

## A COMMUNITY OF EXILES

1. In the paper Alliances in Northern Ireland the question is followed up: How do people from different traditions come together? It became clear that the deepest reason that people from different traditions come together is, that they have something in common which, in their situation, is very important. The histories of their lives bring them independent from each other, in a situation in which they recognise each other over the traditional barriers. In fact they are on the fringes of their own traditions, out of which reason ever and so they come in each other's neighbourhood.
2. In the time that Corrymeela as a Community came into existence, there were groups of students, mostly probably from Protestant origins, who understood in their manner the signs of the time. Maybe they knew, in one manner or another, that the time of Protestant dominance were passing always and that they were losing their place. Probably in the lives of every early Corrymeelian very personal origins can be found which brought them on the fringe of their Community. For the Catholics the situation was not quite the same. They were not the losing; they were the winning part. Nevertheless several Catholics too came, out of personal circumstances, on the fringe, as the Catholic woman of the first example of the former paper.
3. The different position in the cultural process of Protestants and Catholics explain why there was a big influx in the beginnings of Corrymeela of Protestants and a small one of Catholics. It too explains why the (few) Catholics of the beginnings were dropping out. Not only because they were overwhelmed by the Protestants, but too because their fringe position was much more only personal than the fringe position of the Protestants, which was at least cultural too.
4. Anyway, Protestants and Catholics met. They recognized each other as being in the same position, living in the same predicament. That Corrymeela became a Christian Community of course is not fortuitous. To belong to Christianity was the common denominator of both the Roman Catholics and of the Protestants. The being on the fringe expressed itself in a culture as the Northern Irish in being on the fringe of their religious tradition. That, in the same time, the Christian foundation of Corrymeela, the foundation on the Gospel, which was shared, was extremely important for the shape and future of the Community, for its place and its possibilities in the whole of the Northern Irish Society, is equally clear.
5. For the self-understanding of the Corrymeela it is extremely important that it knows, that the members of the community know, that Corrymeela is primarily a community of persons who are driven out of their cultural "nests". This is a double process. The objective side is very obvious. Society was changing and drove many out of their nests. A very important aspect of this probably is, that many were driven out of the accustomed surroundings, as described in Section 2 of the former paper. But certainly, there are many other factors, as the growing awareness that much simply would change in Society. And of course there is the subjective side, the personal choosing to be an exile, with again its many aspects: The wish really to see what was going on, the freedom to accept the consequences and to do something new. On the whole, and that stays important, the

objective side is prior to the subjective, although immediately they become intertwined and reinforce each other.

6. So, first of all Corrymeela is a Community of exiles, of people who lost and lose their place, the place they, or their ancestors had, in Society. This means that everybody knocking on the doors of Corrymeela is first of all an exile, as all the members were, and has to be accepted as such. There is no other condition to be accepted than to wish to belong. As soon as the person who “knocked” is accepted, he is on the way with the members of Corrymeela. He finds his place. He finds his relationship with the Gospel, with Christ, with Jesus. But only then, is accepted as the person he is. An exile. Not a special sort of Christian, wishing to do very good things for his fellowmen and women and for Northern Ireland. Not a very thoughtful and important person, worthy to be one of us. Not spotless, up to the conditions we could fantasize. Simply, and alone an exile.
7. I suppose this would be a very important them for a community weekend or for evenings of cell groups. The implications for ourselves, for our self-understanding, for the understanding of what Jesus asks from us if we wish to follow him, are great. In fact we are in the neighbourhood of Matt. 25, 31ff. We are too in the neighbourhood of an older paper, about being a member of a Community, in which it is worked out that we can be a member of Corrymeela Community, not only because we wish to be it.