with the challenges of difference – Inter-Faith and Sexual orientation factors; what it is that Corrymeela does not do; the faith or theological elements that inform the Community; and finally, what is the most outstanding aspect of Corrymeela for each interviewee.

For the purposes of this dissertation, the main emphasis will be on the first and second questions. The other questions will not receive as detailed attention with the exception of the question about the faith or theological perspectives of the respondents.

The Questionnaire

In general, in respect of 1(a), the relationship of Corrymeela to the Churches

³⁴ The transcriptions and text of these interviews and email responses are available in the original copy of this Dissertation kept by the Irish School of Ecumenics at Trinity College, Dublin.

³⁵ Appendix 1, page 59

seemed to be positive if a little tenuous or tentative. Without the Church, Corrymeela would not be the same sort of Community. It was the Church, down the ages, that carried the responsibility for passing on the gospel. In respect of 1(b), the Corrymeela *take* on ecumenism focuses on the depth of relationships and at the same time, the informality of its style. Underlying this is a creative impatience with the rigid structural ecumenism of the denominations. The responses to Question 1(c) show that there has been no fundamental change in Corrymeela's approach. Any changes that have taken place are in response to societal factors but the response to these is in the spirit of openness and inclusiveness.

Now to the first question and the responses of those interviewed.

Question 1: Corrymeela, the Churches and Ecumenism: a) How has Corrymeela related to the Churches: as a body and through its members? b) Do you think that Corrymeela has a distinctive take on ecumenism? If so, what is it? If not, what is it? c) Has this changed over time?

Question 1 (a): How has Corrymeela related to the Churches: as a body and through its members?

The style of the answers to this question, as with all the questions, reflects the personal experiences and background of each person in relation to Corrymeela. Those in leadership roles in their Church or with a strong clerical connection answer in a different mode to those who sit in the pew. But that is just a matter of style. It is the difference between a theoretical answer and the immediacy of a practical and personal perspective. No one suggested that there was a negative relationship with the Churches. One of the respondents, a founder member [DC]³⁶, comments, “one time I think that we were addressing that [the link with the Churches] very well. It seems to me that latterly we have not paid, if any attention, to where we are in connection with the Churches.”

³⁶ Abbreviations, Page 1

This point is developed later in a way that shows a care for the Churches at the present time, and a plea that some programme time be devoted to bringing leading Church people together. The purpose of this is “to engage in dialogue and give them support because the Churches are beleaguered and it’s not just the Catholic Church, the Protestant Churches are going through difficult times as well”.

One of the words used to describe the connection between Corrymeela and the Churches is *tenuous*. This is the word used by a former Leader [TW], later a Bishop in the Church of Ireland. He says, “the Corrymeela relationship with the Churches has always been a little bit tenuous because originally it was set up quite deliberately as a Christian community but definitely not a Church”. The son of another former Leader [DM] does not use the word tenuous but corroborates its use. In his response to the first part of the question he affirms that he “think[s] Corrymeela is a growth from the Churches. It is part of the Church in a very general sense”. In a revealing statement he puts flesh on the word, tenuous, as used by another contributor [TW]:

Probably in anti-clerical time, which has been Ireland in the last 30 years, [Corrymeela] was a bit of a place for people who did not want to throw the baby out with the bath water. They had sympathy for the anti-clericalism that was going around then but I suppose I sense that the Churches, the gospel, remained critical questions and so somewhere between those two places most of the [Corrymeela] members live.

The tentative relationship with the Churches is partly due to the difference between official or institutional ecumenism and the more intimate version of people working together in practical endeavours at a local level. This latter describes the position of the Corrymeela Community. The impatience that is part of this relationship is encapsulated in the following statement: “We cannot wait but that does not mean we are against the Church but it does mean there are probably many frustrated people.”

The other respondents spoke about the Churches from a personal angle. They spoke about the role of the Church in their own experience and Corrymeela as an additional

aspect of their lives. One person [RL] came to know about Corrymeela through the activities of the local parish youth programme in Dublin, another [MB] through an invitation to join a Corrymeela Cell group, having grown up in Belfast without any awareness of Corrymeela. Both of these people speak in a positive way about their experience of Church life. In the first case, the experience of Corrymeela was a stark awakening to the world outside the Catholic Church. As she [RL] said:

[Y]oung people from right across the sectarian divide in Northern Ireland came down to the south of Ireland [to engage in different ways] from talking in small groups, to hearing how people from other faiths, other than Catholicism, did not want to breathe the same air as people in the south of Ireland, it was that stark. It was that inbred, primeval sense of ‘you don’t go there, these people are out to annihilate us’. For me that was quite horrific.

This extreme experience led to a new understanding, and then, to the decision to be part of Corrymeela, first as a yearlong volunteer, and then as Volunteer Co-ordinator and finally to being a long standing and involved member of the Community. Those who also came from a secure and faithful membership of the denomination of their upbringing or choice affirm that there is no discontinuity or discomfort in belonging to Corrymeela as well.

Question 1 (b): Do you think that Corrymeela has a distinctive take on ecumenism?
If so, what is it? If not, what is it?

The responses to the sub-question about the distinctiveness of Corrymeela’s style of ecumenism indicate that Corrymeela by the nature of the Community is distinctive. In the eyes of the media, ecumenism is interesting when high profile leaders get together, or, more dramatically, whenever some mouth-watering event happens that disturbs the ecumenical peace. This could be the response of some leading Church figure that disagrees or disapproves of some action that runs counter to their particular discipline. This is the trap set for institutional ecumenism, where Church representatives live in an artificial bubble of protocol labelled, ‘ecumenical limits which may not be exceeded’.

In respect to the Corrymeela Community, the respondents affirm that it is in the quality of relationships that ecumenism is based. One respondent [CT] alludes to the distinctiveness of Corrymeela's approach in the following way: "Perhaps, it is in slipping past the ideological/theological/denominational bumps and sharing sweat together." The reference to 'sharing sweat together' is a vivid reminder of the work camps that were part of the first decades of the Community's life. This reflection concurs with other references:

I think the distinctive approach to ecumenism that Corrymeela adopts is very much that it works from the bottom up ... And that is precisely because Corrymeela's relationship with the Churches is not about working from the power structure of each Church, comparing it with one another.

Another contributor [DM] puts it pithily as a "show not tell" approach and speaks about 'circumstantial impatience'.

There was a model of ecumenism I think which was the institutional negotiation in depth that is going to have to go on. However, for Corrymeela in Ireland, in Northern Ireland in particular ... we could not wait. We could not wait. It is probably an exercise in impatience but it was circumstantial impatience. You know you could not go on with something where the Churches were so implicated in the historic development of these things. They even contributed through, both their doctrines and their structures, through some of their practices, and then pretended that you could wait for a dialogue ... We have to have a place where actually we are not interested anymore in the institutional quality of our background. We are interested in the social equality of the people who are here.

This reflects the impatience of the Founder of the Community following his wartime experiences that made it very clear that peace and ecumenism go together, also that the only appropriate response was one that heard the cry of the people for peace and harmony at every level. One contribution could be summarised by saying that Corrymeela is distinctive in providing a place where the disconnected feel at home. This contributor [RL] regularly runs summer family weeks at Corrymeela and says, "I know a family who come, who do not have any affiliation to any Church ... [b]ut they find a sense of belonging in Corrymeela because they are invited to come together, to be together, and to worship together in a way that is safe for them". This, open inclusive approach, is Corrymeela's

distinctive ecumenism according to the same contributor. Another respondent [MC] speaks about the qualities that are part of this approach to ecumenism. “Embracing each other, not gossiping, not rivalling, taking risks and personal responsibility for your own words and actions are paramount in everything we say and do.” The one founder member [DC] among those interviewed, sums up her view of Corrymeela’s distinctive ecumenism in the following way:

I think it is very hard to define it and I sometimes feel that if we try to define it too much we might lose some of the special quality of it. For me it is simply having the openness and the welcome and providing a place, a safe place and safe people around for different groups of faith to come and meet together, and eat together, and play together and talk together and stay up late together and go for walks together. It seems to me that it is at those informal encounters that something happens, and maybe that is not so possible if things were a day’s conference or a Course set up, where there is a limited opportunity for those casual encounters where something begins to happen, and let the people actually communicate with one another.

All are at one, in their responses about Corrymeela’s distinctive take on ecumenism.

Question 1(c): Has this changed over time?

The final part of the first question asks if there has been a change in the Community’s ecumenical approach over the course of forty-five years. The consensus seems to be that the main characteristics have remained the same but Corrymeela is an ecumenical workshop where developments in society and the changing religious climate bring new challenges. As one member [DM] puts it: “No, I do not think so, well I suppose it would change over time in form and content but in its fundamental impulse, no. I think that there is a kind of Lutheran, ‘Here I stand, I can do no other’ type of feel about it. It is just a matter of, ‘what else can we do?’” A former Leader [TW] sets out one of the contemporary challenges very clearly. Responses to all challenges must exhibit the same openness to the new and the needs of people today that made Corrymeela a safe place in which to wrestle honestly with difference. The following quotation addresses one such challenge:

Has it improved or changed? Interestingly, I would say that one of the changes in this area has been the change that we have seen in society. That the use of religious language has become much more problematic for people. Particularly those who are not regular and signed up members of the churches with whom Corrymeela has always worked and has always included a greater variety of people within even its membership in terms of their own connection. Interestingly many people in Corrymeela, many members, do not have a direct church connection themselves, they would be Protestant or Roman Catholic perhaps within the Irish context but they would not perhaps be regular churchgoers. And that has been a tension particularly amongst aspiring young people who would wish to identify closely with Corrymeela by becoming members but they find the definitions for instance of the Corrymeela Commitment which are explicitly Christian too confining

How the Community responds to such challenges will show whether the respondents who affirm that the main characteristics have not changed are correct. The newest member interviewed [MB] will have the last word on the question about whether the Community has changed over time.

I would have to say that probably it is growing, we only have to look at our volunteers, the cross section, for example this year we had Raziyah, she's Muslim, and that must be a tremendous challenge for her, and I think she's been made very welcome. I have watched her interacting with the other volunteers and members of staff up at the Centre when I am on reception. I know one founder member, who has been there from the early days, who told me that the biggest risk that Corrymeela took was inviting Catholics to join them ... That was a long time ago. Originally, it was obviously very much a Presbyterian group. So it was a huge risk to invite Catholics, and yet when you look at how far they have travelled, the number of people, political leaders, leaders of all types of society come to Corrymeela to learn, and to find that safe place. A place, where you could be sitting beside a bishop or on the other hand, a member of a paramilitary group, we just do not know, we meet people on a journey, searching, and all desperately searching.

This comment is clear evidence that the Corrymeela Community has faced major challenges in particular circumstances over a period of forty-five years without losing its ecumenical heart or its loyalty to the gospel of Jesus Christ. This leads to the question about the political context when Corrymeela was founded, and the effect of political turbulence during the Troubles in Northern Ireland.

This next set of questions covers the effect of the political context both in the formative years of Corrymeela, and then, in the wake of the Troubles in Northern

Ireland. There is also an attempt to assess any impact the Corrymeela Community has made through the various aspects of its life and work. The answers to the first part of the question will make it clear that there was more in the minds of the founding group than the ecumenical impulse. In the wake of the Second World War, and the ongoing political unease with IRA activity erupting in the 1940s and 1950s, it was inevitable that political conditions would play a part. The responses to the second part will show how the Troubles reshaped Corrymeela without altering its inner core, though to some extent priorities were reset. The third aspect elicited a variety of responses identifying the difference that Community has made to other peoples' lives. Some were less comfortable than others doing this. Now we look at the second set of questions.

Question 2: The context of Irish political issues: a) Did the political context have an effect on the formation of Corrymeela in the mid 1960s? b) How did the Troubles from 1969 onwards affect Corrymeela? c) Do you think that Corrymeela has made a difference, and how?

Question 2(a): Did the political context have an effect on the formation of Corrymeela in the mid 1960s?

Most respondents are definite that the political context did play a significant part in the minds of those who formed the group out of which the Corrymeela Community grew. The experience of the Founder, Ray Davey, during the 1939-1945 war, clearly was of seminal importance. This is expressed in four responses and a fifth alludes to Ray Davey's background experiences. Of the remaining two, one [CT] makes a very cryptic comment: "I think so yes --- macro vision had to become micro to be authenticated" This compressed statement, from someone who is a long time member, does not suggest any different understanding to the others. The other [MB] has been a member for about ten years, and does not refer to political influences on the formation of the Community. This is

understandable given the personal traumatic circumstances during the Troubles in Belfast.

We will come to this person's situation later.

Those who expanded on the political context reflect on various aspects of that period. A former Leader [TW] spells out the context in the following way:

[T]he actual seed of the formation of Corrymeela of course was Ray Davey's looking at the bombing of Dresden and then returning to Northern Ireland to work among students who at that time in university life across Europe ... students were changing the world and setting a new vision for everything in the 60s and so that political context very much shaped the whole energy out of which Corrymeela grew. And it happened because Ray was Presbyterian Chaplain and gathering a group of students and others around him discussing these issues. And asking the basic question, again a political question, a social question: 'what sort of Northern Ireland do we want' for our future, for the future?

