



IRISH SCHOOL
OF
ECUMENICS

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IS THERE A COMMON GOOD?

AN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCE

Cathy Higgins
and Johnston McMaster

The Irish School of Ecumenics (ISE) was founded in Dublin in 1971 by the late Reverend Michael Hurley, SJ. The school offers postgraduate degrees in Dublin and Belfast, and is committed to blending academic excellence with theory and praxis in building peace and achieving reconciliation within and between nations and also amongst faith communities. In Northern Ireland and the Border Counties, the school has offered community education programmes and developed Inter-Church Fora. In 2021 the Irish School of Ecumenics, Trinity College Dublin celebrated its fiftieth anniversary. To mark the occasion, one of the initiatives of ISE's Trust Steering Committee is a three-year education and research project for Northern Ireland and the Border Counties entitled: *Is There A Common Good?*

This publication is one of the resources developed from the project. There was a publication produced last year (2022) entitled *Is There A Common Good? Is the Past Preventing the Future and the Common Good?* There will be a final publication which will be available toward the end of this year.

Cathy Higgins
January 2023



This project has received financial support from the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council which aims to promote a pluralist society characterised by equity, respect for diversity and recognition of interdependence. The views expressed do not necessarily reflect those of the Community Relations Council.

Published by The Junction, Derry/Londonderry

ISBN: 978-1-8381512-8-7

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In January 2021 a three-year education and research project for Northern Ireland and the Border Counties was launched. The project was named after the question it sought to address, namely: *Is There A Common Good?* This project was one of the initiatives of the Trust Steering Committee of the Irish School of Ecumenics, Trinity College Dublin, to mark the school's fiftieth anniversary.

In Phase One, a series of virtual conversations were held exploring the theme: *Is There A Common Good? Is The Past Preventing The Future and the Common Good?* The contributions from academics and practitioners were published in book form in 2022 using the theme as its title. The civic conversations that resulted from the engagement in Phase One recognised the complexity of what is involved in exploring the common good. Participants affirmed that and agreed:

- the common good is about sharing the good things of life in common;
- it is an ethical vision for our society and world that takes seriously our responsibility to, and for, each other;
- it is concerned with the values we live by, and the consequences of how we live; not only for ourselves and other people, but importantly for other life forms, and the planet; and
- the common good is concerned with the flourishing of all life.

The civic conversations in Phase Two of the project explored the common good through the prism of reconciliation. The title and focus of this Second Phase was: *Is There A Common Good? Shaping The Present; Building Community.* The seven sessions that comprise this programme are reproduced in this manual. The first session sets the historical context and the others unpack the six integrated strands of reconciliation: socio-political, socio-economic, socio-environmental, socio-legal, socio-psychological and socio-spiritual.

A month into the project, in February 2021, the world order was shaken by the Russian war in Ukraine, which has been marked by a hollowing out of democracy, a diminution of human rights and an abandonment of truth. A clear demand that emerged as this education and research project progressed was the need to reimagine values underpinning any vision of the common good and also for strategic action, going beyond words. Values are not values without action; they are lived and embodied in the practice of the common good. For this reason the third series of civic conversations explored the theme and question: *Valuing A Different World: Is There A Common Good?*

This series of seven sessions is included also in this manual. Case studies from history and from other cultures and traditions are the basis for reflection. The programme provides an opportunity to explore important common good questions:

- are there values from the past that need to be recovered;
- what can we learn from other worldviews; and
- what action can we take to make a difference?

In addition to the two common good programmes we have included three papers offering more developed reflections on some of the themes explored in the manual.

The Importance of Civic Conversations

This project from the beginning was conceived as a process of civic conversations and community education as learning together. It has involved a wide spectrum of people from Northern Ireland and Border Counties: from across the Christian traditions and neighbour religions, as well as secularists and humanists; holding diverse political perspectives; inclusive of diverse and minority ethnicities; and from across the gender spectrum. From time to time the project included people from further afield in the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom. This underlined the importance of civic conversations and the challenge of the common good explored in diverse contexts.

Civic conversations are opportunities for a plurality of people to engage with each other and listen respectfully to each other, to hear diverse perspectives and to learn together. Civic conversations model pluralist democracy in practice. There are no dominant voices, as all voices matter and all are heard. Within safe space people of differing perspectives produce a rich learning environment and respond creatively and imaginatively to the complexities and challenges of the common good.

Framework for Engagement

This Irish School of Ecumenics' project is not about pushing a particular agenda, rather it is concerned with hearing as many disparate voices and perspectives as possible to help envision a better future for all in Northern Ireland and Border Counties. We need each other to build a common good future. Together we can be agents of change discerning what change is needed and how to action it.

There are no right or wrong answers as we explore, rather this is an opportunity to listen with open hearts and minds to diverse experiences and perspectives, share a vision for a common good community, highlight the issues that may be preventing this from happening, identify the changes we need that will benefit all and come up with proposals on ways forward. But what makes for good conversations? We would suggest as a guide the following pointers.

- Firstly, active listening and a willingness to learn from each other.
- Secondly, anyone who wishes to speak has an opportunity to contribute, while ensuring also that each person takes responsibility not to dominate the conversation.
- Thirdly, participants show respect for the diversity of perspectives. Reconciliation is not about conformity rather celebrating difference and diversity and holding together fruitful tensions.
- Fourthly, making 'I' statements, so each person owns his or her viewpoint; rather than making generalised statements, which can give the impression all agree with us.
- And finally, keeping confidentiality, which recognises that in speaking honestly we are trusting others to respect us and keep what is said within the shared space.

Methodology

The methodology utilised in this educational resource is interactive and participative, providing the opportunity for participants to respond to the pieces of input in each session. That said, we think it good educational practice that at no point in the facilitation process should pressure be brought to bear on anyone to engage in group discussions or plenary discussions.

Given the focus on conversations we would suggest that twenty minutes be given to the group work discussion and recommend asking someone in each of the small groups to facilitate the process. The facilitator's role is: to ensure those who wish to speak have the chance to do so; and to keep an eye to time, allowing ten minutes for each question. The facilitator, or someone else in the group, may volunteer to feedback the key points of the discussion when all the groups reconvene.

Using the Resource

In this resource we have included a suggested outline for each session, for which we have allowed ninety minutes. We have included also discussion question that may be useful. Though each group may well raise questions specific to their context. The general pattern for each session is: input, followed by group discussion, then feedback, followed by a second input and a final plenary. We took feedback after the group interactions for research purposes, however, it may not be thought necessary to do so in other group contexts.

This resource will be available in hard copy and also online at the Irish School of Ecumenics website under Is There A Common Good? There is no right or wrong way to use this resource. Facilitators are free to be as creative as they wish.

To date, through civic conversations and a range of interviews with a wide spectrum of people, the project has produced an extensive body of insights, information, knowledge and wisdom. From an analysis of this data a final publication will be produced in December 2023. This will provide an additional resource for those who wish to engage in civic conversations around the common good.

We are grateful to the Irish School of Ecumenics Trust who provided the funding that made this project possible. We are also grateful to the Community Relations Council of Northern Ireland for the publications grant in relation to this resource. Thanks also to Eugene Duffy for his creative work in the design and facilitation of this educational resource.

Cathy Higgins and Johnston McMaster
March 2023

IS THERE A COMMON GOOD? SHAPING THE PRESENT; BUILDING COMMUNITY



A Series of Seven Civic Conversations
by Johnston McMaster

Session 1 – Key Moments in Irish-British Political History

Session Outline

1	Input 1: Key Moments in Irish-British Political History: Timeline		20 mins
2	Group Discussion		20 mins
3	Feedback		15 mins
4	Input 2: Can We Critically Engage Our Past for the Sake of the Future?		20 mins
5	Plenary Discussion		15 mins



- On sixteenth January 2022 a state ceremony was held at Dublin Castle to mark the centenary of the handing over of Dublin Castle, the centre of British rule in Ireland, to the Provisional Irish Government. The new president of the Provisional Government, Michael Collins, received from the British Viceroy of Ireland, Lord FitzAlan, the castle for the Irish people. It was a truly historical moment. Attending the centenary event was the British Ambassador to Ireland. It was right that he should be there in a centennial moment. This was British history as well as Irish history. When we speak of Irish history, we speak of the history of the whole island. We cannot partition history. And for centuries, Irish history was British history and British history was Irish history. We are not always aware of that and there may be even less awareness on the other island. Brexit and the protocol have revealed appalling levels of ignorance in Britain of Irish history which is also British history. We are now exploring briefly key moments in Irish-British political history, and it is important on both islands that people know their history. It is an important part of knowing who we are.
- In 1798 a Rising occurred in Ireland. It had been moving towards that since 1791 when Protestants, mostly Presbyterians, founded the United Irishmen in North Belfast. A Rising was not intended but it broke out in 1798 in Antrim and Down and Wexford. It was brutally crushed by government forces and in a six months period, perhaps as many as eighty thousand people died. The radical Presbyterians of Antrim and of Down were disillusioned by the sectarian nature of the Rising in Wexford where large numbers of Protestants died at the hands of rising Catholics. The rising was crushed but it had been a close call.
- Within two years the British had introduced the Act of Union and in 1801 the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland had come into being complete with a Union Flag. The Irish Parliament in College Green, Dublin was abolished after much bribery, intimidation and corruption. Instead of three hundred Irish MPs, now only one hundred sat at Westminster. Elements of the Protestant Ascendancy opposed the Union.
- The majority of the Catholic population supported the Union, never having any love for the Protestant Parliament in College Green. The Catholic bishops were all for the Union believing that Catholic emancipation would be part of the deal. That didn't happen for another twenty-nine years. The merchants of Belfast were pro-union but the Orange Order bitterly opposed the Union because when you are powerful you don't want to give up power to others and London would go soft on the Catholic question.



- From 1801 Ireland is now part of the Union and the cross of St Patrick is part of the new Union Flag. It was not until 1829 that Catholic emancipation was achieved for Catholics in Ireland and in Britain and it was emancipation for Jews also. Daniel O’Connell the Liberator had achieved the freedom of Catholics from oppressive Penal Laws and by nonviolence. O’Connell was also anti-slavery and campaigned against the slavery of Africans transported by the British and others to America. Having achieved Catholic emancipation O’Connell threw himself into the campaign to repeal the Union. The repeal of the Union would dominate Irish political life in the nineteenth century. O’Connell failed in his repeal campaign, and like most becoming older, he was being overtaken and eclipsed by a younger generation of Irish, Young Irelanders, they were called, and they had more radical ideas.
- As the nineteenth century moved on land reform came onto the agenda. Most Irish land was in the hands of landlords, often absentee landlords. The Land League agitated for reform and the return of the land to Irish people. Progressively change was taking place. Mid-century the terrible famine happened reducing Ireland’s population by twenty per cent, about 1.5 million people; half of whom died and the other half emigrated. Famine relief was available but inadequate, the British government was trapped by a philosophy and theology of economic determinism. The land issues were finally resolved by the Wyndham Land Act of 1903, a momentous time in Irish-British history.
- As the nineteenth century moved towards its last two decades, the focus moved towards the demand for Home Rule. British Prime Minister, William Gladstone, had already disestablished the Church of Ireland in 1870, no longer the state church and losing much of its massive assets.
- Gladstone on moral grounds was dismantling the Protestant Ascendancy. In power again in 1886, he introduced a Home Rule Bill, giving Ireland its own parliament again within the British Empire. It was a proposal for a devolved government. The House of Commons rejected the Bill and Gladstone was out of office. He was Prime Minister again in 1893 and introduced his second Home Rule Bill. It got through the Commons but was rejected by the Tory dominated House of Lords. Gladstone was out again and died a few years later. The demand for Home Rule was growing as Irish nationalism was developing and becoming the Irish Parliamentary Party at Westminster. Irish unionism was also developing and its opposition to Home Rule for Ireland was increasing. Physical force traditions were also growing on both sides.



- In 1910 a constitutional crisis occurred in Britain when the Lords did the unthinkable, something the Lords were never supposed to do, they rejected Lloyd George's budget, a radical 'People's Budget', a tax on the rich. A rich, Tory dominated Lords was never going to pass a budget like that. A constitutional crisis and an election followed resulting in a hung parliament in which the Irish Parliamentary Party held the balance of power.
- A second election was held within the year and produced another hung parliament. If Prime Minister Herbert Asquith wanted to govern, he needed John Redmond and the Irish Parliamentary Party MPs. Reform meant that the Lords could not veto a bill, could only vote against a bill three times and then the bill would go back to the Commons and the final decision was with the Commons. Redmond had leverage and Asquith provided a third Home Rule Bill in 1912. The Unionists knew that with no veto in the Lords, the Bill would go through the Commons by 1914. Resistance followed with the signing of the Ulster Solemn League and Covenant pledging to use any means necessary to defeat this conspiracy. In 1913 the Ulster Volunteer Force was formed followed later in the year by the Irish Volunteers. In 1914 gun running took place, large quantities of guns and ammunition, including six Maxim machine guns arrived in Larne, Donaghadee and Bangor. Lesser quantities of weaponry arrived in Howth near Dublin and Kilcoole, Co Wicklow for the Irish Volunteers. There were now two illegal armies in Ireland with weapons supplied by a common German source, and Ireland was on the brink of a civil war.
- We were spared a bloody killing field by an even greater and unimaginable killing field when WWI broke out in 1914. Together nationalist and unionist went off to fight and die together in the trenches of the Western front and at Gallipoli. Home Rule became law and was put into cold storage for the duration of the war, which was expected to be over at Christmas, but lasted until November 1918.
- In 1916 the Irish Republican Brotherhood organised a rising in Dublin. It was, like most of the earlier risings a bit of a botched job, easily put down by British forces, beginning on a Monday and over by Saturday with most of Sackville Street, now O'Connell Street in ruins. Some four hundred people died including forty children, most deaths, as often in risings and wars, civilian or non-combatant.
- Most Dubliners were opposed to the 1916 Rising, but the British military decided to execute sixteen of the Rising leaders and from that action opinion turned and the Rising of 1916 became the most successful failure in Irish history. *Sinn Féin* had nothing to do with the Rising but they became the beneficiaries of it and began to win by-elections, most notably Co Clare with Eamon de Valera.