[DM], a son of another former Leader, brings out the sense of urgency in his comment that "Ray Davey's experience in the War, clearly at Dresden above all, changed his life ... [It is as if Ray] starts to say, we have to find something different, this cannot go on. So the post-War environment in which someone is coming to that sensibility has an effect." A founding member [DC] corroborates the point made earlier about Ireland in the forties and fifties being a place of unease, particularly in the North. She says, "I think it is always important to remember that Corrymeela began before the Troubles started. However, it began in the context where the background of the Troubles was there." And this is supported, by a former volunteer and member for many years [RL], who said, "The troubles had not really erupted at that time, but there was a sense of a divide in Northern Ireland ... [and people felt] that there was a need for a place to which people could come, and be, and to rest a while." In the same paragraph, she goes on to say, "Certainly, politics did play a part in [the formation of Corrymeela.]"

Question 2 (b): How did the Troubles from 1969 onwards affect Corrymeela?

A founder member [DC] responded conveying a sense of the times in the following statement: "I think they affected it very deeply ... [I]t seems to me that Corrymeela was not

only aware what was going on with the Troubles but actually engaged with it, not taking a political stance but just connecting with what was going on.” [DM], a son of one of the founders who is also a political scientist, takes this reflection further first by prefacing his comments on the post 1969 situation with background remarks identifying three issues leading up to 1969.

[T]he three issues were the War, and the ending of austerity and the new generation and the new institutions, all being questioned because of the War, in Northern Ireland circumstances where civil rights and things are opening up and the need to do something differently, and then Vatican II and Ecumenism, these things are coming together and so what it says is that this is a Christian pilgrimage in the middle of a changing world. Rather than, this is an ecumenical response to a divided society ... a Christian pilgrimage in a changing world automatically includes and has to include the issues of friend and enemy and who are our friends and who are our enemies but also knowing that in a political context ... how those kind of values or those kind of visions are made tangible in the middle of a situation like this. So within 4 or 5 years clearly Northern Ireland has gone down this tube and then funny enough we just happened to be the hands that were available to do this.

In his continuing reflection he paints a picture of how the Community responded and the essential theological elements of that response.

It was what Corrymeela did ... it is almost like the Remnant in the Bible, they go for the same experience but they have the opposite response to the crucifixion. Instead of running away, it draws them closer. So at some level or other, having been at Corrymeela when the thing went up the question was how to hold everybody together, the question wasn't to fly, and they had the physical resource in Ballycastle which was available as a place of refuge ... [T]he Troubles had the unusual experience of drawing people closer rather than pushing them away. Everywhere else it was pushing people away, in Corrymeela it was pulling them in, a small, a very small group of people, but nevertheless not just talking about it, actually providing a service on the basis of this refusal to divide between certain enemies and being willing to live with the uncertainty of what I mean in political terms because the key thing to hold on to is the actual commitment to each other, the Christian commitment to each other if you want, that the command to love enemies in this context means that that has priority to a political goal, now that is very unusual in a highly polarized political situation.

The provision of a place of refuge, a safe place and a safe space, is referred to by other respondents as well. One or two of these were living in the midst of violence and terror during this period. Four commented on the importance of the safe space. Three of these from actual observation and the fourth through a personal account about Corrymeela

being the first place in which she could tell her story. The following is a sample of what was said:

It provided the opportunity to embrace its Vision in a way that evolved in a humanitarian and natural way. Corrymeela provided a safe space so that those who came to be there could be safe to engage in new way. It gave me the challenge to examine the possibility of new ways to address social injustice, political and economic issues that affected my everyday life without getting shot dead or being judged, or isolated for expressing my views and opinions that needed to be expressed. It has allowed me as an individual to take personal responsibility for my words, actions and deeds. Our Corrymeela Community allowed me to take risks to try out new experiences, grow and develop without being judgemental or someone else imposing their thoughts vision or standards on me. Instead, exposed me to difference and I could make own choices and decisions. I was invited to give inputs and reflect and most importantly allowed to be myself and grow.

The former volunteer [RL] spoke of Corrymeela “responding to the need whenever it happened and people were taken by busload to Corrymeela for refuge, sanctuary, no questions asked.” The most recent member interviewed [MB] spoke about finding herself “like so many thousands of others unexpectedly caught up in assassinations and losing one’s home, and internment day”. She goes on to speak of the trauma involved, and then, eventually “finding peace with it in Corrymeela that had not been provided before.”

This survey of responses about the effect of the Troubles on Corrymeela ends with an interesting one-sentence summary: “Troubles ... became the roughage contributing to the product of a Community of struggle and hope.”

Question 2 (c): Do you think that Corrymeela has made a difference, and how?

One of the interesting aspects of the responses to this question was the way so many hesitated to make great claims for the impact of Corrymeela on the situation in Northern Ireland. Among the responses, there are stories about the impact of Corrymeela on the lives of individuals as well on the wider scene. DC, a founder member, felt that it would be better for those who came to Corrymeela to give a response. She did mention the difference it has made on her own life. “[N]o volume would be big enough to hold all that

it has done for me. I have been able to grow and develop and it has taught me how to relate to people, it has taught me a lot about facilitating groups, being alongside people”. This is to underestimate the effect of her own contribution to the effectiveness of Corrymeela through ‘Treetops’. This was a response to the effect of trauma on children. It was due to her response to this particular need during an event at the Centre. A participant became very upset during a seminar and during a conversation told the horrific story about her husband being shot at the family home. Her three children were also present. The result of hearing this story was, that “[a]fterwards I [DC] shared her story with a friend at Corrymeela and ... we decided to recruit some colleagues to discuss how we might provide support for children who had suffered a sudden traumatic bereavement”. She goes on to say that, “it was later that year we opened Treetops ... and welcomed our first group of bereaved children to Corrymeela”. This is one of the ways that Corrymeela has made a difference.

Other comments about the effect of Corrymeela’s work show how this is spread through those who have come and found new possibilities opening up. A volunteer [RL], looking back to her time as a seventeen year old, puts it this way: “[I]n my small way with my peer group who are still involved ... we could begin to bring change into our own communities and challenge things that were discriminatory”. In a similar vein a former Leader [TW] speaks about the hidden effects of Corrymeela when he recalls what a former volunteer and staff member, now in community work, told him. He said that, “out of his class in Portadown he referred to a group of fourteen of them and all of them went to prison except for four and those four had been directly involved in Corrymeela”. This story is replicated time and time again. He [TW] declares that it is more significant that “the cumulative effect of Corrymeela offering its programmes where the experience of

reconciliation was seen as possible meant that it was really about lighting a candle in the darkness”.

The following reflection on the effect of Corrymeela provides a different insight:

[I]t is symbolic if you want one word, or sacramental, if you want to take the more religious view on it, the people there saw something ... about the possibility of a genuinely shared life together in the middle of a society which saw no possibility of that at all, and that is, if you want to take the religious view of it, the sacramental role, it is a making visible of something, which paradoxically became the story of the Peace Process and we all have to go there ... The symbolic thing was ‘show not tell’, it wasn’t a political act it was a practical act so the witness was in the reality of the shared space, not in talking about it.

Finally, a comment, from someone who lived through the turmoil of the Troubles:

“My understanding now is that it has made an incredible difference to Northern Ireland ... such a cross-section of people at every level ... have taken away with them something new to think about.”

The phrase ‘show not tell’ is useful as an introduction to the question about the Corrymeela response to social issues. It becomes increasingly obvious that so many aspects of the life and work of Corrymeela overlap and inform each other. Social issues impact on every community endeavour and Corrymeela’s experience is the same.

Question 3: How does Corrymeela respond to social issues: Deprivation; Disability; and, the emergence of a large number of prisoners’ families?

“Social inclusion is a vital ingredient. Our Community does not separate itself from those who suffer deprivation or a disability and prisoners because some of them are part of our Community over the years.” This is how one person [MC] begins to respond to this question and continues, “[w]e are an inclusive Community and through our Youth, Family, Community and Faith programmes, we have developed a way of being with each other”. Another [TW] supports that contention by saying, that in “examining that question

you get to the heart of Corrymeela's approach because basically what I think is being addressed here is the ability to live with difference".

The question about how Corrymeela responds to issues in society is well illustrated by the following piece:

I know from being a young woman going up to Corrymeela in the late 70s as part of a youth group ... I remember Derick Wilson coming over to talk to us one day and saying 'at the end of the day we're exploring what makes you tick inside'. Like there was a young person saying, 'I hate all gay people' and Derick would say why? Why do you hate gay people? Have you ever met someone from the gay community and they would say no. So why do you feel the way you do? And it was through stereotypes, what their perception of a gay person was and what that gay person would do to them and what threats they would bring to them. So Derick would say you have to explore your weaknesses, you have to explore your prejudices, in order to be able to move on and be a more rounded young person in your community and to be able to question the things that you are not satisfied with.

This passage takes you to the heart of the Corrymeela approach to any issue. Notice that the young person was not vilified for being prejudiced. Instead, he was invited to examine the basis of his own position in a way that would enable him to break through the received prejudice and come to his own opinion or response.

Another comment brings a sense of proportion about the extent of Corrymeela's contribution to social issues. "Our responses are necessarily symbolic or token --- bits of yeast entrusted to the divine winemaker."

There are no views in the responses that contradict the conclusion that responding to social issues is at the heart of Corrymeela's approach. The next question looks a little more closely at contemporary social challenges.

Question 4: How is Corrymeela dealing with difference: a) In the area of Inter-Faith?
b) In relation to sexual orientation?

This question is an extension of the whole range of issues and challenges about difference that Corrymeela has faced in its role as a reconciliation Community. These two

aspects are part of the contemporary challenge that local communities and Churches have to face.

Question 4 (a): In the area of Inter-Faith?

[TW], a former Leader, considers that Inter-Faith involvement “will actually grow in the future with Corrymeela. I think it is a natural progression”. Later he cites an example involving a Buddhist volunteer from Japan.

During my time as Leader, I encountered a Buddhist, who came from Japan, and lived as a volunteer with us. That was a hugely enriching experience. He used to attend our worship, and be very happy to do so, and I talked to him about it being a Christian community and how did he feel about that and would he prefer it to be less Christian. He said, absolutely not, it was a great learning for him. Now, he remains a Buddhist but I think enriched in his experience of living in a Christian community and attending Christian worship regularly. That has been repeated with the other volunteers we have had over the years since. I think that has been a very positive experience for many people of other faiths who come to live within that Christian context.

Other comments reflect a similar openness to such Inter-Faith developments. RL points out that there can be difficulties. She recounts the following incident:

Corrymeela would say we are a Christian community but we are open to other faiths. They can become a part of our community. I know in the summer there was a debate, because there was a group over from the UK, I think it was a Muslim group, and the families were upset because somebody decided that to have the Bible and the turf cross and the candle in the Croi would be excluding the Muslim group. They were saying we make no bones about Corrymeela being a Christian community and we welcome inter-faith groups but why hide what we are. If these groups want to come, and they are very welcome they're coming to experience a Christian group, coming to experience what happens at Corrymeela and there'll be an exchange rather than a divide and I think sometimes in our desire to be inclusive sometimes we exclude the people.

These are like growing pains in a relatively new situation. It is a healthy indication that even Corrymeela has to learn and find the best way to respond in any given situation.

Question 4 (b): In relation to sexual orientation?

It is noteworthy that DC a founder member says: “it seems to me that the Community is very comfortable with that. I am not sure that we have addressed it as an

issue ... but I observe that people seem very comfortable with that". [MB] agrees that Corrymeela deals with this issue "without any fuss" and she recounts an interesting story that shows something about the general attitude.

when I was at a Knocklayd Committee [Knocklayd: a Corrymeela Retreat Centre], a number of parents happened to come up to a group weekend and out of that it emerged that they were parents of either gay or lesbian children. And they spoke about the difficulties that presented to them as members of their local communities. How difficult it was to talk about it, to have acceptance, again out of fear and ignorance. Out of that, [a member] began a weekend specifically for parents of gay or lesbian children and that has been running now for about three years. It has been a huge success. So out of a conversation a member of the Community spotted a need for a group of people outside of Corrymeela who needed a safe place to talk to grow and discuss.

That seems to reflect my own sense of the Community's attitude. That does not mean that everyone who comes to the Ballycastle Centre will be as comfortable.

Question 5: What did/does Corrymeela not do?

In relation to the previous question about dealing with sexual orientation, it is interesting that TW chooses to highlight the refusal of Corrymeela to condemn others, as in the following selection of statements.

[Corrymeela] is not about condemning others it is not about saying that we have all the answers ... The place of certainty and the place of conviction of the rightness of your cause may feel to be a very secure place but in fact actually is probably other than that in reality. The place of vulnerability and openness is the true place of a relationship and positive outcomes while dealing with difference. Corrymeela is not about hard edges it is not about slogans that are there to antagonize the other or even to define yourself clearly, so that those others are excluded ... Another thing that Corrymeela does not do is define a boundary beyond which, who you are, is unacceptable and that even pertains to its Christian affirmation.

These statements, even though in the negative, indicate the heart of the Community's approach to all relationship challenges. Other respondents indicate deficiencies. [RL] identifies the loss of some of the Youth work as being unfortunate, specially the fact that the strong link with Derry youth is missing. Likewise, there is much more that could be done in Belfast. Here is what she says:

This is a recent debate around youth work, and looking at the youth programmes,

that Corrymeela is embarking on. There is a view within the Community that we should be doing more to reach the more working class areas in Northern Ireland and to begin to make the links. We used to have very strong links with Derry and a lot of community groups in Derry ... There is not that link with Derry now and I know there is a strong desire from within the Community to build up that again. And to look at carrying out some face-to-face work in Belfast maybe using the long term volunteers to begin that.

[DC] regrets the reduction of work with the Churches. She says: "I would love to see us running some clergy conferences". These were a feature some years ago. When pressed for further comment she said: "It is not in [Corrymeela's] nature to interfere." Then, she defined this. "I am thinking of political interference in terms of making statements in crucial times in our history that might stir things up in a bad way. Interference in maybe telling the Churches what they ought to be doing rather than just being with them."

Three other comments will suffice for an overview of responses to this question. [MB] offers this assessment: "I think what Corrymeela was not good at when I first became a member, but has become much better at, were money issues." And for [MC] one sentence was enough. "[Corrymeela d]oes not replace the Churches." [CT] says that Corrymeela "Does not do explicit evangelism". All the responses convey a sense of the vision and character of the Community and a concern that nothing be lost of its true self.

The next question asks people to reflect on how each one understands the faith or theological dimension of Corrymeela.

Question 6: What faith or theological perspectives are uppermost for you? How would you express the ways that God is active in Corrymeela – its vision, programme and the commitment?

This open question gives an opportunity for personal responses more than theological exactitudes, if there are such things. The responses show that each person took it that way.

A former Leader [TW] contributes a definite theological point of view in the following statement:

I think this is why I find Corrymeela so exciting ... my faith has been illuminated by the experience of Corrymeela more than anything else. One of the things [that is] for me central to the Gospel and the heart of the good news is God valuing of each part of his creation and each individual within his creation as uniquely valuable. That is the incarnation. The incarnation also talks about God participating and coming alongside us in our lives, in our human lives and our struggles. I think Corrymeela also in its approach seeks to be incarnational in that sense, so that those two aspects, the unconditional acceptance and the valuing of others, the coming alongside them is a way of relating to others.

The response from [RL] shows how she found the location inspiring. It evoked for her a sense of the Creator as seen through the created order. "For me, the first time I went up there I was in awe of this God that has created this place and who has influenced these people who are part of Corrymeela and inspired them in many different ways." For [DC] it comes to two things, love and forgiveness. "I suppose it is very simple, we love one another and learning to love the people we do not like ... and there is something in there too about forgiveness because like in any family ... we are hurt sometimes." For [MC] it comes down to, "Being Present and practicing the Gospels". The same sentiments come from [MB] when she says, "I think daily living out; it encourages me to live out the gospel more fully."

The comment by [DM] expresses the heart of Corrymeela in a telling sentence. "I am extremely clear that God is for broken people ... the hard part ... is beginning to see yourself as part of that story of a broken person who had possibilities as opposed to a good person." The image of brokenness appears in an applied sense in a comment from [CT] who describes his preparation for a Family Week at Corrymeela. "I go to mass on a Friday morning ... agree to be broken for the next six days ... but trust the Holy Spirit to use me as [an] instrument of light/peace/presence along the model of Mary's visit to Elizabeth where I am sure she made some bread did some weeding and had a giggle."

Question 7: What are the outstanding characteristics of Corrymeela for you?

The best way to convey a sense of the responses to this question is to list the key words and phrases used, with a final comment by [TW], a former Leader.

Hospitality – the mixture of people – a sense of well-being – freedom – welcome – honesty – simplicity – acceptance – love – embrace – unflappability – perseverance – trust – relationships – an amazing gift – sense of belonging – continuing sense of connection. And [TW] says, of the time after he ceased being Leader, “It is wonderful to be promoted to be a member”

Conclusion

This chapter surveyed the responses from all seven interviewees to a range of seven questions. These questions covered a selection of topics to do with the position of the Corrymeela Community in relation to the Churches, Ecumenism, the political context and other matters. It is interesting that all of the responses were in keeping with the story told in the first chapter. That does not mean that each person approached the questions in the same way. Each of the seven people were quite distinctive in their responses without in any way contradicting each other or the views of those mentioned in the first chapter. To use a phrase I heard recently, this is a ‘differentiated consensus’. The responses are varied but in step with each other on the main characteristics of the Corrymeela Community. It also shows something of the nature of the Community, in that, each person can bring their own experience to bear on matters of central importance to Corrymeela.

There are also the new challenges that come as part of a changing society. This is particularly so in the issues raised by the arrival, in considerable numbers, of people from other continents, faiths and customs. The other new factor in recent decades springs from the emergence of people of homosexual orientation with a new confidence and meeting with some degree of acceptance. Both of these groups find that their reception in society in

general can be fraught, if not worse. In the case of the latter group, resistance often arises in a Church context but also in parts of society where older prejudices hold sway.

The responses show that Corrymeela has risen to meet the new situation in the same way that it has met with religious and political diversity in the past. When Corrymeela was formed neither of these religious and cultural changes were on the horizon but it seems that the original principles were such that the Community has been able to live out of the same spirit and belief.

The next chapter will look at that spirit and belief that inspired those who came together in 1965. It will also illustrate its theology at work in different situations. It will examine the way that the Community seeks to apply its Christian basis in its own life.

CHAPTER THREE – A LIVED INCARNATIONAL THEOLOGY

Introduction

The task of this chapter is to look at the Incarnation as the source of a theological key to the life and work of the Corrymeela Community. Also to look at examples which show the results of the attitudes and beliefs supporting the Community. Then, some of the sermons of the late David Stevens will be used to show that Corrymeela is a face-to-face Community and draw from this source the threads that go to make up the tapestry that has been woven over the years.

This treatment of incarnational theology does not include a consideration of the great debates at Chalcedon or other arguments of a creedal nature, except the implications of the statements in the Nicene Creed. The attempt here is to look at some biblical insights and at the work of those who have written about the Incarnation in practical situations. The work of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, George McLeod and others, will provide perspectives for application to the life and work of the Corrymeela Community, while aspects of Margaret

Barker's work on the Temple will give some biblical insights with comment also by James Alison, who writes from a Girardian perspective.

Perspectives on the Incarnation

Allusions to incarnation, death and resurrection are present in the practices and theology of the Temple in Jerusalem, and indeed in the Tabernacle before that, according to Margaret Barker.³⁷ She claims that “[t]emple theology knew of incarnation and atonement, the sons of God and the life of the age to come ... the renewed covenant and the kingdom of God”.³⁸ She claims also that the early Church took these themes for granted.

When the First Letter to Timothy spoke of the King of Kings dwelling in unapproachable light (1 Tim. 6.16), Timothy would have known exactly what was meant. He would also have known the correspondence between the earthly and the heavenly which was at the heart of temple worship. The glory of the throne ‘was’ the holy of holies, the priests ‘were’ the angels, the rituals acts performed in the temple were part of a cosmic system of healing and restoration. The questions which came so quickly to the Christians who had no Jewish roots such as, ‘How could Jesus have been both God and Man?’ would not have arisen in the minds of those nurtured in the temple.³⁹

This is interesting in connection with traditional ideas about the incarnation and because of the link with other aspects of temple worship. There is a sense of freedom from the sterile arguments that have left people bemused about the ‘how’ of the incarnation and finely balanced metaphysical solutions. In a discussion about the Atonement, James Alison⁴⁰ makes a plea for a liturgical understanding rather than a theoretical approach.⁴¹ He bases this on the work of Margaret Barker and shows how the stress is on the movement of God towards us to free the whole creation from the effects of the damage we have done.

He writes:

³⁷ Margaret Barker, *On Earth as it is in Heaven: Temple Symbolism in the New Testament*, Sheffield Phoenix Press, Sheffield, 2009

³⁸ Barker, *On Earth as it is in Heaven*, ix

³⁹ Barker, *On Earth as it is in Heaven*, 24

⁴⁰ James Alison, *undergoing god: dispatches from the scene of a break-in*, Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 2006

⁴¹ Alison, *undergoing god*, 52

[T]he Jewish understanding was way ahead of the ‘Aztec’ version we attribute to it. Even at that time it was understood that it was not about humans trying desperately to satisfy God, but God taking the initiative of breaking through towards us ... That is the first point I want to make when emphasising that we are talking about a liturgy rather than a theory. We are talking about something we undergo over time as part of a benign divine initiative towards us.⁴²

The rituals and vestments of High Priest on the Day of Atonement point to an incarnation and to how the same understanding lies behind parts of the New Testament. In the following passages, Barker describes the significance of the multi-coloured veil of the temple, signifying the creation, and an allusion in the Letter to the Hebrews:

The veil and the vestment being made of identical fabric is the key to understanding the role of the high priest and the temple context of the concept of Incarnation. The high priest in the temple was the Glory of the Lord veiled in matter ... Incarnation represented by the veil was implied by the gospel writers, who linked the death of Jesus to the tearing of the temple veil, and the Letter to the Hebrews, written to an early Christian community, mentions ‘the new and living way which he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh’ (Heb. 10.20) ... The incarnation as the priestly vestments is not mentioned in the letter to the Hebrews and is only implicit in other biblical texts, but St. Symeon of Thessaloniki (died 1429) knew this meaning of vestments: the priest coming out of the sanctuary and his descent into the nave signifies the descent of Christ from heaven and his humility. That he wears priestly vestments signifies the incarnation’⁴³

The point of this discussion is to bring the prevenient action of God to the fore and to set the scene for an understanding of the incarnation that inspired the founder of Corrymeela and all those who followed his lead. As one who experienced the Second World War first hand, and who sought to serve people in the name of Christ, he was aware of the story and writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

What has Bonhoeffer to say, bearing in mind the perspectives of temple worship and the emphasis on God's initiative as outlined by Margaret Barker? In his *Ethics*⁴⁴ he stresses the movement of God towards us. “God loves man. God loves the world ... God

⁴² Alison, *undergoing god*, 54-55

⁴³ Margaret Barker, *Temple Theology: An Introduction*, SPCK, London, 2004, 30-31

⁴⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, Collins, London, 1964. Note that Bonhoeffer’s contribution on the Incarnation is more influenced by the *Ethics* than by the *Christology*.

becomes man, real man”⁴⁵ He goes on to point out, that God does not become an idealised version of the human person. “While we are distinguishing the pious from the ungodly, the good from the wicked ... God makes no distinction at all in His love for the real man.”⁴⁶ He underlines this point. “Jesus Christ is not the transfiguration of sublime humanity. He is the ‘yes’ which God addresses to the real man.”⁴⁷ Thinking of the background of Ray Davey, and the political tension in Ireland that erupted into violence in 1969, Bonhoeffer’s remarks about the incarnation are very apt, specially where he goes on to speak about the consequences of despising another human being.

The despiser of men despises what God has loved. Indeed he despises even the figure of the God who has become man ... It is only through God’s being made man that it is possible to know the real man and not to despise him. The real man can live before God, and we can allow the real man to live before God side by side with ourselves without either despising or deifying him ... the reason why we can live as real men and can love the real man at our side is to be found solely in the incarnation of God, in the unfathomable love of God for man.⁴⁸

Acceptance is one of the qualities that people highlight about a Corrymeela experience. It is one of the key words for many people at Corrymeela and is included in the list of key aspects of Corrymeela, at the end of the previous chapter. Bonhoeffer gives a clear basis for acceptance of each other in a non-judgemental way. He also points out that no one can avoid some responsibility for what is wrong in the world. “In the man Jesus Christ sentence is passed on the whole of humanity ... Jesus is not *a* man. He is *man*. Whatever happens to him happens to man ... and therefore it happens also to us. The name of Jesus contains within itself the whole of humanity and the whole of God”.⁴⁹ The late John Morrow, a founder member and onetime Leader of the Corrymeela Community

⁴⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 71

⁴⁶ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 71

⁴⁷ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 72

⁴⁸ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 74

⁴⁹ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 72

comments on this aspect in an Introduction to a book of lectures by Eberhard Bethge⁵⁰

The sharing of guilt and responsibility is something which is familiar to many who seek to make a committed witness in the conflict situations of our time. The depth and maturity of Bonhoeffer's witness to the presence of the crucified and risen Lord in the world continues to speak with power to Christians in many different places and times.⁵¹

Looking at the question about where is God in all of the turmoil of the world Ruth Page⁵² gives an interesting response.

Instead of being a descent from heaven to rescue, the loving behaviour of God is more like a being-there, a disturbing and supporting companionship of all creation throughout ambiguous life with an accessibility which simply needs to be turned to, but will not be forced on anyone.⁵³

A point she makes about the idea of rescue by God has a bearing on the work of reconciliation. She says: "There may ... be the rescue of a situation where relationships are changed in line with God's relation. But ... rescue [is not] by means of circumstances being changed from outside."⁵⁴ Later Page speaks about the movement from the personification of Wisdom as a woman to Jesus, a person.