- The 1918 General Election was dominated by the threat of conscription as Britain desperately needed more soldiers for a war they looked like they were losing. Sinn Féin won a landslide victory in the 1918 General Election, refused to take their seats in Westminster and invited all elected in Ireland to form *Dáil Éireann*, the Assembly of Ireland in the Mansion House, Dublin.
- The Unionists who had increased their seats had no intention of coming to Dublin and went to Westminster, where with a decimated Irish Parliamentary Party, the Unionists had the floor of the British Parliament and used that to good effect, as far as they were concerned, to shape the 1920 Government of Ireland Act which partitioned Ireland.
- Between 1919 and 1921 a War of Independence was fought in Ireland, a truce being called on twenty-first July 1921. That was largely a war between guerrilla forces and the Royal Irish Constabulary, much of it Irish against Irish, even Catholic against Catholic. It was muddied by the Black and Tans and Auxiliaries, the former largely made up of brutalised returnees from WWI. They committed atrocities and burnings of Cork and Balbriggan and generated much hatred in Ireland. Northern Ireland was formed and its Parliament met on 21 June 1921, opened by King George V in Belfast. The Ulster Unionists had opposed Home Rule, arming to use force if necessary, and now they had Home Rule. What they had was not Ulster and they abandoned the unionists of Cavan, Donegal and Monaghan.
- Provision for a Southern Ireland was opposed in Dublin and there began negotiations in London towards the end of 1921 between an Irish delegation including Arthur Griffith and Michael Collins. They met a very experienced British delegation, most of whom had been the chief British negotiators at the Paris Peace Conference. On the evening of the fifth of December the Irish were given an ultimatum by Lloyd George to sign the treaty or there would be all-out war.
- They returned to their base at Hans Place in London, fought among themselves and eventually agreed, some very reluctantly, to sign. They returned to Downing Street and at 2.15am on sixth of December 1921 the Anglo-Irish Treaty was signed. Collins believed he had signed his death warrant.
- In Belfast a killing field was developing and between 1921 and 1922 the worst violence and killing in Ireland occurred. It was naked sectarianism, the majority of the dead being Catholic, with thousands of Catholics driven from the shipyards and other places of work. With British approval the unionists had formed a police force, which included the B-Specials, a violent Protestant, and largely Orange militia.



- Sixty-one people died in the single month of March 1922. The IRA were active in Belfast but perhaps the worst atrocity was the killing of the McMahon family, the male members of the family plus a male worker. They were shot dead in their home in North Belfast in a killing believed to have involved police.
- Killing fields soon spread to the south as the *Dáil* bitterly divided over the Treaty. A civil war ensued in which much violence and brutal killing occurred. The pro-Treaty government forces executed seventy-seven anti-Treaty fellow Irish. Families divided over the Civil War. There are still bitter divisions and until 2020 Ireland had civil war politics with the two main political parties coming out of the Civil War. In West Cork there was a sectarian dimension when ten Protestants were shot over two nights in the Bandon Valley. Protestants also died elsewhere often believed, rightly or wrongly, to be informers to British forces. The Civil War ended in April 1923.
- The British handed over Dublin Castle on sixteenth of January 1922 and they had completely withdrawn, including armed forces, by the end of 1922. On the sixth of December 1922, the first anniversary of the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty, the Free State formally came into being.
- There were now two states in Ireland, each born in violence and each a confessional state, one Catholic and the other Protestant. Both were socially and religiously conservative states. Though state-building began, the socially and religiously conservative dynamics prevented the future. In 1949 the Free State became the Republic of Ireland and broke completely with the British Empire. Economic reforms began to happen in both states by the 1960s, but in Northern Ireland tension and violence was building during the late 60s and 1969 is often given as the year when the latest phase of violence and killing began in the North. In thirty years there were many violent killings and atrocities. These also crossed the border to Dublin and Monaghan and killings also occurred in London, Birmingham, Guildford, Warrington and other locations. There have been miscarriages of justice, claims of collusion, informers and in a squalid war, a dirty war, there is still much uncomfortable truth to emerge and will emerge.
- In 1972 Stormont was abolished by a Conservative British Government. In 1998 we had the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement, not a peace agreement but providing a framework for a peace process. It took seriously three strands of relationships, the totality of relationships, within Northern Ireland, north-south and east-west, between Ireland and Britain.



- Political structures were put in place to reflect those three strands and twenty-five years on we need to examine where we are and where we have got to and if the Agreement has been implemented, or the power sharing has happened in Northern Ireland.
- In 2016 a Brexit referendum was declared a mandate by a Conservative British Government to take the United Kingdom out of the European Union. On thirty-first of December 2020, the United Kingdom left the European Union, despite the majority of people in Northern Ireland and Scotland wishing to remain. A protocol believed to prevent a hard border in Ireland has upset loyalists and unionists because it is believed to create a border in the Irish Sea and therefore weaken or diminish the Union.
- Brexit may never be done. It has revealed a disunited kingdom which may produce several constitutional crises in the next decade or so. It has raised the question of the future of this island. All of this is still Irish-British history. What of the future? In history there are no guarantees and nothing is inevitable. And in 2022 it is not just the future of this island that concerns us, it is the future of the global community and the future of the planet.



1. What are the most significant moments in this timeline?

1800	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland
1886	First Home Rule Bill for Ireland
1893	Second Home Rule Bill for Ireland
1912	Third Home Rule Bill for Ireland and Ulster Solemn League and Covenant
1914	Home Rule legislated for and put into cold storage
1914	WW1 begins
1916	Easter Rising
1918	WW1 ends
1920	Government of Ireland Act / Partition of Ireland
1921	Formation of Northern Ireland / One Party Rule in Northern Ireland
1921	Anglo-Irish Treaty
1922	Formation of the Free State
1922	Irish Civil War begins
1923	Irish Civil War ends
1949	Republic of Ireland
1969	'The Troubles' begin?
1972	One Party Rule replaced by Direct Rule from Westminster
1998	Good Friday / Belfast Agreement
2016	Brexit
2020	31 st of December the UK left the EU (Protocol)

2. Do they help us to understand where we are now and what future we might need to build?



- There are serious levels of ignorance and lack of understanding of our Irish history. We need to know about our past, where we have come from, if we want to shape a different future and reach any kind of vision of a common good.
- The decade of centenaries, marking events of 1912-1922 that have shaped Ireland until now, have provided an opportunity to critically examine the past in as factual a way as is possible, to interrogate the past and realise its complexity. The Civil War did not end until 1923. That did not mark the end of history as both parts of Ireland began the task of state building and history continued to be made. We live in that history and are the contemporary history-makers. Over the past decade we have generally avoided the word 'celebration' in relation to any of the events, have realised both the complexity and plurality of narratives, and have engaged with flexibility of narratives as new information and knowledge has come to light and challenged our settled or mono narratives.
- Time, in this case a century, provides distance and therefore longer and deeper perspective on the series of crucial events. People of Germany had a lot of difficult history to deal with in the twentieth century. There was a lot of silence until the early 1970s when a young generation began to interrogate their twentieth century past, asking their parents and also grandparents about the past and what they had been doing during those years of atrocity, death camps and terrible war.
- It was uncomfortable for an older generation but Germany was able to look at its past, begin to come to terms with it and change the history curriculum. The blanks, denials and silences of the past are no more and German young people learn about their history including the history of the Holocaust.
- Some 1.8 million young people have been born in Ireland since the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement of 1998. They know nothing of the decades of the most recent violence but from among them there may emerge the generation that will interrogate more critically the painful past, and ask the uncomfortable questions of those of us of the older generation. A Shared Island history curriculum might become a reality.



- Meanwhile, in 2022, how are we going to deal with the Civil War, especially in what is now the Republic of Ireland? How is Northern Ireland going to deal with the sectarian killings of Belfast in the early 1920s? How are we dealing with the bitter legacies of those violent years when human beings, though partitioned but still sharing this island, brutally killed each other? Could it have been different? Can we learn from those years and build a different future?
- Howard Zinn, one of America’s greatest historians said something important about history: “The idea that people make history and can alter its course, that institutions have human origins and can be changed by humans, is truly subversive”. (*A Peoples History of the United States*, 2015 edition, pxvii).



1. How are we going to deal with the Civil War?
2. How are we going to deal with the sectarian killings of Belfast in the early 1920s?
3. What can we learn from those years and how can we build a different future?

Session 2 – The Politics of Reconciliation

Session Outline

1	Input 1: Introduction to the Six Integrated Strands of Reconciliation		20 mins
2	Group Discussion		20 mins
3	Feedback		15 mins
4	Input 2: Integrated Strands of Reconciliation – The Socio-Political Dimension		20 mins
5	Plenary Discussion		15 mins



- Social relationships mean structural relationships, which is why a privatised approach to reconciliation and even an inter-personal approach is inadequate. 'A' may be reconciled to 'B' and in Northern Ireland there have been remarkable examples of reconciliation between people who were once bitter enemies, and in South Africa, the Balkans, India/Pakistan personal stories of reconciliation are found. Reconciliation happens, it keeps happening, sometimes it's in a religious context, sometimes in a secular context. Reconciliation of unlikely people coming out of terrible experiences is a fact of human experience in life and we are challenged by those experiences. They confront us with the reality that release and liberation from the oppression of a past is possible, and that life does not need to be lived in a vengeance mode. But reconciliation also needs to be social and structural and the strands of reconciliation will hopefully provide an integrated approach to reconciliation.
- Before we begin the exploration of those six integrated strands, it's important to recognise that reconciliation is a process and not a terminus. There is no utopian reconciliation, there is no moment when reconciliation is achieved, or society somehow has arrived. Reconciliation is always a work in progress, a process that requires to be revised and renewed often.
- There are often roadblocks and opposition. For example, there are those who for reasons of power and control may seek to disrupt reconciliation and there may be others who for narrow, ideological reasons wish to maintain societal divisions and binaries, even if this means resorting to violence, promoting extremism and exploiting the vulnerable. Roadblocks to reconciliation will include not telling the truth or the whole truth, sometimes blatant lies in public, or appealing to historically conditioned fears and community myths, the delusional and fantasy thinking. Well there are six integrated strands of reconciliation, and they are integrated dynamics providing a holistic kind of approach.
- All six strands are needed, the suggestion is that there is no reconciliation without each of them and if we neglect one in a reconciling process, the process itself is incomplete and the pursuit of reconciliation may be stunted. The six strands are therefore inter-related and inter-woven.
- We've put the word 'socio' in front of each, it's used intentionally with all six integrated strands. The political, ecological, economical, and legal are more obviously social but in an individualistic culture, the psychological and spiritual strands slip too easily into a very individualistic or privatised mode.



- Humans are relational beings and have been born relational and all of life is social and because we are social beings, always beings 'with', so, reconciliation is social, and 'socio' is used particularly and maybe especially with the psychological and spiritual strands, to underline that these two strands are not individualistic but social and relational and communal realities.
- The psychological strand for example, has to do with identity and belonging and there is no identity or identities, however perceived, nor belonging, apart from relationships and community. Even our belonging is not confined to one community, political, religious, cultural, or ethnic but to multiple and plural communities, which is inevitably ultimately global, or it is not reconciliation.
- There is no agreement on the historical narrative of Northern Ireland, there are contested narratives, we have always, it seems, lived with contested narratives and we may live for quite some time with contested narratives. A shared narrative? An agreed narrative? It doesn't seem that we have reached such a point. The Government of Ireland Act provided for partition. However partition was contested one hundred years ago and was contested from the beginning. It remains contested and consequently Northern Ireland is likely always to be insecure.
- For the first fifty years in Northern Ireland we had the rule of one party but was this a problem? Did the people who lived in Northern Ireland see it differently? Then we moved into thirty years of violent conflict again without an agreed narrative. I doubt if we even agree on the root causes or have maybe even initiated a discussion on the root causes of those years of violent conflict. In broad, widespread general terms, I suppose a unionist interpretation tended to be that nationalists were intent on destroying the state. A widespread general nationalist interpretation was about changing unjust systems that actually refused to change. Now we have twenty-five years of the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement, that has been described as a 'peace process' not peace itself but a process and a framework that can enable us to build a peace and to build reconciliation.
- And finally, is there a commitment in the community to power-sharing? Well, if not, why not a commitment to power-sharing? Or maybe you feel we're doing fine in terms of power-sharing given the contestedness and given the complexity of our community and our community relations.



Introduction to the Six Integrated Strands

- Social relationships mean structural relationships.
 - Reconciliation is a process not a terminus. It is always a work in progress.
 - There are roadblocks and opposition to reconciliation often for reasons of power and control.
 - There are six integrated strands of reconciliation and they are:
 - Socio-Political
 - Socio-Economic
 - Socio-Ecological
 - Socio-Legal
 - Socio-Psychological
 - Socio-Spiritual
 - The word socio is used intentionally with all six integrated strands.
1. **In light of the above points, what does reconciliation mean in a contested and conflicted society?**

The Time We Are In!