To arrive at Jesus after speaking of Wisdom is to move from personification to person/*persona*, from *prosopopeia*, a figure of speech rendered vividly human, to *proson*, the part played by a human being. For the formal crux of this christology is that God in the role of saviour was incarnate in Jesus Christ. In his speech, actions, life, death and resurrection was seen, in this particularity of person, place and time, the saving character of God.⁵⁵

Later, in relation to the role and function of the Corrymeela Community, the idea of Corrymeela as a 'face to face' community will be used. 'Face' is one of the meanings of *proson*. In an earlier chapter, Page refers to Mackey's contention that the Greek terms used in the Chalcedonian definitions "were understood in a functional sense, so that the

⁵⁰ Eberhard Bethge, *Prayer and Righteous Action in the life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, Christian Journals Ltd, Belfast-Dublin-Ottawa, 1979. Bethge was a brother-in-law of Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

⁵¹ Bethge, *Prayer and Righteous Action*, 11

⁵² Ruth Page, *The Incarnation of Freedom and Love*, SCM Press, London, 1991

⁵³ Page, *The Incarnation of Freedom and Love*, 8

⁵⁴ Page, *The Incarnation of Freedom and Love*, 9

⁵⁵ Page, *The Incarnation of Freedom and Love*, 135

definition when it was first made averred that ‘Jesus functions as man and as God’.⁵⁶ This supports the interpretation of the theology of Corrymeela as incarnational.

There is an interesting concurrence with Bonhoeffer’s insistence on Jesus coming as the ‘real’ man⁵⁷ in the words of George MacLeod.⁵⁸ MacLeod cites the human problem of failure to do the good we would like to do, and also on the large stage, which has witnessed the Second Great War, the inability of the majority of people in Europe to avoid war. Then he says:

[I]t was with this that God came to deal, through Christ, the New Man. What he did – in the central scene of our consequent drama – was to come down out of highest heaven (we can only speak in symbols) and cut in half our minus sign – and make a plus. Here is the centre of salvation. When each admits himself a minus sign, we are all more or less minus signs, God comes on the scene and says to each of us “so far as I am concerned you are creditable!” “God commends His love to us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.” ... It is when a man grasps that this is about him, and not just about other people ... then it is that he becomes “a new creature”: he recovers his true nature as a co-operator with God and not as the crucifier he has never wanted to be, but has always degenerated into being! It is when he grasps this that he is back in the garden and *everything* is lovely. But it is inconceivable that this is, in any ordinary meaning of the word, an individual experience or a static experience.⁵⁹

This would seem too easy a solution for Vernon White⁶⁰ who teases out the challenge of justice and the right of anyone to forgive for a victim. He points to reconciliation as the best goal for the resolution of conflict. He rejects retribution or restoration as inadequate solutions to conflict and makes a strong case for the re-creative role of reconciliation. In a chapter, *A moral demand: conditions for real reconciliation*, White says that

Salvation ... implies a positive goal; that for which we are being saved ... this goal is love: right relationship with all around us; at its widest this implies right relationships with each other, as social groups, with our environment, and with God himself. Thus the crucial moral issue ... deals with the kind of reaction which ought to be made to evil ...

⁵⁶ Page, *The Incarnation of Freedom and Love*, 127

⁵⁷ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 71

⁵⁸ George MacLeod, *Only One Way Left, The Iona Community, Glasgow – Iona – Edinburgh, 1964*

⁵⁹ MacLeod, *Only One Way Left*, 34-35

⁶⁰ Vernon White, *Atonement and Incarnation: An Essay in Universalism and Particularity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, 1991

It also follows that a central ingredient in the reaction must be something like ‘reconciliation’ – where reconciliation means both a process and a goal, achieved by a morally adequate response to evil.⁶¹

David Stevens⁶² addressed the issues around reconciliation and the tension between mercy and truth, justice and peace. He does so in the light of verse 10 of Psalm 85: “Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other”.

This text brings two paradoxes together and embraces them: that the claims of truth and the claims of mercy may conflict; and that the claims of justice (righteousness) may conflict with the claims of peace. The tension between the moral demands of justice and the political requirements of peace have been very clear in Northern Ireland [and elsewhere] ... Further, although it is not expressed in Psalm 85, there is a tension between mercy and the claims of justice. People may see that mercy in the form of generosity ... may be the way forward, indeed the only way forward. However, there is a distaste for treating generously those who have behaved badly – it violates a sense of fairness. Justice in its punitive form demands the punishment of wrongdoers and it seems to violate justice when wrongdoers are released early and included in how the society is governed ... There is also a tension between the demands of truth and the requirements of peace ... reconciliation is a process of social conversation between parties and it is a quest. Because it is these things there is no formula for reconciliation that, if implemented, will automatically lead to success.⁶³

The tensions expressed in Stevens’ comments indicate the task of those who seek to accompany people in the process of reconciliation in social, cultural, political and Church contexts. The Corrymeela Community has sought to be a catalyst for change in the lives of ordinary people as well as for those in leadership in Church and society.

The next section will look at examples of an applied incarnational theology. The words of C. S. Lewis provide a good reminder of the scope of the field in which we work.

[O]ur imitation of God in this life ... must be an imitation of God incarnate: our model is the Jesus, not only of Calvary, but [also] of the workshop, the roads, the crowds, the clamorous demands and surly oppositions, the lack of all peace and privacy, the interruptions. For this, so strangely unlike anything we can attribute to the Divine life in itself, is apparently not only like, but is, the Divine life operating under human conditions.⁶⁴

⁶¹ White, *Atonement and Incarnation*, 87-88

⁶² David Stevens, *The Land of Unlikeness: Explorations into Reconciliation*, The Columba Press, Dublin, 2004

⁶³ Stevens, *The Land of Unlikeness*, 31-32

⁶⁴ C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*, Geoffrey Bles, London, 1960, 14-15

Incarnational theology in practice

The essence of human living is relational. If our relationships are harmonious and supportive, life will seem worthwhile and creative. If, on the other hand, our relationships are fraught, contentious or violent then life will not seem worth living. David Stevens in a quotation from a piece by John Morrow, the second Leader of Corrymeela, refers to this understanding of the relational character of life.

Modern insights confirm the Hebrew understanding of the universe as wholly *relational*. The Kingdom of Christ is the Kingdom of right relationships. To understand Christ's life and death and resurrection and to participate in this work is to begin a journey to renew *all* our relationships; with God, with ourselves, and with all humankind and with the earth and the universe.⁶⁵

Morrow goes on to describe the task of Corrymeela. "We are invited to be a sign of the new community and a catalyst for its creation locally and internationally."⁶⁶ The aim as Stevens suggests, in the paragraph heading, is "Transformed Relationships". Ray Davey, said in 1954: "We've got to learn anew that we are members of each other, that we are inter-dependent."⁶⁷ All this is like saying that we are Christ to each other.

The following stories illustrate something of that creative process, or, at least of relationships on the way to healing and transformation. Ray Davey quotes from a story in *A Place Apart* by Dervla Murphy about how the right quality of relationship can mean a great deal. Dervla visited Áine who had just been to Corrymeela following the murder of her son. This is what happened when she opened the door to Dervla with her eyes red from crying.

I was just having a wee cry in the kitchen. Mostly now I'm alright but sometimes it comes over me round this time – when he'd be comin' in for his supper with his dad. They worked together at the plumbing, see. And you know how a lad likes his food – he'd say, 'Great, Mum! Its onions tonight and you've been cryin!' People say that I will

⁶⁵ David Stevens, *The Place Called Reconciliation: Texts to Explore*, The Corrymeela Press, Belfast, 2008, 9-10 (The source of John Morrow's words is not available)

⁶⁶ Stevens, *The Place Called Reconciliation*, 10

⁶⁷ Davey, *Don't Fence Me In*, 118

forget all these details but how can I? It was Corrymeela got me where I am now. I would never have come to myself without it. I never felt at Mass what I felt at those prayers together in Corrymeela. Protestants and Catholics we were, all together, and the Protestants knew 'twas theirs killed my son and they prayed special for me – and it worked! I'll never be happy again, see. But I'm not angry no more.⁶⁸

There is another story but in reverse, so to speak. This time the effect was made by the actions and attitude of a Roman Catholic nun who was a helper at Corrymeela.

Tommy O'Rourke was a pensioner from the Protestant Shankill Road [in Belfast]. He came with a group for a week's break at Corrymeela. Sister Vincentia, a nun from the Cross and Passion Convent in Ballycastle came up regularly to help with these groups of senior citizens. In the course of the week Tommy struck up quite a friendship with the sister. 'Towards the end of the time someone said to him: 'Tommy, ye're gettin' on very well with that wee nun.' 'She's not a nun,' was his indignant reply, 'she's the District Nurse.' But something very important had happened to Tommy. He had had a real meeting, a relationship had developed. The stereotype had been broken and his idea of a nun completely transformed. He had encountered the real person and had not even noticed that she was a nun, much less a member of the 'other side'.⁶⁹

There are many such stories. Some personal memories, from running family weeks along with other members, are still vivid after a few decades. I have a mental picture of a family who arrived all dressed in their Sunday best. Particularly noticeable was the twelve-year-old daughter with long blond hair wearing a very smart red trouser suit. Her two younger brothers and her mother were likewise well turned out. Anyone who knows Corrymeela will realise immediately that this is very unusual way to dress for a Family week at Ballycastle.

The transformation that took place after just two days was wonderful to behold. Gone was all the stiff formality and nervousness. Having spent a day watching all the others having fun they all gradually let go, dressed casually and joined in. A special image of transformation in my mind was of the mother on the trampoline. She said at the time that this was the first time in her life to do something like this. She said: 'if the neighbours could see her now'. A social worker had referred this family because of traumatic events in

⁶⁸ Davey, *The Channel of Peace*, 88

⁶⁹ Davey, *The Channel of Peace*, 114

the family. The way this mother was able to share with others made a significant difference to her. She seemed to have been isolated in her home environment.

This story is a particular instance of the importance of play in the process of healing and reconciliation. People, coming from situations of ‘acute suffering’ and distress, find in play and sharing ordinary things that their life, in a sense, returns. In the following, Peter Berger highlights the importance of play. He uses the category of inductive faith in preparing for a discussion about the significance of play, what he calls

the argument from play... Ludic, or playful, elements can be found in just about any sector of human culture ... play sets up a separate universe of discourse ... which suspends, ‘for the duration’, the rules and general assumptions of the ‘serious’ world ... Joy is play’s intention. When this intention is actually realised, in joyful play, the time structure of the playful universe takes on a very special quality – namely, *it becomes eternity* ... It is this curious quality, which belongs to all joyful play, that explains the liberation and peace such play provides. When adults play with genuine joy, they momentarily regain the deathlessness of childhood. This becomes most apparent when such play occurs in the actual face of acute suffering and dying.⁷⁰

All of these stories are about the effect of seeing other peoples’ faces. They are all about creative encounters for people from distinctly different backgrounds. They are people who found in these encounters a new experience and even a transformation of their world. They bear out the importance of the individual and individuality and the value of relationality. This latter point is supported by Vernon White in *Paying Attention to People*.⁷¹ He establishes the importance of human individuality but also notes the fact that we live in relationships. He puts the doctrinal aspect of this as follows:

There is another aspect [of orthodox Christology] which does not *simply* endorse individuality. For within the same corpus of orthodox tradition the God who was in Christ was also, a *relational* figure ... He is portrayed as one formed and sustained by his relationship to the Father and the Spirit.⁷²

⁷⁰ Peter Berger, *A Rumour of Angels: Modern Society and the Rediscovery of the Supernatural*, Penguin Books, London, 1971, 76-77

⁷¹ Vernon White, *Paying Attention to People: An Essay on Individualism and Christian Belief*, SPCK, London, 1996

⁷² White, *Paying Attention to People*, 125

From this we turn to an expression of Corrymeela as a face-to-face Community and its contribution to reconciliation, unity and peace.

A Face-to-Face Community

David Stevens was the Leader of the Community from 2004 until his death in May 2010. His addresses at the annual Dedication Service each January give a rich insight into the nature and calling of Corrymeela. These addresses are printed as appendices. There are insights about the nature of reconciliation, unity and the theological basis of what inspires the Community. In his first sermon in January 2004 he reminded the Community about what it will take to respond to the challenges of the days and years to come.

As well as the Scripture reading from Colossians 1: 15-20 he calls on “that well known exponent of political realism, Machiavelli: *‘If one wants a republic or sect to live a long time it is necessary to bring it back often to its beginnings.’* However, he goes on to say *‘It is as clear as light that without renovation these bodies cannot last’*.”⁷³ Stevens then reminds everyone about the beginnings of the Community being located in Ray’s [i.e. Ray Davey’s] experience at Dresden and “secondly in a Christian vision of reconciliation which speaks of a remade humanity, of renewed and redeemed relationships, of restored community ... of self-emptying love that makes space for others.”⁷⁴

Then he mentions that at this time the call is “to newness and we will get there ... by a return to our roots, to our founding vision.” The Community will not find a vision for the future by “being a community relations organisation but a Christian community of reconciliation, with all its imperfection, fragmentation and fragility”. He comes now to the kernel of the sermon and his vision of Corrymeela. The following extract expresses his

⁷³ Appendix 1, page 62

⁷⁴ Appendix 1, page 62

vision of the “Christian community as a community of the face”.⁷⁵

I want now to explore a particular sentence of our Colossians’ text

“[J]esus is the image of the unseen God.” For image read ‘face’. He is the face of the unseen God.

Jesus Christ in his life, death and resurrection, embodies the face of God. The Jewish writer, Emmanuel Levinas, is the philosopher who highlights the importance of the face. In the face of the other – in particular the vulnerable face of the other – we are called to respond. Levinas suggests that, in the human face, we see a trace of the divine face. In Corrymeela, particularly in the Ballycastle Centre, there are lots of faces, often vulnerable faces. Not statistics for funders or that demeaning word ‘clients’ but faces. Let us not forget it ...

The Christian community is a community of the face, being graced by God embodied in Jesus Christ, called to face this Jesus, seeing the face of God reflected in creation and especially in each human face ... And of course reconciliation is a face to face encounter for only then can we speak and hopefully hear each other ...

The Bible makes it clear that reconciliation is not some sentimental togetherness, something warm and fuzzy. So, [we are] called to newness, called to return to roots, a community of the face. Finally I want to return to that sentence in Colossians again “He is the image of the unseen God.” The Greek word for image gives us our word *icon*. So he, that is Jesus, is the icon of the unseen God. An icon makes something important visible. The life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ makes God’s reconciliation visible.

There are people who make reconciliation visible – who are icons of reconciliation. Mandela and Tutu ... in South Africa. But there are many others, unheard, unsung, people here in this church, people who are gifts from God, who embody grace at play: grace as beauty. Reconciliation is not some abstraction ... [i]t is embodied in persons, in relationships ... The challenge is for us, in our own way, to imitate these living icons.⁷⁶

In 2009 the sermon at the Dedication Service was about the “anguish of our world and its relationship with reconciliation”.⁷⁷ He mentions many locations of anguish like Gaza; Zimbabwe; the places of torture and cruelty, of malnutrition or lack of health care. Sometimes these situations of anguish are out there and then they can come closer to home. He then says:

At the centre of Christian faith is a cry of anguish ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ Jesus’ cry of where is God in all this is actually the start of any Christian account of reconciliation. Such an account starts in the apparent absence of God. Jesus forsaken is the God for our times. Abandoned, and in solidarity with the abandoned, God is in the bits and pieces of things, in the brokenness. The love of God has a name and a face:

⁷⁵ Appendix 1, page 63

⁷⁶ Appendix 1, page 62-64

⁷⁷ Appendix 6, page 78

Christ crucified. As the German theologian and martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer said: only a suffering God would do. Biblical truth is a suffered truth, not a confessional statement.⁷⁸

He compares the experiences of Ray Davey and Chiara Lubich both of whom witnessed the horrors of war and both responded by forming a movement and a community. David Stevens points to the importance of unity in dealing with forsakenness.

Christ's forsakenness is a central part of Chiara Lubich's theology and she links it with a powerful yearning for unity, a unity which in her life and work moved beyond the Catholic Church to other Christian churches, and to people of other faiths, and it involved politics and economics. Unity is the overcoming of forsakenness and brokenness and the stepping over the boundaries in identification with the other, particularly with the stranger and the alien ... she was driven – and we would follow her in this – to build bridges of understanding with others. Christ forsaken paradoxically reveals the tenacity of God's dialogue with humanity. He will not give up. He will offer time and space. Only a relational God will do ...

Ray Davey, post the destruction and anguish of Dresden saw Easter fitting into 'the realness of things. Its tragedy and sorrow' but 'also climbing up the other side into life and victory over death'. These words pull us into the reality of God's reconciling activity and call us, like Ray, to mend brokenness wherever we find it.

The love of the Father has a name and a face: Christ crucified. A deep paradox and yet a hopeful paradox. Amen.⁷⁹

The date for the 2010 Dedication Service fell on Ray Davey's 95th birthday so it is appropriate to close this section with David Stevens' references to this event.

[O]n the occasion of Ray's 95th birthday let us remember the dislocation, the dispossession, the poverty of being a prisoner of war and seeing ten square miles of the destruction of Dresden – a world where any talk of reconciliation would seem a fantasy. And let us celebrate that out of this poverty he made many of us wealthy. This is actually what it means to be evangelical and to see this wealth is to see salvation.⁸⁰

The Corrymeela Commitment is a summary of all aspects covered in the foregoing chapters. In it members declare that they are a community drawn from many traditions who affirm their faith in the power of God in Jesus Christ; who confess their own responsibility for the destructive conflicts in society; who say they believe that they have been called to seek a deeper understanding of their faith; who surrender themselves to the

⁷⁸ Appendix 6, page 77-78

⁷⁹ Appendix 6, page 80

⁸⁰ Appendix 7, page 82

spirit of Jesus to overcome their own divisions and make themselves instruments of his peace; who commit themselves to work for a just society; who agree to pray regularly for each other. And wish, through the power of the Spirit, to walk the way of the Gospel together.⁸¹ The members' Commitment is reviewed whenever changed conditions call for it. A survey of changes to the Commitment over the years would be an interesting way to chart the life of this responsive community.

Incarnation and Implementation

The principle of Incarnation that lies at the heart of Corrymeela's response, to a divided Church and a divided society, is in the implied acceptance of people as they are. In becoming one of us without prior conditions, or promises of improvement, God accepted us with our human frailty and failings. It is a mistake to think that there was some kind of hidden contract about repentance or contrition being required before we could be redeemed or saved. Repentance follows the experience of being accepted and considered lovable by God and others around us. We can change our minds when we know it is safe to do so.

All the attitudes that are part of Ray's vision and its implementation by generations of followers reflect a like approach to each person or group. People time after time express something about the way they met with acceptance. This was so often the key to being freed from prisons of prejudice and even hatred.

The experience of face to face encounter is enriched by the sense that in the other we see God. The Holy Spirit, as Counsel for the Defence, helps us to see our victims and to hear their cries for recognition and acceptance. As we serve the other we serve Christ and as we learn to communicate we experience the Holy Spirit who helps us listen to and see the other in freedom, thus making peace.

Conclusion

⁸¹ Appendix 8, page 84

This chapter brought together a number of strands that have emerged through the literature, the interviews, the incarnational principles and the examples showing the effect on a variety of people of putting those principles into practice. It presented Corrymeela is an example of faith in action. Eberhard Bethge, when summarising Bonhoeffer's emphasis on 'prayer and righteous action' at a time when preaching was prohibited, writes:

Bonhoeffer ... teaches us to keep a balance in thinking, in teaching and in acting so that doing the just thing keeps prayer from destruction and vice versa ... First, "doing the just thing among men" keeps praying from escaping into self-sufficient piety, and praying keeps the doing of the just thing from self-righteousness. Second, doing the just thing keeps praying from that hypocrisy which the children of the world have discovered in the pious at all times, and praying keeps the doing of justice from the fanaticized ideologizing which makes those who work for change most of the time bad representatives of their own cause. Third, doing the just thing keeps praying from pessimism, which is not faith, and praying keeps doing the just thing from resignation, which is not Christian either. And fourth, doing keeps praying within the reality of this earth, and praying keeps doing justice in line with the truth of the Gospel.⁸²

David Stevens' sermons and writings draw together many strands that run through the experience and practice of Corrymeela at different times over the forty-five years of its life and witness and illustrate the claim that Corrymeela is a *Face to Face* community. The ongoing challenge to live up to these aims remains.

⁸² Bethge, *Prayer and Righteous Action*, 26-27

CHAPTER FOUR: TAKING THE VISION FORWARD

Being a *Face to Face* Community is a continuing challenge. As can be seen throughout this dissertation, the faces that come to meet each other in a Corrymeela context are becoming more and more varied racially, culturally, and also from faith perspectives. The context, nearly fifty years on, seems to be the same in terms of the tensions between the factions roughly described as Protestant and Catholic or Loyalist and Republican. But the realities are much more complex. Since the early days of the Corrymeela Community the make-up of the population has changed with the introduction of other races from the Far East and the Global South, with a sizeable contingent from Eastern Europe. Another change is in the fall off in Church attendance and affiliation, specially over the last twenty-five years or so. Along with this within the Churches, in some quarters, there has been a hardening of attitudes against ecumenism and an increasing emphasis on religion as a private matter focussed on personal salvation. Ray Davey's disquiet about individualistic Christianity still applies. Outside the Churches there is growing rejection of the idea that any religious contribution could be relevant to society as a whole. All of these aspects are generalisations but indicate a very different Ireland, including Northern Ireland, but while everything has changed all remains the same in so many hearts and minds.

The purpose of Corrymeela

The three strands in the mission of Corrymeela indicate a wide spectrum of challenges. They are: To embrace difference; heal divisions; enable reconciliation. These three enormous tasks may seem too much for any small group of people no matter how dedicated. Indeed they need to be faced with an attitude that acknowledges the fact that no programme or set of experiences that are planned is bound to produce positive results. Yet some statement of the purpose of the Community and its expression in various ways,

involving young and old, local and immigrant people, Republican and Unionist, is needed. Otherwise, Corrymeela could be seen as too vague and aimless. Without being grounded in the vision of an open ecumenical Christian community which exists for others it would lose its soul. The original vision of Ray Davey of an Open Village, in which all are welcome from across the whole spectrum of society seeking together a new kind of life for all, is still of enormous importance.

Many Corrymeela members have learned to value the insights of René Girard⁸³ who helps people to identify the ways that rivalry works in human relationships and leads to conflict and destroys possibilities for real sharing. The quality of acceptance which means so much to those who experience Corrymeela at its best is the antidote to harmful rivalry which has been destroying the world from time immemorial. So it ill behoves any member to think and act in ways that suggest that the Community has all the answers. This would be a recipe for increasing tensions and inviting ridicule.

The Corrymeela Community cannot of itself “Embrace difference, heal divisions or enable reconciliation”. In fact these three phrases are expressions of what has happened in the past at different times and to the surprise of all those involved. All that the Community can do, using the various facilities, staff and volunteers, is to embody the spirit of the vision and hope that those who come will receive sufficient encouragement and inspiration to take the steps they need to take in their own localities and communities. The sometimes misunderstood saying, “Corrymeela begins when you leave”, is a vital part of its influence. But most of all it is about people discovering that it is looking at each other “face to face” that can enable people to see “eye to eye”. And along with this kind of encounter learning

⁸³ René Girard, who has written many books on the origins of human culture and the working of imitation in acquisitive desire and the function of scapegoating in the resolution of rivalry and conflict. His insights were brought to Corrymeela by two Dutchmen, Roel Kaptein and André Lascaris, OP.

how to hear each other's stories and discovering that we are part of one great human story with all its up and downs, sorrows and joys.

The hope expressed in this dissertation is that people will discover how to look at each other in our shared humanity and be surprised to find that peace and love contribute to a better life. The alternative of jealously guarding territory and parading traditional cultures has not made for peace and harmony but rather made the lumpy crossing places into permanent painful barriers. The answer is not in our histories but in how we go forward together. The world is going through a modern version of the Dark Ages and needs some sign of light, even from such a small place as Ireland.

Signposts for the journey with Corrymeela are Welcome (offering hospitality and meeting); Story (yours and ours); Power (created by relationship and sharing); Confession (acknowledging our own complicity); Risk (stepping out into the unknown); Together (the ingredient of community).

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has surveyed the Corrymeela Community through the literature about it and the seven interviews.

It is clear from the literature that Ray Davey and those who gathered around him were concerned about the political tensions in Northern Ireland and the call to unity in the Church of Jesus Christ. This was at a time when people in different countries and Churches had identified the importance of community in developing an effective response to rampant individualism in Church life and the need for a better basis for peace in the world.

The interviews showed the response of a variety of people in harmony with each other even though they differed in the emphasis they placed on a number of issues. All that they had to say supported the original vision and aims of the Community and were clear that the challenges of the present and the future would have to be met in the same spirit.

The third chapter placed Corrymeela in a theological context using the Incarnation of God in Jesus Christ as the key and stressing the incarnational nature of everything that the Community does and its attitudes to dealing with each other and those who come to the Centre. The use of Christ as the icon or face of God transfers to seeing reconciliation as being in a face-to-face relationship and Corrymeela as a Face-to-face Community.

The fourth additional chapter is an attempt to look forward as a Community to facing new situations that arise in Ireland and the world. These challenges can only be faced by continuing to be open to each other and finding each other's humanity behind whatever racial or cultural or religious mask they may hide behind. As the Community celebrates its 50th Anniversary and faces into the future new challenges will appear and new responses will be made. This is the nature of how Corrymeela has lived out the vision and leadership of the Revd. Ray Davey and his inspiring wife, Kathleen. Kathleen wrote a poem that seems to me like a parable from which to draw inspiration for the future:

Hidden Roots

I contemplate my birch-tree over there,
Trunk, branches, twiglets bearing leaves,
And underneath the soil, buried from view,
The taproot, side-roots, countless rootlet webs,
A mirror image of the tree above.