- No agreement on the historical narrative of Northern Ireland.
 - Partition is contested.
 - Fifty years of one-party rule. Was this a problem? Did people in Northern Ireland see it differently?
 - Thirty years of violent conflict without an agreed narrative.
 - A widespread unionist interpretation - nationalists were intent on destroying the state.
 - A widespread nationalist interpretation - changing unjust system that refuses to change.
 - Twenty-five years of the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement - Peace Process
 - Were the last Twenty-five years the best years in the last one hundred or so years?
 - Is there a commitment to power sharing? If not, why not?
2. **Taking account of the time we are in, is a common good possible in a contested and conflicted society?**



- Reconciliation, well whatever that means it requires political responses, it requires political structures. Violence very often occurs in societies. We can see this across the planet where perhaps there is a political hegemon, there is a monopolisation of power over others and a group who are usually expected to know their place. The result is a political domination system at work to the exclusion of some groups or categories or people. And when discrimination of minorities occurs, or even in some cases discrimination against majorities, there are abuses of power. Now, extreme examples of this are totalitarian regimes, dictatorships, autocracies, military or non-military rule by political and/or often social elites; and there are other forms of political hegemony such as a one-party rule over a period of time. But any reconciliation or peace process needs to address political issues and systems and structures. Power structures especially need to be addressed as to future power arrangements and models of government.
- Now, there are many countries that long for democracy and freedom but what will this look like? What does it mean to be, for example, a pluralist democracy? How can participative democracy be structured and implemented? Well perhaps there is no reconciliation in a broken, divided, and conflictual society unless political structures of power are addressed and just power structures, which may mean shared power structures are put in place.
- Some political power structures were provided for in the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement. It talked about, for example, 'the totality of relationships', the relationships within Northern Ireland, the relationships between North and South, the relationships between East and West. But it also provided structures to meet each of those: power-sharing, Assembly, Executive within Northern Ireland, the North-South bodies and the East-West Council. They were political structures provided to address the totality of relationships and to enable a process of reconciliation.
- It's rather interesting that something similar is now being called for in a horrendously suffering and divided country like Yemen. But has it been realised or managed within Northern Ireland and the totality of relationships between these two islands and within Ireland itself?



- Now if we turn briefly to the primary elements of the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement. The preamble is usually an important part of any document because it sets out the fundamental values that underpin everything. And there are central values in the key words that keep coming up in the preamble, it talks about 'new beginning', it talks about reconciliation, then there is 'tolerance', 'mutual trust', 'protection of human rights for all', 'partnership', 'equality' and 'mutual respect'. We might describe these as key values that are at the heart of the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement. How well have we embedded these, or adhered to these, or shaped and helped create these?
- Another key theme that appears in the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement is 'parity of esteem', but what does that mean in a contested, divided society? The Agreement also talks about the 'principle of consent', there will be no change, for example, in the constitutional arrangement for Northern Ireland except by the will of the people. It is down to the people, not the politicians. It's interesting that the old 1949 renewed Government of Ireland Act put that question another way, it said that there could only be a change in the constitutional arrangement of Northern Ireland if there was political agreement by the government then at Stormont. Well, we knew what that was going to mean, but by the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement all of that had changed! It is the principle of consent, it lies with the people, and not the politicians as to what constitutional change might come about. In the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement everybody has the right to identify as Irish or British or both. And indeed if one wants to identify as British that, according to the Agreement, is not affected by any future change in the status of Northern Ireland. So, that identity marker is not under threat in the Good/Friday/Belfast Agreement.
- We now have the language of a First Minister and a Deputy First Minister, which is usually interpreted in hierarchical terms, literally a first and a second. It's not that, they are both equal, which is why when the First Minister resigns automatically the Deputy First Minister is out of post. So these positions are equal, the language perhaps needs revised.
- The Good Friday/Belfast Agreement is an international and legal agreement that has been lodged with the United Nations. It is an agreement between the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Government of the Republic of Ireland. In other words, those two governments are guarantors of the Agreement, and each government is meant to see that that agreement works as it's intended to work.



Review the following and discuss the questions that follow.

Reconciliation: The Socio-Political Dimension

- A peace process requires political responses and structures.
- In a political peace process the arrangements of power are important.
- These are fundamental concepts for building peace anywhere
- What arrangements of power are needed for a divided, contested and conflictual society?

Key Elements in the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement

- Preamble – key words – new beginning, reconciliation, tolerance, mutual trust, protection of human rights for all, partnership, equality and mutual respect.
 - Parity of Esteem
 - Principle of Consent
 - Right to identify as Irish / British / Both – Not affected by any future change in the status of Northern Ireland
 - First Minister / Deputy First Minister – these posts are equal
 - 3 strands – totality of relationships
 - International and legal Agreement (Lodged with UN)
 - Agreement between Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Government of the Republic of Ireland
1. **Does the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement provide us with a framework for reconciliation in a political context?**
 2. **Does the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement still need to be fully implemented or does it need to be revised?**

Session 3 – Just Economics

Session Outline

1	Input 1: Living with Poverty on the Island of Ireland		20 mins
2	Group Discussion		20 mins
3	Feedback		15 mins
4	Input 2: No Reconciliation Without Just Economics		20 mins
5	Plenary Discussion		15 mins



- As an example, the income poverty statistics for Northern Ireland for the period April 2019- March 2020 reveal the extent of relative and absolute poverty.
 - Approximately 313, 000 people live in relative poverty. This includes approximately 100, 000 children (22%).
 - Around 241, 000 people live in absolute poverty. Of this figure seventeen per cent are children. This means household income is insufficient to afford the basic necessities of life.
 - Nearly one in four people are living in absolute poverty.
 - Places with the highest levels of poverty include: Belfast, Derry Londonderry and Strabane, and Newry and Mourne.
 - Within Belfast there are significant inequalities, for example, poverty rates in North Belfast are fifty per cent higher than in South Belfast.
- Social Justice Ireland have compiled a report on Poverty in the Republic of Ireland (2021).
 - About 630, 000 people in Ireland, which is one in every eight people, live with an income below the poverty line. Of this figure twenty-six per cent are children.
 - Poverty lines are recorded as higher for the following regions: the Border, Midlands, West and South-East of Ireland.
- A project listening to people's experiences and reflections of partition in the border region of Clones, County Monaghan, revealed for some it feels like living in a forgotten region. As one person explained:

I feel strongly that the border area has been left behind. You know people talk about- there are two parts of Ireland. There is the North and there's the South. But actually there is three. There is the North and South and there is the border area. And it doesn't matter which side of the border you are on. You are either remote from Belfast, or you are remote from Dublin. And the authorities never do anything for us.

(The Clones Family Resource Centre Research on Experiences of the Border, *Our Border Heartbeat*, June 2021, p 9).



- A mural on a wall in the loyalist heartland of the Shankill Road, Belfast quoted the words of former PUP Councillor Hugh Smyth. It read:

Historically; Unionist politicians fed their electorate the myth that there were first class citizens ... and without question people believed them. Historically; Republican/ Nationalist politicians fed their electorate the myth that they were second class citizens ... and without question, the people believed them. In reality, the truth of the matter was that we all, Protestant and Catholic, were third class citizens, and none of us realised it!

(Accessed online <https://extramuralactivity.com/2014/08/11/third-class-citizens/>).



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Former PUP Councillor Hugh Smyth

1. **How do you respond to Councillor Hugh Smyth's analysis?**
2. **In relation to poverty does the border area constitute a third county in Ireland?**



- Reconciliation requires economic regeneration and redistribution. The failure to deal with economic and educational poverty prevents reconciliation.
- Almost three decades on from the end of apartheid in South Africa, the vast economic disparities have not been dealt with. There is still extreme poverty in the majority Black community. It used to be possible to blame the white apartheid government but after nearly thirty years of ANC governance, little has changed economically.
- Social inequalities and economic disparities cause tensions and violence as the poor realise their poverty and lack of dignity, because of a wealthy elite. When consciousness and will are raised, protest and resistance follow.
- Recent riots and violence in Belfast and other areas of Northern Ireland (April 2021), happened in areas of serious poverty, some of the poorest areas. Some of the areas have the lowest educational attainment levels in Europe. They are areas of economic and educational poverty.
- The perception that this deprivation is only in one community is untrue and unfounded. Serious lack of income, economic and educational poverty are shared in both of the main communities in Northern Ireland.
- There is an equality of poverty and unless political strategies and manifestos are produced and implemented, rioting and violence will break out from time to time and there will be no reconciliation and peace.



1. How can a society be reconciled when there are such levels of poverty and economic inequalities?
 2. Is reconciliation in our society possible and how might we realise the common good?
- Reconciliation requires the healing of eco-destruction and the implementation of eco-justice. Reconciliation and peace call for the mending of the Earth.

Session 4: Making Friends with the Earth

Session Outline

1	Input 1: What Creates the Ecological Crisis?		20 mins
2	Group Discussion		20 mins
3	Feedback		15 mins
4	Input 2: Reconciliation and Eco-Justice		20 mins
5	Plenary Discussion		15 mins



- This is an overlooked strand of reconciliation and one that only in relatively recent times has entered our consciousness. We have become increasingly aware of eco-destruction for which, as human, we are responsible.
- A consumerist life-style is destructive and unsustainable. The planet cannot sustain our present demand for fossil fuels.
- Military consumerism not only deals in arms and weapons, killing and war, it creates a whole raft of service industries and provides a disaster economy. Who receives the contracts to build an infrastructure after invasion and war?
- Military expenditure accounts for the consumption of huge amounts of fossil fuels. A non-nuclear aircraft carrier burns up as much fuel in one day as a small Midwestern US town might use in a year.
- Militarisation is the single most ecologically destructive human endeavour.
- War and violence have always laid waste the environment. Nature has not fully recovered from the battles on WW1 sites and not even recovered from some of the battles of the American Civil War.
- The extinction of species through human intervention (is it interference?), and abuse, desertification and soil erosion through human greed and the effect of our consumer lifestyles on climate warming are obvious ways by which eco-destruction takes place.
- Large swathes of Brazilian forest are being cleared with deliberately set wildfires. There was an eighty-four per cent year to year increase in wildfires in Amazonia.
- The intention is to replace vast areas of the rainforest with cattle ranches, mines, and soya and sugarcane monocultures.
- Humanity is often at war with nature.
- It has been suggested that what we need are 'peace talks with nature'. Whatever about talking with nature, and we ought not to dismiss that as a romantic idea, we have needed for a long time to listen to nature.



Session 4 – Input 1

What Creates the Ecological Crisis?

- We live at a time when a seismic shift in consciousness is needed, not only through listening to nature, but realising that as humans we need to get away from the dominating idea that we are the only ensouled beings; that the earth is an inert entity that only exists to provide the superior and solely ensouled beings with resources.
- Humility is the foundation of everything. We need a narrative of humility in which we acknowledge our mutual dependence on each other and on 'all our relatives' or kin in the community of life.
- The ecological crisis has been caused by ideologies of conquest and domination by humans. A shift in consciousness is happening, which is why in the West there are a growing number of nature religions. There is the growth of countercultural, biocentric belief systems. They have various names, such as neo-pagans, new agers, soul-surfers, pantheistic, wiccans, and neo-animist.
- Classic religions are also recovering the green dimension to their faith traditions, a biocentrism, faith overlaid and obscured for ages by anthropocentrism, a human-centred ideology of conquest and domination that has helped to destroy the Earth and warp the religious tradition. The profound encyclical *Laudate Si*, by Pope Francis, is the major Christian contribution to the shift in consciousness and recovery of a 'lost' green faith and praxis.
- There is an awareness of the contribution militarism is making to environmental destruction, deliberately obscured and undeclared. A nuclear aircraft carrier consumes 5,621 gallons of fuel per hour. A single F-16 military aircraft consumes around 1,700 gallons per hour. The US Air Force has around one thousand F-16s and they are a small part of the air fleet. The three branches of the US military consumed roughly twenty-five billion tons of fuel per year, and that was in the 1990s. (Ghosh, Amitav. *The Nutmeg Curse: Parables for a Planet in Crisis*, 2022, pp121-124).
- Now we have Putin's unlawful and immoral invasion of Ukraine after a military build-up for months. The war requires unimaginable quantities of fossil fuels, destroying the landscape and the earth. The war on Ukraine has not only created a humanitarian crisis, less is being said of a no less real environmental crisis. The war is a major moral crisis as common moral values and ethics have been turned upside down.
- Since the beginning of drawing up agreements on reducing carbon footprint, the military contributions to carbon footprint have never been included at the request of military powers. The figures on carbon emissions and reduction are distorted. Why is the largest contribution of all, that of the military, excluded?



1. Military related emissions have never figured in international climate negotiations. Why are they being excluded?
2. Does nature exist only as a resource for humans to use for our own ends rather than as a force of its own with life, agency and meaning?



Session 4 – Input 2

Reconciliation and Eco-Justice

- An impressive part of the Korean peace movement is the creation of ecological corridors along either side of the South Korean peninsula.
- Here alternative energy is being produced and there is a big emphasis on organic farming, all of which is a contribution to a healing partnership with nature, a making friends with nature, not conquering it and in the process destroying it.
- Reconciliation has to do with eco-justice and this requires political, economic and personal action.
- Reconciliation is about:
 - a) eco-friendly policies;
 - b) renewable and sustainable energy policies;
 - c) water management strategies;
 - d) waste disposal;
 - e) land management;
 - f) transport and town planning strategies; and
 - g) the creation of green areas and landscape regeneration.
- Decisions about personal lifestyle also come into play. Is our purchasing power always based on need or is it acquisitiveness?
- Reconciliation is eco-friendly, eco-justice, living personally, structurally and systemically for the healing of nature and the environment.
- In simple terms, reconciliation is being friends with the environment, being engaged politically and economically with the socio-ecological strand.
- It may be said that the environmental crisis and the war with nature is largely a European crisis and problem. The European conquest, or imperial model, dominated most of the world for six hundred years. This included the industrial revolutions.
- Not surprisingly environmental movements are growing rapidly in Latin America, Asia-Pacific and Africa. These regions have lived with colonialism and have been the victims of imperial predatory economies and economies of extraction. They are suffering the most from the environmental crisis.



Session 4 – Input 2

Reconciliation and Eco-Justice

- The signs are that many middle-class Asians, having been absorbed by consumerism, are now turning to Earth-oriented movements and they are drawing strength and motivation from Asian ideas of 'sacred forests, lands and water'. China is rightly criticised for its environmental destruction, yet in recent years environmental groups have developed and grown across China. They have focused on the sacredness of land and forests, sacred place and sacred nature. There is reconciliation with nature, a making friends with nature. There is hope for the regeneration of nature.
- Europe having conquered and dominated most of the world for the last six hundred years has a lot of catching up to do. Europeans with their North American white relatives have to undergo the greatest shifts in consciousness.
- Again, a most influential voice in the West has been a Latin American, Pope Francis, who has done much to wake us up to the reality of the planetary crisis. With English, David Attenborough and Swedish, Greta Thunberg, these are key voices, key moral voices calling us to action in a renewed and healing relationship with the Earth.
- The Earth movements across the world, whatever their foundational sources, are not dependent on billionaires or technology, but on the resources of the human spirit. This may be the spirit that can change hearts and minds across the world and bring about the spiritual, ecological and political changes that make reconciliation and eco-justice possible.
- For some the source is the human spirit, for others the Sacred Spirit and for others the hidden force that pulsates through the veins of the universe. However we experience this or draw from whichever well, spiritual, ecological, political change, reconciliation and eco-justice are possible.



1. How far does individualism and consumerist greed drive us?
2. How do we nurture a culture of co-operation and responsibility for the earth?

Session 5: Reconciliation and a Culture of Human Rights

Session Outline

1	Input 1: A Socio-Legal Framework for Northern Ireland		20 mins
2	Plenary Discussion		15 mins
3	Input 2: Humans Rights and Participative Democracy		20 mins
4	Group Discussion		15 mins
5	Feedback		20 mins



- Reconciliation always requires a socio-legal response. It requires that critical attention be given to the socio-legal systems and institutions of society.
- This is especially true and obvious in situations of conflict and violence, and situations of civil war.
- The Good Friday/Belfast Agreement was a framework for peace. It was not a peace agreement, but a significant legal framework for peace and an internationally agreed and legally binding framework for peace.
- It did not just involve the British and Irish governments, it also involved the European Union. All are obligated to ensure that the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement is upheld.
- There is no meaningful peace process anywhere in the world without human rights.
- In contested societies where there are often diverse identity politics, human rights protect us from one another. Human rights always involve responsibilities but responsibilities can never be used to stifle human rights, in the sense that there can be such an emphasis on responsibilities and duties that human rights are avoided.
- The point is that reconciliation requires legal dimensions such as international agreements, systems and structures that have legal status.
- The Good Friday/Belfast Agreement provided for a radical review and restructuring of the criminal justice system.
- It also provided for a review of the policing service. Policing in Northern Ireland is now human rights-based policing.
- It called for a Human Rights Bill, not only for Northern Ireland but also for the Republic of Ireland.
- The work around criminal justice and policing was a significant achievement.



1. What needs to be included in a Human Rights Bill for Northern Ireland / the Republic of Ireland?
2. How would Human Rights Bills further reconciliation in Northern Ireland and on the island of Ireland?



- The socio-legal strand of reconciliation also requires the embedding and nurturing of participative democracy.
- Democracy includes the rule of law and order, with no person, institution or government above the law.
- Within a democracy reconciliation needs equality legislation, especially where that has been a history of systemic discrimination.
- Northern Ireland has Section 75 of the Government of Ireland Act 1998, which stipulates that it is unlawful for public authorities to discriminate against twelve to thirteen categories of people. These include the following protected characteristics: gender, disability, religion and sexual orientation.
- The recognition of difference in a pluralist democracy needs democratic inclusion and involvement of all, if society as a whole is to be reconciling and flourishing.
- This means greater commitment through legislation for social, political, economic and ecological justice.
- There is a local and global dimension to all of this, if reconciliation and peace are to be global realities. It is important that human rights are not just thought of as rights for Northern Ireland.
- There is the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the European Convention on Human Rights (1953). At this stage human rights were largely shaped by the Western world and were seen in individualistic terms.
- Global discourse continued and by 1966 we had twin covenants on human rights. One on civil and political rights and the other on economic, social and cultural rights. This emphasis on human rights moved on from the strong individualistic tone and recognised the importance of ethnic, linguistic and religious identities.
- Environmental rights are **human rights**, as people's livelihoods, their health, and sometimes their very existence depend upon the quality of and their access to the surrounding environment.
- The generational development of rights has become much more holistic with all the various strands indivisible and inter-related.



- We have now reached a point where the invasion of Ukraine and the war being waged there has thrown into question democracy, rights, freedoms and the values that were considered important to good order and life together.
- Will this mean that when this moment in history is over, whatever that means and whenever that will be, that we will have to begin again to reshape democracy, or a better form of order and governance?
- Will it also mean reimagining and reshaping the basis for human and eco relationships globally and the place of rights, freedoms, and responsibilities in a new world order?
- Northern Ireland struggles with the practice of democracy and may indeed have always lived with a democratic deficit. There is no embedded culture of human rights, though things have improved.
- The past locally and globally is not pretty, not least because of an imperial past and its legacies, as well as the historical systems of racism, sectarianism, social inequalities, environmental degradation, and a divided world still living with domination systems.
- Reconciliation and the common good always needs the socio-legal strand locally and globally.



Group Discussion:

1. Have liberal pluralist democracies and the legal framework of human rights been destroyed by the invasion of Ukraine by Putin?
2. What would democracy mean now in global and local terms?

Session 6: Identity Politics: Stumbling Block to Reconciliation

Session Outline

1	Input 1: Contested Identities: A Block to Reconciliation?		20 mins
2	Group Discussion		20 mins
3	Feedback		15 mins
4	Input 2: Reconciliation and the Dislocation of Identities		20 mins
5	Plenary Discussion		15 mins



- The socio-psychological strand is about deep issues of identity.
- On St Patrick's Day we might pause to reflect on the complexity of identity. The most famous Irish person, a global icon no less, was not Irish! He came from somewhere else. He was not 'one of us'. But then, what does 'one of us' mean?
- Patrick not only came from somewhere else, so did most, if not all of us. Who do we think we are? We have either forgotten or have never known our story. My ancestry is a mix of Irish, Scottish, Cornish and Italian, and that is only as far as I know!
- Some years ago remains were dug up on Rathlin Island, off Ballycastle. The remains were some thousands of years old. These people had been farming on Rathlin. With all the modern scientific testing available now we discovered that their line of ancestry goes back to Kiev in present day Ukraine. Imagine that, people from Kiev farming on Rathlin thousands of years ago!
- We know that the earliest people came to Ireland around 8,000 BCE, or to put it another way, people arrived here ten thousand years ago. The best preserved evidence comes from Mount Sandel on the edge of present day Coleraine. Those of you from around Coleraine may be the ancient of days! Those people with roots in Kiev probably came to Rathlin between 8,000- 4,000 BCE.
- We have all come from somewhere. We are *homo sapiens*, first appearing on earth 200,000 years ago. Before that we, *homo erectus*, came out of Africa. We humans are really *homo migratio*. Human beings have always been moving, always migrants. You might say that our primary identity is as moving Earthlings. We have all come from somewhere. Everyone is one of us. We are one of everyone!
- Identities are imagined. We make them up and what's more, we reimagine them and make them up again and again. In the modern world, over the last two hundred years or so, we created nationalism and nation states, and imagined identities to fit them. All of these imagined identities took us to catastrophic wars in the twentieth century, and the same is happening again with Ukraine.
- As *homo migratio* we look critically at our contested identity problems, our imagined identities.



- Identity is a major concern for many people in Northern Ireland. This has meant being trapped in binary identities: British-Irish, unionist-nationalist, Protestant-Catholic, loyalist-republican. The problem now is that the binaries are breaking down and are no longer adequate.
- We were always more than the binaries but the contestedness of place, religion, violence and politics, squeezed many into the either-or. Now a large number of neithers have emerged and the neithers are a diverse constituency.
- It has been suggested, with some justification, that there are now three minorities in Northern Ireland. This undoubtedly shakes up identity and may well change the face of politics and governance.
- In a conflict situation a people's identity is shaken. It can be traumatic. A people's sense of who they are and where they belong are important.
- There are many situations in the world where cultural identities are in conflict or contested. Northern Ireland is a classic example, but not the only example. Are people British, Irish, Northern Irish, all of these or none?
- Scottish and Welsh people have a strong sense of identity, but which comes first, Scottish or British, Welsh or British? What is British? If it ever did have real meaning it is changing or has changed.
- Increasing numbers of English people no longer identify as British but as English, an indication of the growth in English nationalism.
- Have people in the Republic of Ireland a stronger sense of being European than do English people? Are Scots more European than the English? Their overwhelming Scottish vote to remain in the European Union might suggest that they are.
- A significant majority in Northern Ireland also voted to remain in the European Union, which might also suggest there is a greater sense of European identity here than in England.
- But then in the 2016 referendum a small majority of English voted to leave while the numbers who didn't vote were as large as those who did.
- It may be fair to say that in the United Kingdom identity questions have been in a state of flux for some time, at least since devolution was granted to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland in 1997.



- Brexit has made the deep psychological issue of identity turmoil in England more obvious and the level of imperial nostalgia deepens it further.
- There are larger identity issues in a state of flux now. Europeans are becoming more aware of their imperial histories and domination of the world for the last five hundred years. The role Europe played in constructing a world of racial identities, above all a world of white supremacy, is an uncomfortable truth.
- All of this is now breaking down, raising questions about identity. Who have we been? And who are we now?
- The current crisis centred in Ukraine is a threat to the whole of Europe and raises huge issues as to the future of Europe and who we are as Europeans.
- The ongoing arrival in Europe of refugees and those fleeing conflicts, now added to by the huge numbers of Ukrainians, is challenging our imagined and settled identities. We are on the way to creating a new world order.



1. Why is the issue of identities so emotive?
2. In what ways are identities being reimagined in Ireland and Europe today?



Session 6 – Input 2

Reconciliation and the Dislocation of Identities

- When borders were redrawn after WWI many found themselves on the wrong side of the new boundary.
- In Romania there are still tensions between the Hungarian population in Transylvania and Romanians. The name of one Romanian city is contested, Sibiu or Hermanstadt? Their version of Derry or Londonderry!
- Palestinians do not want to live in a Jewish state, nor do they want to live in a Muslim or Christian state. In fact they do not want to live in a confessional state of any kind, because such a state tends towards being sectarian and discriminates against minorities.
- To what extent do people on the Korean peninsula, which is divided by the thirty-eighth parallel, imposed by Americans and Russians, live with a conflict of identities? Conflictual identities may only be resolved by the reunification of the Korean peninsula.
- In many conflictual situations identity is contested and there are often issues of violence, suffering, grief, loss and victimhood, and a past that needs to be addressed.
- Experiences of violence and war not only shake and traumatise identities, they change them. In these situations there are deep psychological issues to be addressed in the politics of identity.
- Flags and emblems are elevated to the status of deities in many places, and are revered as objects of worship, adoration and loyalty.
- The flying of the Union and Irish flags become fiercely contested territorial markers in Northern Ireland. They are used often in provocative ways, and literally and metaphorically fly in the face of the other.
- A flag becomes a total issue, which to some in Northern Ireland and to many outside Northern Ireland is totally incomprehensible. But as one of Northern Ireland's most farsighted politicians and an international statesperson said often, "You can't eat a flag".
- The absolute loyalty to flags and other emblems in Northern Ireland will never deal with the socio-economic issues, the deep-rooted problems of economic and educational deprivation, which blight those within the binary communities that seem to find the meaning of life in a flag.



- Here we need to pause and reflect on what is now happening in the context of the war in Ukraine and the appearance of the Ukrainian flag on our streets, in shop windows, on football shirts, and elsewhere. Is the Ukrainian flag being used in a different way, as a symbol of solidarity with those who are facing what some believe is genocide?
- Reconciliation addresses the deep dislocating issues of identity, contested identity and identities imposed by the powerful, often the political elites, as a means of control.
- It is believed that Vladimir Putin and a small group of six or seven people are imposing a rigid identity on the Russian people, in an attempt to control who they are and what they think. Absolute loyalty to Russia, as defined by the president and his small group, is expected and demanded.
- Identities are imagined. We can make them up and change them. When they become fixed, however, we are trapped in our imaginations and shaped by fantasies that easily become destructive.
- The psychological trauma cannot be ignored, especially when identities are challenged and in a changing world, begin to break down. Some of the deepest human questions are: who are we and where do we belong?



1. Are identities fixed or fluid? Can both be held together in a reconciled society?
2. In a world of war and environmental catastrophe do we need to reimagine larger identities; and how can those reimagined identities contribute to reconciliation?

Session 7: The Spiritual, the Social and the Human

Session Outline

1	Input 1: Valuing a Better World		20 mins
2	Group Discussion		20 mins
3	Feedback		15 mins
4	Input 2: The Spiritual, the Social and the Human		20 mins
5	Plenary Discussion		15 mins



Session 7 - Input 1

Valuing a Better World

- We are people of the Enlightenment, which means we are shaped by individualism. We are individualistic in the way we think and act. The quest for the spiritual can be individualistic. Whilst our individuality is important, individualism creates an 'I' world rather than a 'We' world. The spiritual or spirituality needs to be socially critical spirituality, whatever source we draw on. Not an individualistic or privatised quest but one inspired by the spiritual values for the common good. This is why this strand of reconciliation is called the socio-spiritual.
- The socio-spiritual strand has to be taken seriously in the reconciliation process. This may seem like the strand of reconciliation where faith communities come into their own and have their biggest contribution to make.
- Faith communities may not come up with political or economic blueprints for society, though the politicians and economists who have these responsibilities include people of faith.
- If faith communities have a contribution to make to the reconciliation process, along with many other groups in civic society, it is in a socio-psychological and in particular, the socio-spiritual strand.
- This is not to say that they are the only group in society with the potential for such a contribution. The church has never had the monopoly on spirituality or goodness, not even the monopoly on God!
- Spirituality or spiritual is one of the in-words of our time. Many prefer this word to the alternative, religion. 'I am spiritual but not religious', they say. What is meant by spiritual? There is no simple meaning because the word is used in diverse contexts. There is a broad sense of spiritual or spirituality used by some from the human perspective, others from a religious sense.
 - Spirituality is about the holistic, a fully integrated approach to life. It is life-as-a-whole.
 - Spirituality is the quest for the 'sacred', the 'something more', entering the depth of existence, exploring the endless mysteries of the cosmos.
 - Spirituality is the quest for meaning, the purpose of life, a sense of life direction. It is a quest for the non-material or more than material dimension to life.
 - Spirituality is the quest for ultimate values beyond a purely materialistic approach to life. It is the self-reflective life concerned with ethics and moral vision.