I makes me think how similar we are,
The helpless ones dependent on the strong,
The strong of no avail without the weak
And both together gradually would die
Unless they drew upon the hidden sap
That nurtures and sustains all life.⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Time Passes, Poems of Kathleen Davey

APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Leader's (David Stevens) Address at Service of Dedication, January 2004

Appendix 2

Leader's (David Stevens) Address at Service of Dedication, January 2005

Appendix 3

Leader's (David Stevens) Address at Service of Dedication, January 2006

Appendix 4

Leader's (David Stevens) Address at Service of Dedication, January 2007

Appendix 5

Leader's (David Stevens) Address at Service of Dedication, January 2008

Appendix 6

Leader's (David Stevens) Address at Service of Dedication, January 2009

Appendix 7

Leader's (David Stevens) Address at Service of Dedication, January 2010

Appendix 8

Statement of Commitment made by members of the Corrymeela Community and a Corrymeela Mission Statement.

LEADER'S ADDRESS AT SERVICE OF DEDICATION

Sunday, 11 January 2004

Text: *Colossians 1: 15-20*

Trevor [Williams] has just read one of the great New Testament texts about reconciliation. I have a subsidiary text and it comes from that well known exponent of political realism, Machiavelli:

"If one wants a republic or sect to live a long time it is necessary to bring it back often to its beginnings."

However, he goes on to say

"It is as clear as light that without renovation these bodies cannot last. The mode of renovation is, as I have said, to reduce them towards their origins."

The founding vision of Corrymeela is located in Ray Davey's vision of reconciliation and Christian Community. It has a concrete focus in Ray's life – in his wartime experience of being a prisoner of war and of being outside Dresden when the city was firebombed in February 1945. This vision was not located in the dreary steeples of Fermanagh and South Tyrone (with apologies of course to those of you who come from Fermanagh and Tyrone). It is located firstly in Ray's experience and secondly in a Christian vision of reconciliation which speaks of remade humanity, of renewed and redeemed relationships, of restored community, of the acceptance of limitation, of suffering vulnerability, of self-emptying love that makes space for others. A Christian community has this knowledge at its heart, as it centres itself round the person of Jesus Christ.

At this point in our history we are called to newness and we will get there, as Machiavelli suggests, by a return to our roots, to our founding vision. And our founding vision tells us that we will find future vision by not being a community relations organisation but a Christian community of reconciliation, with all its imperfection, fragmentation and fragility. I want now to explore a particular sentence of our Colossians' text

"He is [i.e. Jesus is] the image of the unseen God."

For image read 'face'.

He is the face of the unseen God.

Jesus Christ, in his life, death and resurrection, embodies the face of God. The Jewish writer, Emmanuel Levinas, is the philosopher who highlights the importance of the face. In face of the other – in particular the vulnerable face of the other – we are called to respond. Levinas suggests that, in the human face, we see a trace of the divine face.

In Corrymeela, particularly in the Ballycastle Centre, there are lots of faces, often vulnerable faces. Not statistics for funders or that demeaning word ‘clients’ but faces. Let us not forget it.

Corrymeela does not exist for its members or for its staff or for its volunteers, important as these are, but for all the faces who come through our centres, and the people who, in all our different ways, we work with and relate to, and even the people we cannot work with or relate to, the people who are outside the bubble of our concern, the people who are outside our comfort zone, the people who we do not see, the people whose faces we look through. We are challenged to extend our sympathies to see people we do not want to see in the world of the DUP and Sinn Fein who are today the dominant parties in Northern Ireland.

The Christian community is a community of the face, being graced by God embodied in Jesus Christ, called to face this Jesus, seeing the face of God reflected in creation and especially in each human face. And there is a certain summing up of this in a verse in John Bell’s hymn:

“So did the Word of Grace
Proclaim in time and space
And with a human face
‘I am for you’ ”

And of course reconciliation is a face to face encounter for only then can we speak and hopefully hear each other. Rembrandt’s painting *Wrestling with the Angel* portrays Jacob wrestling with a mysterious figure, possibly an angel, possibly God. Jacob is having his neck slowly and painfully turned so that he looks this figure in the face. Reconciliation has to occur face to face. There may be lessons here for Northern Ireland politics. Sinn Fein and the DUP will eventually have to meet face to face. Anyway this story suggests that reconciliation does not occur without travail, without pain. Jacob limps towards reconciliation with his brother Esau in a later part of the story.

The Bible makes it clear that reconciliation is not some sentimental togetherness, something warm and fuzzy. So, called to newness, called to return to roots, a community of the face.

Finally I want to return to that sentence in Colossians again “He is the image of the unseen God.” The Greek word for image gives us our word *icon*. So he, that is Jesus, is the icon of the unseen God. An icon makes something important visible. The life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ makes God’s reconciliation visible.

There are people who make reconciliation visible – who are icons of reconciliation. Mandela and Tutu are well known examples in South Africa. But there are many others, unheard, unsung, people here in this church, people who are gifts from God, who embody grace at play: grace as beauty. Reconciliation is not some abstraction, theory, concept or a course. It is embodied in persons, in relationships. It is a life’s practice. It is a craft we learn from others. The challenge is for us, in our own way, to imitate these living icons.

So may the Lord bless us and keep us

The Lord make his face to shine upon us and be gracious to us

The Lord lift up his countenance upon us and give us peace. Amen.

Appendix 2: **Leader's Address at the Service of Dedication**

January 2005

Hebrews 11: 8-10; 32 and 39

Chapter 11 of Hebrews is a chapter about great adventures of faith of people from the Old Testament. But, as verse 39 says, "Yet all these though they were commended for their faith did not receive what was promised". And that promise was Jesus Christ. What is being said is that there are more and better things to come.

The text is also saying that there are endless things to be said about these adventures of faith. 'And what more should I say for time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets'.

And this echoes for me the last verse of John's Gospel: "But there are also many things that Jesus did; if every one were written down I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that could be written".

Ray Davey started the Corrymeela adventure of faith. As we near the 40th anniversary of the founding of Corrymeela, we should be profoundly grateful to God and Ray. All of us, in Gill Michael's words at the AGM have been given "spaces for adventure" and all of us could tell stories that "the world itself could not contain the books that could be written" and time would certainly fail us. So let us be grateful for the great spaces for adventure we have been given.

And of course adventure stories are to be added to. That is what the Hebrews text is saying. There are more adventures to be had. We are not stuck in old stories endlessly repeated. This is a journey. This is an adventure story to be continued as the story books say.

Ray writes about the first Corrymeela event as follows:

"In June 1965 a group of some 40-50 people entered the lounge at Corrymeela. It was a Saturday afternoon and the purchase of the premises had just been completed. This meeting had been called to express our gratitude and also to dedicate ourselves and the house to the work of Christian reconciliation throughout the country. It was not a very impressive event and perhaps a little self-conscious, as even then we stressed informality and also none of us were at all sure how it would all work out. This was indeed the very first Corrymeela event and somehow it almost took us by surprise, as the building itself was undergoing some long overdue renovations, and much obviously needed to be done before it would be fully functional. If I remember rightly I don't think there were even enough chairs to go round and some had to stand. I mention this because it

seemed so much a non-event with no press and no television coverage. Yet it was a first step and something had happened”.

I think that this points to the paradoxical importance of non-events, at least as the world understands them. The birth, life and death of Jesus Christ – the promise that the Hebrews text looks to – was a non-event in an obscure part of the Roman Empire. One routine crucifixion of absolutely no significance. Yet the knowledge of the Pure Victim, Jesus Christ, journeys through space and time and the knowledge of our victims becomes central to our western culture. So the foundation of Corrymeela was an absolute non-event. Yet the language of reconciliation and relationships has become central in Northern Ireland.

Who can tell me where the following quotation comes from?

“This community has been deeply divided and has suffered much in social and economic terms from the prolonged conflict. There is much to be done to create a society in which mutual respect for the rights and equality of all our citizens and in which mutual trust can grow. There is need to build a calm regard for our distinct and sometimes conflicting cultural traditions and to respect the diversity of our people”.

This is the DUP’s statement in Annex E to the Proposals by the British and Irish Governments for a Comprehensive Agreement.

Can it be that the language of reconciliation will soon be on the lips of the DUP?

There are, however, another set of despisers. The leader article of Fortnight for October 2004 had the following

“Lets forget any fanciful notion that the desired or remotely possible outcome of current negotiations is respect and affection between Adams and Paisley, Robinson and McGuinness. These are Corrymeela dreams”.

As Ray has taught us, never underestimate the power of dreams and visions.

So let us celebrate the non-event of our founding, the insignificance of our dreams and the non-event of our 40th anniversary. Let us give thanks to God and to Ray. And may we journey on, and in the words of W.H. Auden “see rare beasts and have unique adventures”.

David Stevens

Appendix 3: ADDRESS AT THE SERVICE OF DEDICATION

January 2006

Two texts:

The first from 2nd Corinthians chapter one, verse 19

“For in him [that is Jesus Christ] every one of God’s promises is a yes”.

The second is from 1st Peter chapter three, verse 15

“Be ready at all times to answer anyone who asks you to explain the hope you have in you”.

What I see the first text as meaning is this: that God’s wish for reconciliation, for peace, for justice, for healing finds its yes in Jesus Christ.

Similarly the hope that the scapegoats again find their place in the community and that the victims will not be permanently silenced finds its yes in Jesus Christ. All of this is the grace of new vision, of new horizons, given in Jesus Christ who is God’s yes.

This does not remove suffering, victimisation, exclusion and affliction from our world, as the first part of chapter one of the Corinthians text makes clear. But they are part of the context of the yes.

We are simply people who live with the hope of a yes. The 17th century Anglican poet George Herbert beautifully articulates this for me in the following words:

Come my way, my truth, my life

Come my light, my feast, my strength

Which brings me to the second text

“Be ready at all times to answer anyone who asks you to explain the hope you have in you”.

There is a temptation or a tendency to look with morbid fascination on what has gone wrong, or what is going wrong. It’s part of human life. And we in Corrymeela are no exception in this. There is the pleasant schadenfreude of watching things go wrong and there is the destructive tendency to encourage them to go wrong. Our personal negativity has a wish for general negativity.

When Peter tries to counteract human weakness with words of hope, he did not encourage people to say what was wrong with the world, the church or society. He did not ask people

to draw up a list of problems or negatives. Instead he asks them simply to give an account of the hope that is in them “Explain the hope you have in you”.

So as a challenge to you all at a Service of Dedication, at the start of a New Year: “Explain the hope you have in you” or to put it another way “say why you are here”.

Let me sketch some aspects of what hope looks like for us

- When people meet across unexpected lines
- When honest conversation occurs
- When we learn something new, instead of repeating the old patterns
- When real change occurs

In someone’s words “what goes on up there I don’t know but it works”.

And all of you could add to the list. And tell stories.

And we see what hope looks like in persons. One of those persons died just before Christmas. Una O’Higgins O’Malley in her person incorporated the bloody history of Ireland in the 20th century. Her father, Kevin O’Higgins, was murdered when she was five months old. He was the man who did what was necessary to ensure that the Free State would survive. Her grandfather too was murdered. On the 60th anniversary of her father’s murder she arranged for a Mass to be held which remembered him and the three Republicans who had killed him. She was a founder of Glencree and a pioneer of North/South understanding and of the politics of forgiveness.

I would like to read one of her poems. It is called ‘Forgiveness’, written just after the Good Friday Agreement was signed. It is about Easter and it is about the politics of forgiveness.

FORGIVENESS

“So there he stood upon the shore

with everything in waiting.

The fire was going well,

fresh fish were grilling

and they would bring some more

(this would confirm their own importance).

And at that Easter breakfast

he would hear from Peter.

No decommissioning of the past
nor rank betrayals would be mentioned
simply 'Bring more fish' and 'Do you love me?'

Today as mists clear from the Agreement,
hammered in Belfast last Good Friday evening,
a voice speaks from far South Africa
of truth and reconciliation
and puts a definition on forgiveness:
'It is', the bishop says,
'a way of dealing with the past
so as to plan the future'.

Poor Peter's past had been disastrous
but he was asked to bring along his gifts
of fish and loving;
nothing more was needed
to complete this paschal sharing
and look towards the future."

At the AGM I said the title was "Then there were Flowers". I had had the experience when Dermot Ahern, the Irish Foreign Minister was at Corrymeela and the flowers appeared and I said that expressed something about a tradition of hospitality. Now I want to add to "Then the Flowers appeared and I saw Frank's picture". For there is a picture of Frank Wright in the lounge too. There is a communion of the present with the past and the living with the dead. We are nourished by those who have gone, even those we have never met. Frank shortly before he died said "It's been great". In the difficult times let us be nourished by the good stories and those who have gone before.

There are times when you know why Corrymeela has to exist, when something profoundly shocking hits you in this society. For me this last year it was one fact. The Housing Executive spends £45 million a year in relocating people who have been forced out of their homes. This is at an apparent time of 'peace'.

So let us have no doubt that Ray's vision is as relevant as it always has been. And we cannot assume that things in Corrymeela will continue to exist in their present form. Large amounts of resources have been injected into Northern Ireland over the last 35 years and we have received our share. We have to see this in historical terms as abnormal. I have been to 3 closure events in the last four months and I expect to be at more. There are tough times ahead. There is no going back to how things were. We are journeying as aliens and strangers into foreign lands. And we were always aliens and strangers, not at home in the present dispensation. That is how we started.