Session 7 - Input 1: Valuing a Better World

- For some this sense of the spiritual or spirituality will be drawn from human philosophies of life, others will draw from the world of arts, beauty and music. Yet others will draw these from indigenous traditions, Amerindian, Maori or Aboriginal. Many Chinese will draw this spirituality from their Confucian tradition, a tradition of ethics and moral vision. Yet others will root this spirituality in their religious traditions, whether Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Baha'i, Hindu or Buddhist.
- The spiritual is in all of these and is bigger than all of these sources or traditions. The point is not competitiveness or claiming original or ultimate primacy or superiority but, whatever source you draw spirituality and the spiritual from, getting on with the quest and living it. The practice of the spiritual is a key strand in reconciliation.
- There is no indication by Mark Carney, the former Governor of the Bank of England, in his remarkable book, *Value(s): Building a Better World for All* (2021) that he is coming from any faith perspective.
- It is a book about embedding ethical values in our economic markets, values of sustainability, solidarity and responsibility, which can create a world fit for our children, grandchildren and the generations to come. *Value(s): Building a Better World for All* is a plan for humanity restored. We might also add, a plan for nature restored.
- There is no overt faith perspective in Carney's book, but it is full of Deuteronomistic echoes, Deuteronomy being a book in the Hebrew Bible with a profound and radical and just economic strategy.
- As well as all the classical world religions, the secular also offers a spirituality and values, and the faith and the secular may be two sides of one coin.



Group Discussion

1. Where do we get our values from?
2. What do you think is the purpose of the socio-spiritual strand of reconciliation?



- Again the socio-spiritual does not imply a narrow religious dimension. The spiritual is larger than that. It is the recognition that every human person has spiritual intelligence.
- All humans have intellectual intelligence, emotional intelligence and spiritual intelligence. All of these make up who we are and we are not human without these three inter-related strands of intelligence. They are innate to our being, which again is social and relational being.
- The spiritual has to do with meaning, purpose and values. No matter how much we may distort our being, intellectually, emotionally and spiritually, or block our development, maturation and growth by the choices we make, we still long for meaning, purpose and values.
- Meaning and purpose are concerned with the ultimate questions. What are we for? What is the purpose of life? What does it mean to be human? What is community? What does 'being with' mean? What does it mean to be eco-human/an Earthling? Why suffering? Why evil?
- Issues of meaning, purpose and values are heightened for people in conflict, when a conflict ends and during a lengthy peace and reconciliation process. The socio-spiritual is shaken to the foundations by violent conflict and a divided community. Violence and war are always destructive of meaning, purpose and values.
- Being caught up in a violent conflict is to be caught up in sectarian, racial or ethnic hatred, bitterness, vengeance and deliberate exclusion, all of which dehumanise the other and ourselves.
- A bitterly divided community and world is dysfunctional and destructive.
- The values of love, compassion, justice, non-violence, reconciliation, peace and relational humanity are diminished or destroyed, and take a long time to recover.
- Reconciliation needs the socio-spiritual strand and requires it to be integrated with the five other strands.
- It is the forgotten or neglected dimension, but unless meaning, purpose and values are addressed in the reconciliation process there will be a huge deficit and ultimately a failure to process reconciliation.



1. How can the socio-spiritual strand enhance reconciliation?
2. What are the core values necessary for statecraft, reconciliation and peace building?

VALUING A DIFFERENT WORLD: IS THERE A COMMON GOOD?



A Series of Seven Civic Conversations
by Cathy Higgins and Johnston McMaster

Session 1: Valuing the Common Good: Historical Frameworks

Session Outline

1	Input 1 - The Axial Age 900-200 BCE: The New Moral and Spiritual Consciousness by Johnston McMaster		20 mins
2	Group Discussion		20 mins
3	Feedback		15 mins
4	Second Input: Amos and Socrates: Prophetic Voices for the Common Good by Cathy Higgins		20 mins
5	Plenary Discussion		15 mins



Session 1 – Input 1: The Axial Age 900-200 BCE: The New Moral and Spiritual Consciousness

- The years 900-200 BCE are crucial to the moral and spiritual development of humanity. It was a German philosopher Karl Jaspers who described these years as the Axial Age. In evolutionary terms these seven centuries saw a great leap forward in human consciousness, into a new consciousness, a new moral and spiritual awareness. Transformation and newness became core to what it meant to be human together. If the earth turns on its axis, humanity turned at this point in its history. Humanity made a huge evolutionary leap forward. It wasn't that the pre-Axial age was without morals, ethics and spirituality or meaning. The pre-Axial Hammurabi Code was very ethical in its vision and organisation of human society. But something profoundly moral, ethical and full of deepest meaning exploded into the human consciousness in different parts of the world, seemingly unconnected but profoundly shared. These were centuries of the most morally, ethically and spiritually creative time in recorded human history. Nothing like it has happened since. We have not yet had another evolutionary leap into new consciousness and awareness.
- The Axial Age was the most seminal period of intellectual, psychological, philosophical and religious change in the history of humankind to date. It was in one sense local but also global. It produced the great world traditions that have continued to nourish humanity. These were human, philosophical, moral, ethical and spiritual traditions. Christianity and Islam were much later but they were rooted in the traditions of the Axial Age. They would not have been possible without the Axial Age. They represent a profound flourishing of it.
- The global Axial Age happened in four regions of the world. Confucianism and Taoism emerged in China. Zoroastrianism came out of the cradle of human civilisation in Persia. Hinduism and Buddhism emerged in India, an ethical monotheism flowered in ancient Israel and philosophical rationalism and humanism burst onto the scene in Greece. From 900-200 BCE great minds and imaginations took human consciousness, experience and morality to a whole new level.
- All of this flowering of ethical and moral consciousness was concerned with being truly human. There was a transcendent dimension to all of these profound traditions and the core was the human. Not all of the great minds and imaginations identified the transcendent with the supernatural, in fact most of them refused to speak of it in supernatural terms. They didn't even discuss the moral, ethical and spiritual in supernatural terms. Some did have a strong sense of the ultimate and the sacred, imagined in different ways. What mattered in the Axial Age was not what you believed but how you behaved, how you lived.



Session 1 – Input 1: The Axial Age 900-200 BCE: The New Moral and Spiritual Consciousness

- The Axial Age put ethics and morality at the heart of the spiritual or meaningful life. They didn't need a supernatural reference. Whether you talked of G-O-D, Nirvana, Brahman, the Way or Beauty, the way to encounter any of this and the truly human was to live a compassionate life. Religion was compassion. Being human was compassion. The point of it all was to grow a totally different kind of human being. Empathy and compassion that was being truly human. Empathy and compassion that was being truly spiritual. With empathy and compassion being truly human was to be truly spiritual and to be truly spiritual was to be truly human. The human and the spiritual were the same thing.
- It was recognised that people have to give up self-centredness, greed, violence and unkindness. The truly human or sacred life was to be lived in empathy and compassion. The great minds and imaginations were not saying these things from comfortable armchairs. Between 900-200 BCE, East and West, the sages, wisdom teachers were living in societies torn apart by violence and war. Their worlds were violent, warring and brutal. It was in this context that they shaped their great moral, ethical, wise and spiritual traditions. These religious and humanist traditions all came up with the Golden Rule, 'do not do to others what you would not have done to you', or some similar variation. Who created the Golden Rule at the heart of every human, philosophical and spiritual and wisdom tradition? It is believed to have been Confucius in China who lived from 551-479 BCE. We will meet Confucius again in week three when we look at Global Wisdom Ethics: Eastern Perspectives. Confucius gave us the Golden Rule now at the heart of all our human and spiritual traditions. Religion or humanism was to respect the sacred rights of all.
- This did not mean that 900-200 BCE was some kind of golden age, a paradise now lost. People being people didn't always get the evolutionary revolution. They gave way to exclusivity, cruelty, greed, atrocity and violence. All of the newness of consciousness didn't shake off its patriarchal culture. The patriarchal system remained and it was no great era for women. For all the moral, ethical, human and spiritual sensitisation, there was no gender equality. But the new consciousness, awareness and spirituality shared the same ethics and values, sympathy or compassion, respect and universal concern. Compassion was at the top of the common and shared agenda for life. Religion or humanism was the Golden Rule in practice. All shared a simple test. If secular or religious beliefs make you aggressive, belligerent, intolerant, unkind, violent towards others, this was not what Buddhism called being skilful. Rather that was the unskilful life.
- But if beliefs impelled you to act compassionately, justly and non-violently towards others, to honour and respect the stranger, then those beliefs were good and helpful.



Session 1 – Input 1: The Axial Age 900-200 BCE: The New Moral and Spiritual Consciousness

- These are the shared ethics and values of the great religious and human traditions of Persia, China, India, ancient Israel and Greece from 900-200 BCE. The Axial Age was the time in our human history of the great wisdom teachers and spiritual leaders. They burst onto the human stage in these seven centuries. They were: Zoroaster, Buddha, Confucius, Socrates, Amos and Jeremiah, mystics of the Upanishads, Mencius and Euripides. (Karen Armstrong, *The Great Transformation: The World in the Time of Buddha, Socrates, Confucius and Jeremiah*, 2006, pxii). They were all men, but we still need to get to know them and how they put values, morals, ethics and meaning at the heart of human life together. The Great Age may have faded after the end of the third century BCE, but these wisdom teachers provided us with foundations for the good society and the good life together. Humankind has not yet taken a great leap beyond them but on their foundations we build. We take their new consciousness, values and ethics and we apply them to and reinterpret them for our context and our time.



Group Discussion

1. What do you think were the core values that emerged in the Axial Age? Was there a shared ethic?
2. How do we apply values and reinterpret and reimagine them for our contemporary global world?



- In this second presentation we will consider the ethical values underpinning the prophetic vision of Amos in ancient Israel and the thinking of the philosopher, Socrates in ancient Athens. These historical personalities shed light on two of the great world traditions that emerged in the Axial Age.
- a. **Amos:**
 - Amos was one of the prophets of ancient Israel and belonged to a Hebrew tradition, which remembered the great liberator Moses, the story of the Exodus from Egypt and deliverance from imperial oppression and exploitation.
 - Moses promised the Hebrew people a new social reality and experience of community with justice and compassion at its heart, and based on a covenantal relationship with Yahweh. The Hebrew prophets reminded the Hebrew people of this covenantal relationship and particularly of their responsibilities to Yahweh and each other.
 - To understand the prophet Amos, or any of the Hebrew prophets, we need to read the writings attributed to them against the backdrop of the geopolitical realities in which they lived. By the eighth century BCE, the time of Amos, there were two separate Jewish kingdoms. Before the split, David and his son, Solomon, had ruled over a united monarchy, but shortly after Solomon's death the northern tribes revolted against the oppressive taxes imposed by Solomon to fund his extravagant building projects.
 - Solomon had sought to grow the kingdom, in imitation of other imperial kingdoms and had forgotten the Mosaic covenant. Instead of acting with compassion and justice he oppressed the very people he had a responsibility to protect.
 - Amos was from Tekoa, near Jerusalem, in the Southern Kingdom, where he was a shepherd and keeper of sycamore trees. He left behind this way of life, feeling compelled by Yahweh to travel to Bethel, one of the principle places of worship in the Northern Kingdom of Israel.
 - This was around 780 BCE when King Jeroboam, a favoured vassal of Assyria, was ruling a prosperous but inequitable agrarian state in Israel. Under Jeroboam Israel enjoyed an economic boom, though not all Israelites benefitted from this wealth. As in the time of Solomon, the widening gap between rich and poor undermined the core values that defined the covenantal relationship.
 - What most disturbed Amos was the enormous gap between the way people worshipped and the way they lived.



- He reminded the Israelites of their covenantal mission to promote justice. He castigated the nobility who lived in splendour and neglected the poor. They lived extravagant lifestyles crushing the people with heavy taxes, and corrupting the courts with their bribes so there was no recourse to justice. Amos reminded the king and the elite that Yahweh held them accountable for their actions toward the poor, sick, widowed and orphaned.
- Amos drew attention to the fact that they had come to the shrine at Bethel in their finery to worship Yahweh, failing to recognise that worship is human justice being offered to God. He reminded them that human justice is divine worship being lived out. In separating worship from justice they had become idolaters. True worship, Amos underlined, was a summons to practical compassion. Yahweh wanted justice to “run down like water and righteousness like a mighty stream”. (Amos 5: 24).
- Amos, like the other Hebrew prophets, insisted that the people cannot separate their understanding of Yahweh from the common good ethics of justice, righteousness and compassion. Their loss of faith in Yahweh and refusal to adhere to the ethical values that underpinned a just ordering of society would result in their suffering under imperial powers.
- Amos’ mission to the Northern Kingdom took place about sixty years before its eventual destruction. And other prophets followed in his wake, Hosea, Elijah and Elisha, repeating this same message. The eventual destruction of the Kingdom of Israel, in 722BCE by the Assyrian empire, followed a number of attempts by the Israelite king and his elite to rebel against imperial control and expand their own power and wealth.
- There is no averting the coming judgement but Amos does hold out the possibility that on the other side of judgement hope exists; a remnant of the people will survive to recreate God’s just society (Amos 5: 15).

b. Socrates

- The Greek philosopher, Socrates, was born in 469 BCE into an Athens that was recovering from a successful war, which had prevented Persia from extending its imperial control over Greece. Athenians credited their success to the pantheon of gods they worshipped, whom they believed determined their fate. The importance of sacrifice and religious ritual, to keep the gods on side, would have been reinforced in all Athenian homes.
- In Socrates early years Athens experienced a period of relative peace, burgeoning trade and a flowering of the arts. In the market place a teenage Socrates would have encountered travellers from the Eastern Mediterranean whose ideas would have excited and inspired him.



- Often referred to as the Pre-Socratics, the best known being Pythagoras, these thinkers asked scientific questions that challenged traditional religious explanations of the cosmos. They sought to make sense of the world around them asking: What is the cosmos made of? What is matter and how do we perceive it?
- What impressed Socrates most was their use of reason and systematic argument. They challenged the belief that human fate was determined by the gods and argued that humans could harness their minds to explain the world around them. This was a quantum shift in thinking and understanding.
- Inspired as he was by this spirit of inquiry, Socrates' interests took him in a different direction. Studying the secrets of the cosmos was important but for him human affairs and how we live in this world was of greater interest. He applied rational thought to the fundamental moral dilemmas of human existence.
- Socrates asked profoundly ethical questions: What kind of life should we lead? What sort of people do we want to be? In so doing he put ethics at the very heart of his philosophy. "His uncompromising quest was to distinguish the 'good' from the 'bad', the 'true' from the 'false'." (Bettany Hughes, *The Hemlock Cup: Socrates, Athens and the Search for the Good Life*, 2010, p 55).
- Analysing the society in which he lived, Socrates recognised that democracy as a social experiment raised ethical dilemmas that compromised its capacity to serve the common good.
- Athens had been experimenting with democracy as a system of governance for about fifty years before Socrates birth. Athenian males over the age of eighteen were paid by the state to participate in public affairs. Previously, only the wealthy could afford the time to participate in politics. That development transformed the character of Athenian democracy and society. Radical as this was for the time, for some like Socrates this did not go far enough.
- Socrates worried that those sitting in judgement in the law courts were not qualified to know the difference between right and wrong and could convict an innocent person. The greatest obstacle to the common good, therefore, was ignorance! What was required to underpin democracy and make it just was knowledge of the good in a universal sense, which could be applied in different contexts.



- Socrates inherited a patriarchal tradition that said there was one kind of virtue for a man and another for a woman, and men have a greater capacity for virtue, hence their involvement in civic society. Instead Socrates taught women should have the same training and education, and pursue the same activities, as men. In a true democracy, men and women could learn to be equally virtuous and behave with courage, pursue justice and seek wisdom. Thus men and women could achieve goodness and happiness in equal measure.
- Socrates invited those he met to seek knowledge of the human good and identify fundamental truths. He invited people to interrogate their actions and their most deeply held beliefs. He taught that an unexamined life was not worth living and that a citizen's democracy does not work without educated citizens. (Karen Armstrong, *The Great Transformation: The World in the Time of Buddha, Socrates, Confucius and Jeremiah*, 2007 edition, p 260).
- Socrates ideas have shaped Western and Eastern thinking. His questions continue to engage us today and are at the heart of our value systems. He pushed ethical questions: "What is good? How do we know that we know anything? Who is qualified to rule? What is love? ...He purported not to instruct, but to 'un-teach' men (sic). (Ibid., p 31). He was convinced a good life was within reach if education was at the heart of the search for the common good.



1. What values were at the heart of Amos' and Socrates' visions of the common good life in Israel and Athens?
2. How do these values translate into actions?

Session 2: Valuing the Common Good: Turning Points in History

Session Outline

1	Input 1 – The Scottish Enlightenment by Cathy Higgins		20 mins
2	Group Discussion		20 mins
3	Feedback		15 mins
4	Input 2 – a) Francis Hutcheson: We are the People by Johnston McMaster b) Olympe de Gouges by Cathy Higgins		20 mins
5	Plenary Discussion		15 mins



Session 2 – Input 1

The Scottish Enlightenment

- In this session exploring the theme: *Valuing the Common Good: Turning Points in History* we will begin with a brief exploration of the Scottish Enlightenment, which birthed a revolutionary leap in intellectual, ethical and common good thinking.
- The Scottish Enlightenment began in the eighteenth century and continued into the early nineteenth century. Dates vary but generally it is thought to have taken place between 1730 and 1820. The term ‘Scottish Enlightenment’ was coined by the economist, William Robert Scott, after the event in 1900. He credited the educator, Francis Hutcheson (1694-1749), as a key initiator of the movement. (Ronald C. Arnett, *Communication Ethics and Tenacious Hope: Contemporary Implications of the Scottish Enlightenment*, 2022, p 4).
- In this Enlightenment period Scotland experienced a creative surge which was reflected in the ideas and works of the philosophers, David Hume and Thomas Reid, the economist, Adam Smith, the theologian, George Campbell and the philosopher and historian, Adam Ferguson.
- They promoted the virtues of freethinking and tolerance of ideas within the public domain while encouraging practical application. This encouraged creative thinking which found expression in a range of disciplines, including: architecture, chemistry, physics, medicine, geology, engineering, economics, history, sociology, philosophy, theology, poetry, painting and law.
- You might be wondering how Scotland became a hub for such creativity and innovation. The preparatory work had begun in the previous centuries. The three Scottish universities founded in the Pre-Reformation period had always been strongly orientated toward Europe. St Andrew’s University (1411) and Glasgow University (1451) had been modelled on the universities of Paris and Bologna respectively, and almost all the teaching staff at these universities and at King’s College Aberdeen (1495) were Scots who had received their education in European universities.
- The founding of two further universities in the late sixteenth century, the University of Edinburgh (1583) and Marischal College in Aberdeen (1593), to meet the demand for education, brought the total to five in Scotland. This was at a time when there were only two in England, Oxford University (1096) and Cambridge University (1209) and one in Ireland, the University of Dublin (1592).



Session 2 – Input 1

The Scottish Enlightenment

- By 1696 a school had been established in every parish in the Scottish Lowlands ensuring free education for all and consequently Scotland achieved the prestige of becoming Europe's first modern literate society. (Arthur Herman, *The Scottish Enlightenment: The Scot's Invention of the Modern World*, 2001, pp 22-23).
- It's impossible to make sense of the Scottish Enlightenment in isolation. It was part of a wider European movement that reached its height between 1750 and 1800. The Scots were influencing and being influenced by the ferment of new ideas being discussed in various public arenas at home and abroad. It was in Europe that young Scots encountered ideas that challenged almost every aspect of life. They learned that people should not just accept what they were told, they should question ideas in a rational way.
- Radicalism took hold in Scotland as it did in the American colonies and Revolutionary France. Newspapers and publishing houses boomed, ensuring Scots were informed on the latest developments around the globe. They would have been informed about the civil war that led to the birth of the United States (1776) and the events surrounding the French Revolution (1789) and its aftermath.
- Scotland's influence in the period owed little to the Government of the time. Union with England in 1707 had brought the Scottish Parliament to an end. London became the centre of political activity for Scottish parliamentarians and politicians, however, Scotland retained its own laws and civil law courts, education and medical institutions and the state Church of Scotland.
- The relative political stability in Scotland, opportunities for lucrative trade deals with the American colonies and the benign neglect of the authorities in London, provided an enabling environment, offering freedom to think and act relatively free of the restrictions of state involvement.
- Human morality and ethical behaviour were popular areas for philosophers to question and debate in the public square. These discussions provided a forum to understand the practical impact of new ideas on people. For instance, Adam Smith teased his ideas out about the economy with representatives of the business community. These encounters convinced him that any efforts to increase commercial output and effectiveness had to take account of business owners' social responsibility for the workforce.



Session 2 – Input 1

The Scottish Enlightenment

- In his book, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, (1776) which informed modern economics, Smith underlined the point that while a division of labour made good economic sense, the downside was the negative impact on workers who were forced to repeat the same monotonous tasks to the detriment of their human intelligence and spirit, leaving them demoralised. He suggested one way of counteracting this was to build in free education for all workers in reading, writing, accounting, geometry and mechanics that would engage their minds and allow them to progress in the workplace.
- This was not an ivory tower experiment with academics talking to themselves divorced from the world around them. Quite the opposite. Academics came together from across the disciplines to engage with civil society in discussions they hoped would yield new insights and improve thinking and practical applications. Outcomes were important as was the process of thinking with others.
- Freedom of thought and freedom of speech were at the heart of the Enlightenment movement, therefore thinking for oneself and experimenting for oneself were viewed as integral to intellectual and moral growth. There was not a whole sale rejection of authority figures and institutions, however, the recognition that the words and actions of those in authority had to stand up to cross examination and prove reasonable.
- By reasonable Enlightenment proponents meant that those in leadership had a responsibility to the general public to demonstrate that what they said was true and that their actions were valid. Reasonableness, truth, validity, and accountability, then, were Enlightenment values. Added to this was the idea of freedom, the freedom to put ideas into the public domain and the freedom to engage in social critique as a community.
- David Hume in his book entitled *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* in 1748 underlined the value of using reason to fight bigotry and superstition. He recognised that just because something was believed that did not make it true.
- Another significant development that marked the Scottish Enlightenment was the affirmation that citizens had rights that needed to be protected. Reforms to the law to protect human rights and freedoms allowed individuals to make their own choices about what they wrote, read, believed, did and said publically.



Session 2 – Input 1

The Scottish Enlightenment

- Adam Ferguson, a professor of moral philosophy was particularly concerned about political corruption, recognising that even a benevolent politician is ultimately concerned with staying on top, convinced he was the best person for the job.
- Ferguson called for a system of checks and balances to ensure that in the political and public arena, no individual poses a threat to the system of justice and the liberty of others.
- He argued for the public right to protest perceived injustices as part of the system of checks and balances. This empowering of the citizenry was a recognition that politics is much too important to leave to the politicians. Our civic responsibility was the flip side of our civic freedom. Both virtues were central to the functioning of a civilised society.
- Finally, an overarching value that Enlightenment advocates adhered to was universality. Behind this was a belief in cosmopolitanism. They encouraged the idea that people of Scotland were citizens of Europe and of the world. Their particular and local identities did not limit how they viewed themselves and their relationship to others.
- This was no narrow nationalism, instead a recognition that all people were entitled to live in freedom with their civil liberties protected. This outlook committed enlightened citizens to work for the eradication of slavery, which they viewed as repugnant and degrading of human nature and humanity. Their commitment to the value of universalism convinced them that as long as slavery continued to exist we were all morally culpable.



Group Discussion:

1. What values defined the Scottish Enlightenment and why were they considered important?
2. Can we learn lessons from this period in history about fostering a common good culture and way of life?



- Francis Hutcheson was a key figure in the Scottish Enlightenment, a significant part of the eighteenth century philosophical and cultural movement that sought social improvement through scientific and rational principles and stood for freedom of conscience and religious tolerance.
- Hutcheson was also very much part of the Irish Enlightenment, though for much of his life he was Professor of Moral Philosophy at Glasgow University. Numbers of Hutcheson's students went to America and through them Hutcheson's moral philosophy underpinned the American Revolution, the American Constitution and the crucial line, 'We the people'.
- Many of his students were appointed to important positions in the American Presbyterian Church, in education, law and politics. Hutcheson's Enlightenment philosophy and its radical social and political vision had an immense influence. One of my old teachers quoting from an American pamphlet, said of Hutcheson's vision and influence that it was "...brewed in Scotland, bottled in Ireland and uncorked in America". (John Barley in *The Cultures of Europe: The Irish Contribution*, edited by James Mackey, 1994, p64).
- Francis Hutcheson was born in 1694 in the townland of Drumalig near Carryduff. He was a third generation Presbyterian minister having completed his theological studies in Glasgow. After ten years running a dissenting academy in Dublin, during which he published books on Beauty and Virtue and on the Moral Sense, he was appointed to the chair of Moral Philosophy in Glasgow in 1730. Three things stand out in Hutcheson's Enlightenment philosophy.
- There is a deep moral sense within every human person. We have a reasonable, social and altruistic nature. There is a deep moral sense within us. There is an innate knowing of what is good. This ran contrary to Hutcheson's Presbyterian and Calvinistic theology which taught total depravity and every person incapable of any good. Hutcheson's philosophical assumptions spoke of original goodness, a positive and higher side of human nature.
- There is the inalienable right to freedom of opinion and religious tolerance. In the Ireland of Hutcheson's birth neither of these existed. His vision of freedom of thought and religious tolerance was crushed by the 1798 Rising in Ireland.
- Hutcheson insisted on the right to resist tyranny. This was built on the relationship of trust between those governed and those who govern. If that is broken and government no longer serves the common good, there is the right and obligation to resist. If the common good of civil society breaks down, there is a national and moral right to resist.



- Hutcheson’s philosophy was that sovereignty lay not with monarchs or governments, but with people. Power belongs to the people, is derived from the people and is only and always exercised by the consent of the people. So the great American document begins with ‘We the people’, though the ‘we’ were male and white.
- Hutcheson taught that the end of government was “the greatest good of the greatest number”. And this is where he joined political and moral philosophy together. Politics and morals are inseparable. Politics is not morally neutral or value free. The use of power and decision making are to be rooted in morality. Using power and decision making are always ethical activities. Seeking the greatest good of the greatest number is the moral and ethical use of power and governance. Civil power by the consent of the people, all of the people, is the moral basis of good civic society.