I received a profound shock just before Christmas. I was delivering a Christmas card to John Morrow and I noticed something was wrong. The former Presbyterian Community Centre had been demolished. The place where Corrymeela was founded. Gone. Ray Davey and John Morrow's home. Gone. Philip Morrow and Duncan Morrow's bedroom. Gone. Where we were married. Gone. Truly there is no abiding city.

What we can do is to affirm the vision and live boldly no matter what happens, confident in God's Yes, confident that we will be able to be held, knowing that there is always a ministry of reconciliation and being ready to give an account of the hope that is in us.

David Stevens

Appendix 4: LEADER'S ADDRESS

SERVICE OF DEDICATION

January 2007

Rather than a post-Christmas story I thought I would take a post-Resurrection story in the spirit of W.H. Auden's:

The Christmas Feast is already a fading memory
And already the mind begins to be vaguely aware
Of an unpleasant whiff of apprehension at the thought
Of Lent and Good Friday which cannot after all, now be very far off.

I want to use this text in John to reflect on three important areas: the first is around failure; the second is about attentiveness; and the third is around hope. I believe it is around these 3 things that Christians can make a distinctive contribution to peace.

The text portrays a community of fear, failure and desertion, hiding behind locked doors. This is a community that has reached a dead end with no where else to go. They had hoped that Jesus was the person to set Israel free. And it had all gone wrong. Their religious and political stories had collapsed. And there is a deeper collapse shown here: the collapse of the myth that we can know history and know how things are going to turn out.

Christian hope cannot be about offering an easy option that things will simply carry on and that things will work out okay. There are real endings; for us personally, for us as a Corrymeela Community – which we have experienced over the last year – and for us as a society.

And a language of hope may paradoxically have to begin with an acknowledgement of failure and endings, and a language of grief. And many people may not want to hear anything about these things.

One of the big failures of this society is to find symbols and words that are adequate for the massiveness of the experience which people have gone through during the Troubles. There is a desire for a too easy moving on among some and a wallowing in competitive victimhood among others.

‘And Jesus came and stood among them’

Jesus breaks into the world of fearful and failed people, and stands among them. Jesus appears in acceptance, forgiveness, reconciliation and hope. On the far side of revenge - somebody who is entirely for us and not against us. Even though he has been transformed beyond death, Jesus still bears the marks of the crucifixion. The wounds make it clear that there is continuity between the crucified and the Risen Lord. The wounds tell the story of failure and complicity – whether active or passive – of people who were in various ways crucifiers. This is fundamentally our story. The memory remains in the wounds but it is a memory which has been woven into a new story in which the lie of violence has been exposed and in which reconciliation will have the final word. ‘Shalom. Peace be with you’.

So failure, complicity and betrayal are recognised in this story – they are recognised in the wounds. There is no false innocence here. One of the real problems in Northern Ireland is that nobody appears to have been guilty of anything during the Troubles. This very comforting myth of innocence – perhaps necessary for a peace agreement – inhibits an honest reckoning which is necessary for the health of this society. There is no myth of victimised human innocence in the New Testament story. There is a real innocent victim, however, and he returns to save and heal the disciples, to save and heal us. ‘Shalom. Peace be with you’.

To be a Christian is to know that we cannot live with goodness and truth for any sustainable period, is to know failure, and in fact it is to know that failure is normal – this is the knowledge of the wounds. And it is to know that there is something beyond failure – this is the knowledge of the Risen Christ who appears in the Upper Room.

Our involvement in peace and reconciliation work cannot start from a position of being good people who are going to do something good. It must start from a knowledge of being fragile, fractured and failed people who have been given the possibility of starting again. And this is truly liberating. It is what I think James Alison is getting at when he talks about the joy of not being required ‘to get it right’. So this is the first thing that Christians can bring to peace work: a perspective on failure and that it is not the end.

The second thing I want to talk about is attentiveness. The great writer about attentiveness is Simone Weil. She was a French secular Jew who found Christ and died at 34 – she is one of the great writers of the 20th century. She is the patron saint of all outsiders and non-joiners. Although entranced by Christ she did not quite join the Catholic Church. She was a great favourite of Billy McAllister who was the presiding presence at the Corrymeela Centre for the first 10 years. So we can regard Simone Weil as an honorary Corrymeela

person. She was a sort of practical mystic – deeply rooted in another world and yet with an urgent sense of responsibility for this.

One way of seeing the disciples' failure is as a failure of attentiveness. They were caught up in religious and political dreams, in a jockeying for position in the coming Kingdom, and so on. And when the really important moment came they failed to recognise it or grasp it because it did not come in the way they were expecting.

Contrast this with Jesus. Jesus was very clear that he was part of a society hurtling to disaster – he understood the signs of the times. He was attentive to people, and particularly in their distress – the woman who touches his garment in Mark 5 and to those who want the Kingdom on easy terms, e.g. the rich young ruler (which is most of us). And finally he was supremely attentive to God. Attentiveness is a form of prayer, to the deep down things, to the ground of being which is beyond all our feelings about things, which is God.

So I think Simone Weil points to the gift of attentiveness to what is going on. It is not a form of cleverness. Maybe it is a form of seeing out of the corner of the eye, the lucidity to see the shadow of the victim, a moment beyond rivalry and nonsense that we are all caught up in. It is a form of creativity, or the source of creativity. It is a knowledge that we can bring to peacemaking.

In the post September 11 world if we are to break the deadly cycle of escalating violence – of strike and counter strike, of atrocity and enraged reaction – we must start by paying attention to what everybody is saying, even our enemies and there are real enemies here, and be sincerely ready to let it change us: to get beyond rhetoric, decode the imagery, and hear the subtext of rage, grief, fear, pain, hatred and despair.

And the third thing I want to talk about is hope. Jim Wallis has said that the important thing that Christian can offer to those who are working for peace is hope. Peter Berger once called hope a 'signal of transcendence', an intrusion of God into our lives. This is in many ways an exhausted society and we are immunised against hoping too much. In such a situation there is an audacity to hope. At the heart of biblical faith is a series of images – Noah after the flood, Isaiah contemplating the destruction of Jerusalem, for instance – showing the unbroken human capacity to rebuild life after disaster. Hope is the refusal to accept the reading of reality which is the majority opinion – the reading of reality of the disciples in the Upper Room was the majority opinion. And Jesus stood among them and majority opinion was dethroned. A new alternative, transformed reality was set before them compelling them out of a room into a world with a limitless horizon. We are in the business of alternative realities – we have been since 1965. Hope is what this community must do because it is God's community invited to be on God's pilgrimage to an alternative future. This is not about some happy piety that everything will turn out all right – that there will be no pain, hurt and failure – but trusting that we will ultimately be held.

And, of course, there is a fragility about hope. In the Northern Ireland painter Colin Middleton's *Jacob Wrestling with the Angel* (1948) Jacob's raised right hand is big and strong – symbolising the struggle with God. But there is also a delicate, fragile butterfly, signifying the angel/God figure. The butterfly symbolises resurrection and transformation. And transformation does not come without struggle, conflict and pain. In Middleton's picture Jacob's face is anguished and sad. And there are two 'sides' to his coat, one in bright positive colours and the other in dark colours, representing suffering.

There is the knowledge of the wounds – and Jesus came and stood among them and said 'Shalom – Peace be with you'. Amen.

David Stevens

Appendix 5: Leader's Address

Dedication service 2008

CHRIST IS OUR PEACE – Ephesians 2: 14-18

And a subsidiary text from Dostoyevsky's novel *The Brothers Karamazov*. In the novel Christ returns to earth on the eve of the Spanish Inquisition. He is arrested and confronted by the Grand Inquisitor who asks Christ the question: 'Why have you come to disturb us?'

Christ is at the point of intersection between humanity and God and at this point of intersection there is a supreme act of self-giving love. In this text he is at the point of intersection between Jew and Gentile and through the same act of self-giving love he breaks down the 'dividing wall of hostility' (v14) between them. This text has spoken eloquently in the Northern Irish context.

Reconciliation work can be understood as being at a point of intersection where there are 'walls' and hostility. The story of the Cornerstone Community, another community of reconciliation in Northern Ireland, illustrates this:

When the Cornerstone Community came into being twenty years ago, the choice of place to live was deliberate. The house is at the intersection of two communities in West Belfast, two communities then at war. Violence was rampant, people lived with grief, pain, fear and mistrust. A wall was being built to keep us apart. Cornerstone hoped to show there was another way of living. For the place of intersection is also the meeting point, and the function of a cornerstone is to unite the two intersecting parts, making both one (cf Eph 2: 20-22).

Twenty years on, we are still at the point of intersection. The physical wall is higher, but many encounters have taken place at the meeting point. We celebrate the fact that the community house has been a place of welcome where people have met across many divides. We celebrate the way our own lives have been enriched by encounters with visitors from across the world, each one a gift. We celebrate the generosity of the many volunteers who have come to us over the years, bringing their gifts of energy, enthusiasm, caring, practical faith. We celebrate republican ex-prisoners meeting with groups of English church people and tackling difficult questions together, and we celebrate people from different political persuasions using the house as a place to thrash out new political possibilities as part of the peace process. Above all, we celebrate our belief that Jesus Christ is himself the cornerstone.

Cornerstone's point of intersection was at a point of physical intersection between two opposing communities in West Belfast. Corrymeela's was the need for change in Northern Ireland in the 1960s, with a background of Ray Davey's experiences in the Second World

War. But a point of intersection could be anything or anywhere where there are tension points, hurting places, vulnerability, silences, exclusion and division. It could be around gays, battered women, racial and ethnic minorities, refugees and asylum seekers, inter-faith relations, anything. And finding your point of intersection involves attentiveness to what is going on; it means really ‘seeing’ and listening.

Reconciliation work faces the reality of pain and death and destruction and seeks to make visible new life. It breaks down walls of antagonised division and offers a new world – a new ‘body’ (v16). We engage in reconciliation work with confidence because Jesus has been there before, having endured the extremes of human hostility and lostness. As Archbishop Rowan Williams says, ‘Our hope and our faith as Christians is that Jesus is Lord – that there is no situation in which he is irrelevant or impotent’.

Reconciliation work is about creating a trusted ‘space’ which brings people and things together to discover that change is possible – just as Christ in his breaking down the ‘dividing wall of hostility’ (v14) created a new space for a peaceful humanity.

Ephesians two is almost a hymn to the peace which Jesus brought about, to the possibility he creates for people. This is a peace based on a refusal to scapegoat – so it is not the peace that Herod and Pilate found (Luke 23: 12), the peace of the common enemy. It is a peace of being together in Christ (v16) – who was made a scapegoat by Jew and Gentile alike.

This is, therefore, not some soft and cosy peace, of happy consensus and quietness, of business as usual. Jesus comes as interruption; he brings worlds from elsewhere. He interrupts the comfortable worlds of the people who have arranged things to suit their convenience – who do not want to see their victims – with the worlds of judgement, truth and grief. This Jesus brings critical presence, disturbance and conflict. He also interrupts the worlds of exclusion and death with the worlds of healing, wholeness, life, joy and inclusion. And Jesus brings the challenge of new life and transformation to all.

Jesus refuses to belong – he is not at home with his world but is only at home with the Father. But he creates a home for others to belong to, his homelessness creates our home, a place for us to live. Christ’s peace is given to us as we enter into and live in his world, as we enter into his ‘space’, the place of joy and grief, hope and judgement, truth and mercy, inclusion and narrow gates. In facing the world’s tensions and challenges we receive Christ’s peace and his Father’s.

What does this peace look like? In the words of Rowan Williams again it is

A peace which is free, active, involvement, compassion, grateful receiving, generous offering, reciprocal enrichment. This is a peace Jesus creates between

God and the world, because it is the kind of peace which exists between him and the Father.

To sum it up: a line from Anne Enright's Man Booker Prize winning novel, *The Gathering*, 'I give you a word and that word is love'.

This is not the peace of a truce which allows continued separation and business as usual but the peace of transformed relationships, of a new creation. And all of this is deeply mysterious. It is not something we know about most of the time. Peace is mystery, it is walking into the unknown. To follow Christ is to go into this unknown. What is known, in Northern Ireland and other places, is violence, fear and division. As a Kosovan Serb said recently about the situation in Kosovo: 'Everyone expects violence, because it is the one constant here'. Peace is the unknown. And you are asked to create a shared and trusted space and a shared future with the person who was your enemy and who you may still have dark suspicions of. This is beyond the romantic 'poetics' of peace. This is the unsentimental prose of living together, the difficult journey that has to be made, the journey of Jacob and Esau, Joseph and his brothers, into the way of peace (Luke 1: 79). May we all make the journey. Amen.

David Stevens

Appendix 6: A Sermon by Dr. David Stevens, Leader of Corrymeela

Service of Dedication – January 11, 2009

This is a sermon about the anguish of our world and its relationship with reconciliation. It has its origin in a dialogue between Simon Jenkins, a columnist in the Guardian, and an atheist, and Richard Harries, former Anglican Bishop of Oxford. In the dialogue Jenkins accuses Harries of being ‘a vaguely agnostic bishop’. Harries responds in a confession of not-knowing (agnosticism) and a confession of faith. This is the quotation:

I am a definite agnostic in the sense of St John of Damascus who said that what God ‘in his essence and nature is absolutely unknowable’. And a definite believer in that the only faith I can live with in a world of such anguish is a God, who is at once crucified and risen.

I don’t want to focus on Harries’ confession of not-knowing but on his words ‘in a world of such anguish’, and how they relate to a God ‘who is at once crucified and risen’.

This is a world of anguish, filled with war as we see currently in Gaza, torture and cruelty and where millions of people die of malnutrition or lack of health care each year. We could mention the current situation in Zimbabwe and we can go on. And we often want to hide, completely understandably from this anguish. Our whole modern Western world often seems to be devoted to keeping it hidden. Our Northern Ireland Programme for Government has at the heart the prospect of prosperity and, therefore, the minimising of anguish. The Government’s policy on victims in so far as it has one, is about the political management of anguish. And, of course, the political avoidance and management of anguish is not to be despised. It is partly what politics is about. And it has its dark side.

There is the out-there-ness of political and social reality but anguish often comes closer to home. Walter Schels is a photographer who photographs people before and after death. He photographed a woman whose mother had rejected her as a child and who struggled all her life for some acceptance. She felt that ‘even life itself has rejected’ her. In death her face is painfully broken and aged, expressing a silent scream of unspeakable pain and trauma. Before such realities we fall into silence. This unlovedness is hell.

At the centre of Christian faith is a cry of anguish

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Jesus’ cry of where is God in this is actually the start of any Christian account of reconciliation. Such an account starts in the apparent absence of God. Jesus forsaken is the God for our times. Abandoned, and in solidarity with the abandoned, God is in the bits and pieces of things, in the brokenness. The love of God has a name and a face: Christ crucified. As the German

theologian and martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer said: 'Only a suffering God would do.' Biblical truth is a suffered truth, not a confessional statement.

'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me' is a direct quotation from Psalm 22. And many of the psalms give voice to profoundly angry people, who are expressing their anguish to God, who want justice and indeed revenge. They tear the veil that hides the anguish of the world. These voices are profoundly not nice and remind us that reconciliation and related work is often a place of uncomfortableness. Reconciliation is about the 'realness of things' (Ray Davey).

One of the most interesting Catholic renewal movements is Focolare which was started by Chiara Lubich, arising out of her experience in the Italian city of Trento – a city heavily bombed in 1944. Compare Ray's experiences in Dresden. She died last year.

Christ's forsakenness is a central part of Chiara Lubich's theology and she links it with a powerful yearning for unity, a unity which in her life and work moved beyond the Catholic Church to other Christian churches, and to people of other faiths, and it involved politics and economics. Unity is the overcoming of forsakenness and brokenness and the stepping over the boundaries in identification with the other, particularly with the stranger and the alien. Christ makes himself one with us (Phil 2: 7) in a process that culminates in his dereliction and the consequence is his cry of forsakenness. For Chiara Lubich unity is related to a centre – the forsaken Jesus, who is at one with us in all the forms that anguish takes in human existence for he accepted 'death, death on a cross. Therefore, she was driven – and we should follow her in this – to build bridges of understanding with others. Christ forsaken paradoxically reveals the tenacity of God's dialogue with humanity. He will not give up. He will offer time and space. Only a relational God will do.

There is a dimension of reconciliation work which is about anguish.

- I have heard about in those who have listened to the stories of the victims of the Northern Ireland troubles
- I have heard about in those who have listened to the stories of some refugees and asylum seekers who have come to these shores

And all of you could go on. I saw the anguish in Ray's face at the death of Kathleen.

And, and, and...

The hope which we see in Jesus Christ will not be extinguished.

He is the image – the icon – of the invisible God.

As Emily Dickinson said

Hope is a thing with feathers

That perches in the soul
And sings the tune without words.
And never stops – at all.

We are prisoners of hope.

Sometimes, precariously, fragilely, often not knowingly, we mediate a resurrection faith – a faith which is about piecing together broken fragments, and reclaiming a healed identity. We often cannot bring solutions, often there are no solutions. It may simply be about being there – in silence, attention, solidarity and gesture. We see this in Jesus' silence and then a kiss in his encounter with the Grand Inquisitor in Dostoyevsky's *Brothers Karamazov*.

The resurrection of Christ transfigures – changes the appearance – of the world. The mystery of Christ's post-resurrection appearances, as gardener, stranger on the road, figure on the shore, point to a changed reality. Sometimes through us, not because of us, there is a changed reality.

As Christians we are not asked to sign up to a grand theology about how the world works including anguish and suffering – 'just to imagine that the world might have changed' (Rowan Williams).

The contemporary painter Ken Kiff has painted a water colour called 'Flower and Black Sky'. He shows a very bleak world indeed. The sky is the darkest black, and even the moon or sun is a clouded ball. In its occluded illumination we can make out a shrivelled tree, as stark as seaweed, and beside it a pale rock. In this arid world, a purple flower lifts up its leaves in a gesture of rejoicing. Its petals glow with radiant vitality: whatever else is dead here, this small bloom is joyfully and brightly alive. Love, in fact, cannot be extinguished. No black sky or dying trees can affect its inner radiance, its knowledge of another world coming into being.

Ray Davey, post the destruction and anguish of Dresden saw Easter fitting into 'the realness of things. Its tragedy darkness and sorrow' but 'also climbing up the other side into life and victory over death'. These words pull us into the reality of God's reconciling activity and call us, like Ray, to mend brokenness wherever we find it.

The love of the Father has a name and a face: Christ crucified. A deep paradox and yet a hopeful paradox. Amen.

Appendix 7: A Sermon by Dr. David Stevens, Leader of Corrymeela

Service of Dedication January 10, 2010

Being Reconciliation

Hosea 11: 1-4 2 Corinthians 6: 8b-10

Perhaps one of the odd things about western Christianity is that if we look at artists' images of God from the Middle Ages to the 19th century, what is likely to strike us is that God is nearly always represented as a great authority figure. In the Middle Ages he is a heavenly baron, or a king, or a judge. Fighting, ruling, condemning to death seem to be his major occupations. Perhaps one of the best known of the post-medieval pictures of God is by William Blake. Eyes flashing, arm outstretched, finger pointing, God is leaning out of a thunder cloud, surrounded by lightning, issuing a terrible command. Here is Authority personified, demanding obedience, brooking no delay or temporisation, ready to punish the least deviation from his commands with fearful severity. This is the God who does not suffer but inflicts suffering. This is the imperial God who through power and might makes things happen and it is a God we can understand, and many of us have internalised.

By contrast the greatest religious painter of the 20th century, Georges Rouault portrays God made vulnerable in Jesus Christ. The face of Jesus is a symbol of the pain of the world. He also painted clowns and prostitutes. His famous picture *The Clown* has a sort of sad-faced clown with a painted hat and a fluffy collar – the clown, the outsider, the dislocated person who bears tension away in laughter but carries pain behind the mask. In his greatest work, *Miserere* there is a print of a clown with the title 'Who Does Not wear a Mask?' And for Rouault when God sees the faces of suffering humanity he sees the insulted face of the suffering Christ.

The work of Rouault is echoed in the novel *Silence* by the Japanese Catholic author Shusaku Endo. In *Silence* Endo tells how a Jesuit priest, Rodrigues, goes to Japan in the seventeenth century to discover why his former mentor had renounced his Christian faith. Rodrigues is zealous, tough, a hardened soldier for Christ – and yet in his search finds the Christ he has been trained to follow loyally is silent. At the end of the novel, Rodrigues is captured, imprisoned and finally ordered to follow his mentor's example and renounce his faith. To symbolise his final abandonment of Christ, he is instructed to grind an icon in the mud under his foot. He hesitates – and is told that so long as he delays Christian prisoners will be tortured. In an agony of indecision, he suddenly hears the long-silent Christ speak to him. 'Trample! Trample my face!', says the filthy icon. 'It is to be trampled on by you that I am here.'

Nothing could better capture the rejection by the book's author of the Imperial God. It is only when the icon is lying in the mud, shorn of all glory and power and dignity, that he can allow it to speak, 'a forsaken Christ to a forsaken man; a suffering Christ to a suffering man; a Christ who had been very near apostasy to a man about to apostasize. Only such a Christ could bring a word of acceptance, peace and hope in such a time to such a man.' And it is only when Rodrigues too has been shorn of his certainties, his confidences, his battle-trained hard shell, when he has been dislocated and dispossessed that he is able to hear what such a Christ has to say. It is a message his old self would have regarded as blasphemous. Now he can receive it as a word of life.

The Christ we see in Endo and Rouault etched in word and line shows weakness, vulnerability, insignificance, dependence and nothingness. He has eyes for the invisible. He does not command territory. He is in the broken middle, in the place of painful encounter, in the place of failed words. He is 'poor'. He has no secure home, he dies outside the camp (Heb 13: 12) in the unholy place. He is the person who

Emptied himself

Taking the form of a slave

Becoming as human beings are; (Phil 2: 7)

God's initiative in Jesus is to enter in full vulnerability, the heart of human resistance to God, to be embodied among humans, offering participation in the divine life, being reconciliation. This is the pathos, the pity, the grief, the sorrow, of God. And it is in this total poverty that Christ transforms our situation. Giving himself, transparent to God's love, making himself God's space, he gives us a home, he enables us to 'be' to find space and freedom – to become 'wealthy'. It is this new way of being in the world through being weak and powerless – being 'poor' that Jesus is with us and helps us.

There is no situation he cannot enter to undermine division and rivalry and create new relatedness. The German martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer in a letter from prison – a man who had made the transition from security to 'poverty', a man who dies inside a camp, but outside the camp of Nazism, says of Jesus, 'he is weak and powerless in the world, and that is precisely the way, the only way, in which he is with us and helps us'.

And on the occasion of Ray's 95th birthday let us remember the dislocation, the dispossession, the poverty of being a prisoner of war and seeing ten square miles of the destruction of Dresden – a world where any talk of reconciliation would seem to be a fantasy. And let us celebrate that out of this poverty he made many of us wealthy. This is actually what it means to be evangelical and to see this wealth is to see salvation.

Ray out of his dislocation and dispossession made himself a meeting place and a place for others. He created a community and a place dedicated to making people rich, through giving and receiving. And, of course, there are other people present today who out of their poverty have made the wealth of Christ visible.

We should dedicate ourselves to serious and unapologetic wealth creation – we are at work to make each other rich, to make each other human and the person who gives us that possibility is the poor Christ. Nor should we forget that we live from the wealth creation of the communion of saints – the four founder members of this Community who died in the last thirteen months, John Morrow, Kathleen Davey, Margaret Ritchie and Joyce Nice.

It is in his way of weakness and powerlessness that Jesus points to a pattern of right relationships and order in the world – how we might be rightly ‘wealthy’, an approach to living that expresses compassion and a wholeness of human desire which takes the other person seriously. This is the ‘wealth’, this is fullness of life.

‘Poor ourselves, we bring wealth to many’. Paul was constantly aware of his poverty, his weakness – and if he was ever in danger of forgetting it, his critics, especially in Corinth, were all too happy to remind him. And of course, he was a man with a past, a victimiser of the church. But out of his dislocation and weakness he could proclaim the richness and graciousness of God. In his life Paul knows that weakness, vulnerability and failure are the ordinary human stuff with which God works.

And it is to many. Not to all. For not everyone wants this sort of wealth or can receive it. There are those who do not want this sort of God, or a Jesus who asks us about the boundaries of our self-protective ‘we-ness’, our ‘I-ness’ - all those worlds of separation we want to keep intact, of sexuality, ethnic difference, race, socio-economic division -because he has died outside them. This is the challenge of genuine Catholicity. As such he continually asks the questions: Who are you? Behind the mask who are you? Calling us to have eyes to see the ‘poor’ in their various forms in our midst. Calling us into possibilities of transformation. Calling us to pilgrimage into diverse places, calling us into ways of being with others. Calling us into ways of inhabiting reconciliation. Calling us to find our story in his story.

May we be poor that we possess everything.

Appendix 8

CORRYMEELA MEMBERS' COMMITMENT⁸⁵

We are a community of Christians drawn from many traditions, who:

AFFIRM our faith in the reconciling power of God in Jesus Christ;

CONFESS our own responsibility for the destructive conflicts in our society;

BELIEVE that we have been called to seek a deeper understanding of our faith;

SURRENDER ourselves to the spirit of Jesus to overcome our own divisions and make ourselves instruments of His peace;

COMMIT ourselves to work for a society whose priorities are justice, mutual respect, the participation of all, concern for the vulnerable and the stranger, stewardship of resources, and care for Creation;

AGREE to pray for each other,

To join in the worship of the community,

To give time to the life and work of the community,

To care for and support each other,

To live out our commitment in our daily lives,

To give, according to our ability, to the funds of the community;

And WISH, through the power of the Spirit, to walk the way of the Gospel together.

Corrymeela Mission Statement

[From www.corrymeela.org]

Corrymeela's mission is: embracing difference, healing division and enabling reconciliation. Our vision is of a peaceful and sustainable society based on social justice, positive relationships and respect for diversity. The Corrymeela Community strives to embody these values in every aspect of our lives.

⁸⁵ This commitment is made annually at a Dedication Service. Every January, the Leader asks each member to make a fresh commitment. Their other options are become an Associate or a Friend of the Community.

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