Session 2 – Input 2b

Olympe de Gouges (1748-1793)

- Olympe de Gouge was forty-one years old and in Paris when the French Revolution began in 1789. The growing population in France meant greater demand for food. A number of natural disasters in 1785 and 1788 affected crop growth and resulted in a shortage, pushing up the price of grain. Hunger became a serious problem for peasants. The rumblings of discontent were fuelled further by the lavish lifestyle of King Louis XV¹ and Queen Marie-Antoinette, which when combined with France's financial support for the American Revolution against the British meant France was on the brink of bankruptcy.
- When the King imposed taxes on the clergy and nobility for the first time, to help fill the empty coffers, they formed an alliance with the middle class and starving peasants. On the fourteenth July 1789 a mob of angry French citizens and rebellious soldiers attacked the Bastille, a royal fortress, prison and armoury. The prison had become a symbol of the monarchy's dictatorial rule. The fortress capitulated after the revolutionaries aimed cannons at its gate and the event became one of the defining moments in the Revolution that followed. The fall of the Bastille was viewed as symbolic of the overthrow of the old order and a victory for liberty, equality and brotherhood.
- On the fifth October 1789 news reached the starving women in Paris of stockpiling of bread in the Royal Court. Women from all walks of life, and men disguised as women, stormed the palace gates and forced the king and queen, along with the National Assembly, to return to Paris. Once in Paris the king was left with no option but to sign the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen*, 1789.
- Olympe de Gouges was both a supporter and critic of the French Revolution. She endorsed its philosophy of natural human rights, liberty and equality, however, a feminist and abolitionist, she publically repudiated the failure of its declaration to universalise rights and pursue equality for all. She refused to remain silent and chose to expose the patriarchy of the declaration, publishing an alternative document entitled a *Declaration of the Rights of Woman Citizen*, in 1791.
- In eighteenth century France and across Europe a woman's place was in the home. Women were not allowed to own a property or business, have their own bank account or get divorced. They had no political rights and those who could afford a private education were not allowed to study politics, economics or science.



Session 2 – Input 2b

Olympe de Gouges (1748-1793)

- De Gouge demanded both civil and political rights for women on a par with men. She argued that women should be entitled to the same opportunities and benefits as men, have an equal say in the implementation of government policy and an equal amount of wealth for doing the same job as a man.
- She stated that “...if a woman has a right to mount the scaffold (in defence of the Republic), she must equally have the right to take the political platform”. (*The Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen*, 1791). De Gouge underlined the fact that the only full right women shared with men was the right to be executed.
- The Jacobin ‘reign of terror’ began with the execution of the royal couple in 1793. The violence put paid to any public dialogue on the gender equality question.
- The ‘Terror’ was justified by male revolutionary leaders who claimed that the violence was necessary to create a ‘Republic of virtue’. They made it clear that anyone critical of the violent revolutionary methods was in great danger. They called on true citizens of the Republic to denounce those who challenged the methods used to achieve freedom.
- A committed pacifist, de Gouge abhorred the violence that ensued and, ignoring the ban on dissent, she refused to stay silent. She critiqued the use of violence as a means of securing the Republic and distributed a leaflet calling on the men and women of France to decide for themselves how France should be governed. One of her pieces, written in the last year of her life, called for a democratic government chosen by the people, where no one would be put to death just for holding opposing views to the government.
- She wrote that she did not favour the monarchy being abolished entirely and put forward the model of a constitutional monarchy, whereby the king or queen ruled alongside a government rather than having absolute rule. The National Convention considered this an act of insurrection in contravention of the decree they had passed banishing any texts alluding to the establishment of a monarchy.
- De Gouge was arrested, imprisoned and put on trial for treason. She was allowed no defence and only the accusations brought against her were admitted in court. De Gouge was sentenced to death on second November 1793 aged forty-five. Her execution marked the beginning of a political backlash against women.



Session 2 – Input 2b

Olympe de Gouges (1748-1793)

- Women who had challenged the patriarchy of kingship found that the new order they had fought for was patriarchy in a different guise. Instead of one man ruling them they now had a cohort of men. Napoleon reinforced the new order when he came to power in 1799. The Napoleonic Code of 1804 gave men ultimate power over women. This code shaped women's lives in France until the mid-twentieth century. It wasn't until 1944 that women were granted suffrage in France.
- One of the last things de Gouges wrote from her prison cell shortly before her death was "My voice will be heard from the depths of my tomb". (Olympe De Gouge, *To The Revolutionary Tribunal*, 1793). The impact of her work is now being validated and celebrated in France and other parts of the world.
- De Gouge was among the best advocates for Enlightenment thinking in Europe in the 18th century. In her view it was the failure to stress human commonality that led to racial discrimination, as well as gender and class prejudices. She recognised how different forms of discrimination intersected to reinforce prejudice and deny the most vulnerable in society the rights and protections that should be naturally theirs.
- De Gouge campaigned for an end to slavery and patriarchy. She was committed to the common good and had the courage to stand up for her convictions, even knowing the likely consequences. She was a person of her time and ahead of her time.



1. Does Francis Hutcheson from the townland of Drumalig, Carryduff, still have something to say to our politics and the pursuit of the common good?
2. How did Olympe de Gouges put Enlightenment values into practice? What can we learn from her in our context?

Session 3: Global Wisdom Ethics: Eastern Perspectives

Session Outline

1	Input 1 - Confucius: Ethics in the Public Place by Johnston McMaster		20 mins
2	Group Discussion		20 mins
3	Feedback		15 mins
4	Input 2 - The Buddha by Cathy Higgins		20 mins
5	Plenary Discussion		15 mins



- It is important in a globalised and interdependent world to move beyond an Irish-centric, British-centric and Euro-centric world. These worlds are not enough. We are used to being dominant. For five hundred years European imperial powers dominated the world, we have been part of a European hegemony, not just in rule and governance but also in ideas, technology and thought. We have lived with European or Western exceptionalism, even a divine right to rule and dominate. But our world is coming to an end.
- There are rich cultures, civilisations and wisdom traditions and ethics that are older, much older than Europe or the Atlantic West. This is why it is important to tap into global wisdom ethics and Eastern perspectives as we pursue values for the common good. The wisdom, values and ethics of the East are rich and diverse. We only have time to explore two, Confucianism and Buddhism. This means getting to know Confucius and Buddha and the wisdom of their ethical thought and practice.
- In the sixth century BCE, during the remarkable Axial Age, Chinese minds and imaginations were at work. The most significant was Confucius, 551-479 BCE. He was a failed politician, nothing new in that, but he became a great teacher. He was always on the move, never standing still, but journeying with his students believing that this was how one became more truly human. Confucius was the champion of the common people against the nobility and elite. He had a deep and critical social awareness.
- It was Confucius who introduced to Chinese imagination and thought the idea of the Mandate of Heaven. This does not make Confucianism a religion though it does introduce a transcendent dimension to all of life. The Mandate remains core to Chinese thought. A ruler ruled with the Mandate of Heaven but if the ruler behaved in an unjust, violent or evil way the Mandate would be withdrawn. There is, then, no moral authority to rule and govern. Confucius did not bother to speak of a supernatural being. This is not Western theism, the Western idea of a supernatural, interventionist God. Confucius wasn't interested in that idea. There was talk of the Supreme Lord on High, but there was a close relationship between the Supreme Lord on High and human authority. There is a transcendent dimension to life together and humans have agency and responsibility.
- Confucianism is not so much a religion, perhaps not a religion at all, but a system of social ethics. Confucius was more earthly minded than heavenly. "Learning on the ground" was how he put it in his writings, the Analects, Analect 14 v35. Confucius was about handling practical problems in the human world. What he introduced into his Chinese world were humanistic elements. Spiritual beliefs became humanistic practices.



- In Analect 6 v22 he expresses a moderate attitude to the sense of the Sacred in a humanistic way. This is not our traditional Western way of seeing things, our Western way of talking of God or atheism. Confucius is about something different.
- For Confucius education was hugely important to improve the quality of human life. This is why Confucius extended education to the poor and lower classes, but education was not extended to women. For all his emphasis on the centrality of being human together and of extending education away from the elites to the poor and lower classes, women are excluded, which suggests that women are not quite human or capable of true humanity.
- The Axial Age is rooted in patriarchy. Patriarchy is the all-pervasive culture, the system and ethos of the human society. Confucianism did not escape patriarchy, neither did the Biblical writers, the humanist Greek philosophers, Christianity or Islam. Patriarchy was and is a domination system. An expression of it in China was foot binding and in recent months violent and brutal treatment of women has been reported in Chinese cities. Confucianism has not dealt with patriarchy and neither has Western culture, philosophy and religion.
- At the time of Confucius, China was in crisis, on the verge of total anarchy. There were multiple struggles for supremacy. Confucius was horrified by the constant warfare threatening to destroy the common life. Confucius was a traditionalist, a conservative person. He believed that the root cause of the current disorder and crisis was neglect of traditional rites that had shaped positive conduct for so long. Confucius looked back. He did not see his teaching as original. “I have been faithful to and loved the ancients.” (Analects 7v1). “I am simply one who loves the past, and who is diligent in investigating it.” (Analects 7v19). But he was an innovator. He was bringing to life the old in new ways and applying new insights and thoughts to the present. “A person is worthy of being a teacher if he is able to gain new insights from chewing over what he already knew.” (Analects 2v11).
- The world of Confucius had changed from an earlier one but there is continuity as well as discontinuity. The old needs to be reworked for the new, reinterpreted. Confucius took the old wisdom off in a radically new direction. There had been a tendency in the old to focus on the heavenly, otherworldly dimension.
- Confucius turned his attention to this world and his teachings became responses to practical human and communal questions. His view was that you can't serve the spirits unless you have learned to serve human beings here and now. Confucianism was this-worldly and about integrity, social and communal integrity in the here and now.



- The teachings of Confucius were collected in the Analects, gathered together long after his death by his followers. They are believed by scholars to be a reliable source of wisdom. The Analects are the most important book in the long history of China and have been an essential source of reference for scholars, rulers and political figures in the last 2500 years.
- For centuries you had to pass rigorous state examinations in Confucian thought to gain admission to the civil service. Confucian studies were core to every child's education. The voice of Confucius has been a source of authority for the Chinese, for successive governments except during the era of Mao Zedong. The present government has drawn on the social and political wisdom of the Analects. As the Chinese people come to terms with their place in the emerging world order, they are recovering the tradition and reimagining Confucianism.
- The most important ethical value in Confucianism is *REN* which means humanness, humanity. *REN* has a double meaning. It means a human being. It also means and refers to human relations, co-humanity or humanity together. *REN* is all the good things that happen, the good when people relate and meet. It is about the relational good and carries a sense of benevolence. *REN* is respect for the self and the other, the sense of the dignity of all human life. It is about welcoming the stranger.
- Our primary identity is human, humans together and being human, humane, welcoming and generous in our relationships. In a sense *REN* is the common good and the power of the Way. Way is the way of life, of relating, living together in mutual commitment, reciprocity, living towards each other as in a dance, movement towards each other and in relationships. The Way, Confucius believed, enabled rulers to rule without force. He rejected the belief and practice that might is right. *REN* is more effective than violence and war.
- Confucius applied *REN* to political life. In political life you behave as though you were in the presence of an important guest. You deal with common people as though you were offering an important sacrifice. Power relations are not about domination, power over, exploitation, divide and rule. There is a sacred trust in relation to others, governance and the organisation of society. Confucius is believed to be the first to articulate the Golden Rule: "Do not do to others what you would not like yourselves". The Golden Rule of Confucius has become the universal value and ethic for relationships at all levels of a society.



- *REN* is core whether one is handling the affairs of state or the affairs of family. Confucius saw the ego principle as the source of human pettiness and cruelty. “Confucius was asking people to trust in the power of enhanced humanity instead of coercion.” (Karen Armstrong, *The Great Transformation*, 2006, p210). *REN* was about countering pride, resentment and the desire to dominate others. For Confucius it was a lifelong struggle but the ethical pathway to travel was itself the transcendent experience.
- Much of this may seem very human-centred or anthropocentric. Like other philosophies of life, wisdom traditions and world religions there is a growing consciousness of eco challenges. Our anthropocentrism has been largely responsible for eco and environmental destruction bringing us to the brink of catastrophe. Confucian practitioners are having to reinterpret Confucian wisdom ethics. They realise that for too long we have been concerned with exclusive humanism and now there is a focus on inclusive humanism in which the human is not the centre of the world. It is humans and things in the world that are the centre. The defining spirit of inclusive humanism is the will for harmony.
- The will for power, so characteristic of the human, is transformed into a spirit of friendly love and support. Exclusive humanism is about domination of others, the land and territorial rights. Inclusive humanism is for the harmony and interrelationship of everything for the good of all life. Confucianists now speak of ethics as ethics of the cosmos and an ethics of creative change of the cosmos. (Tucker and Berthrong, *Confucianism and Ecology*, 1998, p216).
- Confucian ethics belong to the public place. They are an ethic of social and eco responsibility. They are essentially humanistic, now also bio-centric, relational, humane, and hospitable to others and the environment and embracing the community of life. Confucius in his time put human and humane ethics at the heart of Chinese social, political and cultural life. The ethics are now cosmic ethics. We can draw on the ethical wisdom of Confucianism in our interdependent world. To also understand the role and mind of China in the emerging world order, we will need to dialogue with and understand Confucianism.



Group Discussion:

1. Confucius was a traditionalist and an innovator. Bringing to life the old in new ways and applying new insights to the present. Can we learn from this and how do we reinterpret traditional values for a new time?
2. The most important ethical value in Confucianism is *REN*, being human, humans together, being humane, welcoming and generous in relationships. How might *REN* apply to our community and political relationships?



Session 3 – Input 2

The Buddha

- Buddha means an Enlightened or Awakened One and the most famous Buddha is Siddhartha Gotama (Gautama), the founder of Buddhism.
- Gotama lived about two and a half thousand years ago. It was a time when the Persian Empire ruled the Mediterranean world, Jewish exiles returned to their homeland from Babylon to rebuild Jerusalem, Confucius was reforming the religious traditions of China, and shortly after Gotama's death, Socrates was born in Athens. Like other luminaries in the Axial Age, Gotama contributed to the transformation of human understanding, ethical thinking and practice.
- What do we know about Gotama from the Buddhist scriptures? He was born around 560BCE in the republic of Sakka, near the foothills of the Himalayas in present day Nepal. He was from a prosperous family, his father was a clan leader.
- A few days after the birth of his son, Gotama, aged twenty-nine, experienced an existential crisis, which resulted in his decision to leave his wife and son in the care of his parents and put on the yellow robe of the ascetic in order to seek "the holy life". (Karen Armstrong, *The Great Transformation: The World in the Time of Buddha, Socrates, Confucius and Jeremiah*, 2007 edition, p 274). He travelled south and passed through neighbouring states, until he arrived in the northern region of India. But what was Gotama searching for?
- The doctrine of reincarnation had become widely accepted by the sixth century in India. The belief was that a man or woman would be reborn after death into a new state that would be determined by the quality of their actions in their present life, their *karma*. Bad *karma* would mean being reborn as a slave, animal or plant; good *karma* would ensure a better existence next time, perhaps even as a king or god. But even a god was caught in the endless cycle of rebirth and death known as *samsara*.
- The prospect of living one life after another and enduring sickness and suffering, and growing old and dying in an endless cycle, filled Gotama and others with horror. Indian sages of Gotama's day believed that an escape from this cycle into *nirvana*, understood as end to suffering in life, and an end to life at death, was possible.
- Gotama left his family convinced he would discover the way and in the process save his family from inevitable suffering without end. The type of spiritual crisis Gotama experienced appears to have been widespread in his day as people sought a new religious solution not provided by the traditional religions.



- This was a time when the population in the northern part of India saw and experienced great changes. New cities emerged along with a new urban class made up of merchants, business men and bankers. The rural way of life was being transformed by new iron-age technologies. The plain around the river Ganges became the centre of Indian civilisation and six great cities grew in the area linked by trade routes that brought merchandise to and from distant lands. And the old republics began to be replaced by kingdoms with armies who professed allegiance to the king alone.
- Along with familiar ways of life, traditional values seemed to be crumbling, as kings backed by their armies could force their will upon the people. The crowded streets witnessed outbreaks of violence and there was a spirit of aggressiveness and competition, fuelled by greed, in the marketplaces. It is no surprise then that there was an unprecedented level of questioning about what it meant to live in the world and how to live one's life.
- After six years spent fruitlessly looking to others for answers to the problem of suffering and trying different recommended practices, Gotama decided to trust himself.
- While meditating on his life an early memory stirred of his father taking him to watch the ceremonial ploughing of the fields. He experienced again the deep sorrow he had felt as a child watching chicks in their nest falling victim to the plough. What surprised him was the feeling of deep joy that followed in the wake of his sorrow.
- Reflecting on this early experience, Gotama realised that it was one of spontaneous compassion. When he had allowed the pain of creatures to pierce his heart and fill him with selfless empathy, he had experienced the pure joy of spiritual release. Was this an intimation of the way to liberation? (Ibid., p 277).
- Gotama came to a number of realisations:
 - The external world is constantly changing. Everything changes, even what appears solid and unchanging: mountains crumble, seas dry up and stars burn out.
 - We are constantly changing too – our material form, our sensations, our mind, our consciousness, our character, are all in perpetual flux. Health and happiness are only temporary.
 - Suffering is a result of our attachment to the people and things we crave and cling to, under the mistaken view they will last forever, but nothing does.
 - All we can know for sure is how we experience the world. As our minds determine which kind of experiences we have, controlling our minds will likely hold the key to the problem of suffering.



- Using mindfulness as a yogi technique, Gotama began practicing the art of letting go: of self-obsession, of attachment to people and material things, and of negative and positive emotions that were a distraction from living with purpose and inner freedom. Only thus, he believed, would he be equipped to face the ups and downs of life with equanimity and free himself of desire and suffering.
- We are told that one night aged thirty-five, he came to Bodh Gaya and sat underneath a tree. He had been practising mindfulness for some time and had realised that it was not enough to practice the avoidance of violence. He must behave gently and kindly to everything and everybody, and cultivate thoughts of loving-kindness to counter any feelings of ill-will.
- He developed the practice of beginning each day in meditation, evoking the emotion of love and directing it to the four corners of the world, not omitting a single living thing – plant, animal, friend or foe – from this benevolence. And he spent time nurturing feelings of compassion – opening himself to the suffering and pain in the world. He learned also to rejoice at the happiness of others. (Ibid., p 279).
- Sitting under the tree in an attitude of mindfulness, Gotama was attuned to the love and compassion within him and around him. In this state of preparedness he experienced *nirvana*. He does not describe this instance of awakening, as some experiences lie beyond the ability of language to describe.
- Gotama's enlightenment was not bestowed through communion with a superior external force, an eternal God, but through his own efforts. What he does affirm is that his enlightenment was born of compassion, the desire to free all beings from suffering, even those who wished to harm him or who considered him an enemy. (Ibid., p 281).
- What his story demonstrates is that “a Buddha was not only one who achieved his own salvation, but one who could still sympathise with the pain of others”. (Ibid., p 283).
- As Buddha, or awakened one, Gotama found he had a new mission, to share what he had experienced. According to accounts of his life the Buddha is reported to have said of his mission: “One thing and one thing only do I teach, suffering and how to end suffering” (*Majjhima Nikaya* 1. 140). He wanted to assure others that they too had the raw material to achieve liberation from *samsara*.



Session 3 – Input 2

The Buddha

- His profound empathy for others' suffering drove him on, and this brought him a new realisation that to live morally was to live for others. He spent the next forty-five years of his life trampling tirelessly through the cities and towns of the Ganges plain, bringing his teachings to whoever wanted to listen.
- The Buddha revolutionised ethics. People could no longer blame an external force like a god for how they lived, instead they were entirely responsible for their own moral condition.
- He challenged people to make up their own minds on questions of morality, by looking into their hearts rather than expecting other people to tell them the answers. He advised people to follow what other traditions have called the Golden Rule indicating that “Hatred does not cease by hatred but only by love; this is the eternal rule”. (Siddhartha Gautama, *The Dhammapada: The Sayings of the Buddha*). He shared that happiness consisted in cultivating benevolence, kindness and generosity toward others.
- The Buddha's teachings flourished in India and then spread to Sri Lanka, China, Korea, Japan, Tibet and Southeast Asia. As it spread Buddhism has cross pollinated with other cultures in numerous ways. But at its heart the Buddha's message remains the same. That whilst change is inevitable we all have the power to direct that change. His greatest gift is the affirmation that compassion, empathy and knowing who we truly are helps us discover the good within us and live for the common good.



1. What can we in the West learn from the wisdom of the Buddha about living ethically?
2. How does the practice of mindfulness further the common good?

Session 4: Global Wisdom Ethics: Indigenous Perspectives

Session Outline

1	Input 1 – Beyond Anthropocentrism to Biocentrism by Johnston McMaster		20 mins
2	Group Discussion		20 mins
3	Feedback		15 mins
4	Input 2 – Indigenous Perspectives by Cathy Higgins		20 mins
5	Plenary Discussion		15 mins



- We live in a human dominated, human-centred world and we need a radical transformation of consciousness if the Earth is to survive. Anthropocentrism is the word for this human-centredness and domination of everything. It also suggests that only humans have value, the rest of life has no value in itself but only as it serves our human needs. We are coming to realise that anthropocentrism is not only destructive of the Earth but destructive of ourselves. Biocentrism is where the transformation of consciousness needs to lead us. Bio is life and we need to be life-centred rather than human-centred.
- All of life and its diverse forms have intrinsic value and not just humans. We are not outside or above nature. We are nature. We are the environment, part of the web of life, of interdependent and interrelated life in all its unity and diversity. So we need to move from anthropocentrism to biocentrism, from being egocentric to being eco-centric. It is a huge transformation of the human consciousness, and also the transformation of our human systems, above all of how we humans have constructed power and our structures and arrangements of power. At heart we are dealing with an ideology of domination.
- We are Europeans, part of the history or story of European imperialism, European expansionism, and Europe's domination of the world since the fifteenth century. Europeans are all over the world and have been for the last five hundred years. An analogy from bee-keeping has been used. Bees swarm. Europeans have swarmed again and again. We have swarmed biologically in Europe and through ecological imperialism.
- We swarmed as population. We worry today about a growing world population and forget our European story. From 1840-1930 Europe's population grew from 194 million to 463 million. That was double the rate of the rest of the world. During that time Europeans swarmed all over the world. Between 1820 and 1930 over fifty million Europeans migrated and set up neo-Europes in the rest of the world. One fifth of Europe's population moved out and there has not been a movement of people like that since then. Numbers of migrants coming into Europe since the collapse of the European imperial powers since the 1950s are paltry by comparison. And we want to close our borders and keep people out, we Europeans who swarmed over the planet and as white people took thirty million square kilometres of land around the globe. (Larry L Rasmussen, *Earth Community, Earth Ethics*, 1996, p45).
- The swarming not only brought diseases to indigenous peoples, killing them off, it took land, destroyed land. Since 1450 agricultural systems in the poorer, conquered regions have genetically collapsed. What does that mean for the Earth and its peoples?



- This is what we now call ecological imperialism. It brought about the near extinction of the indigenous peoples of America, wiped out cultures and civilizations in Latin America and brought to extinction the peoples of Greater Antilles and Tasmania.
- As Europeans we have over the last five hundred years been responsible for biological expansion and imperial expansion, as well as cultural expansion and cultural imperialism. As Europeans we have had a deeply embedded myth of cultural superiority also described as “predatory expansive agriculture and parasitic resource use”. (Rasmussen, *Ibid*, p51). We hold the myth of exceptionalism, manifest destiny, by divine appointment.
- Now we have an Earth crisis, and are not sure what a common good might look like. Somehow we need to create an Earth community with Earth ethics and to do that we will need to abandon anthropocentrism and embrace and become part of biocentrism, a life-centred Earth view and praxis.
- We need to learn from the indigenous peoples whose lands we destroyed, resources we pillaged, whose existence we almost wiped out, in some cases did, and in relation to whom we thought we were culturally, humanly and spiritually superior. Some of them came to the big summit in Glasgow 2021 and brought their stories of eco destruction and their indigenous perspectives and life-centred, Earth ethics. Did we listen?
- As we seriously critique anthropocentrism and open ourselves to a revolutionising of consciousness and develop a life-consciousness, an Earth consciousness, we learn from the people we conquered and dominated, exploited and culturally rubbished. The indigenous traditions underline the importance of respecting Mother Earth. We are in relationship to all other creatures and life forms. Animals, plants, living water, air, stones, rocks, soil, together we share a common home. The indigenous traditions see ourselves in the context of all our relations.
- Our actions have implications, what we do or decide is for seven generations into the future. “Aboriginal spirituality teaches that you look after what the Creator has given you and those things will look after you. It’s a symbiotic relationship”. (Mark Hathaway and Leonardo Boff, *The Tao of Liberation: Exploring the Ecology of Liberation*, 2009, p338). All of life is in relationship, an intimate Web of relationships. Indigenous traditions have always got that and know that.



- President Joe Biden appointed the first Native American Cabinet Secretary in US history. Deb Haaland has a brief for public lands. Her Native American spirituality is, like the Aborigines and Maoris, rooted in nature.
- Chief Seattle famously said:

Every part of this earth is sacred to my people. Every shining pine needle, every sandy shore, every mist in the dark woods, every clearing and humming insect is holy in the memory and experience of my people...We are part of the earth and it is part of us. The perfumed flowers are our sisters; the deer, the horse, the great eagle, these are our brothers. The rocky crests, the juices of the meadows, the body heat of the pony, and man (sic) - all belong to the same family...What is man without the beasts. If all the beasts were gone, men would die from a great loneliness of spirit. For whatever happens to the beasts, soon happens to man. All things are connected. (From Joel Beversluis, (ed.) *Source Book of the World Religions: An Interfaith Guide to Religion and Spirituality*, 2000 ed., p288).
- Kinship and interconnectedness are at the heart of indigenous wisdom traditions, including the early Irish. All things are connected and these wisdom traditions are ways of life with the Earth.
- Perhaps that revolution in consciousness is under way as we move from an ideology of domination to a realisation that we humans do not stand apart from the greater web of life. We need to put aside this imperialistic quest to dominate other species and forms of life and other humans. We do not have the right as humans to destroy biodiversity in order to accumulate capital and riches, nor to produce unnecessary luxuries. (Hathaway and Boff, op cit., p65).
- Instead of anthropocentrism we move into a biocentric equality where everything that lives and every ecosystem has an intrinsic right to existence not dependent on its usefulness to humanity. We learn that from the indigenous wisdom traditions. It might lead to a common good.



Group Discussion:

1. Where has anthropocentrism brought us and how can we move from anthropocentrism to biocentrism? (Life-centred rather than human-centred).
2. Kinship and interconnectedness are at the heart of indigenous traditions, including the early Irish. What would it mean to learn from these wisdom traditions?



An African Indigenous Perspective:

- Africa was divided up and colonised by European powers in the late nineteenth century. Teresia Hinga, from the Gikuyu people in Kenya, recalls the pre-colonial relationship between people and land. Their belief was that Ngai (God), creator of the world, allotted land to each people sufficient for the maintenance of life. People were responsible to God for the care of the portion they farmed. Women were involved in community decision-making and engaged in agricultural work.
- With colonisation, the land was appropriated by European powers leaving African people landless and forced to become low-paid labourers on plots they had tilled for generations. Colonial powers viewed the land and African people as resources to be used and abused for financial gain. Cash crops not native to the county were grown to supply a Western market, depleting the soil and severing the relationship between people and land that had been essential for survival. The colonial view of women as inferior and subordinate meant women were treated as valueless and dispensable, like the land.
- In an attempt to challenge this destructive worldview, Wangari Maathai, an indigenous woman from Kenya and biological scientist, founded the Green Belt Movement in 1977. Maathai recognised colonialism's destructive impact on the environment had left rural women minimal access to clean drinking water and nutritious food to feed families, as well as limited resources for cooking and heating. She began by planting a tree nursery near her home and encouraged other rural women to do the same.
- As well as firewood and building materials, along with fruit, the reforestation project "... causes the return of animals and birds, protects and restores eroded soils, and cleans water sources". (Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Integrating Ecofeminism, Globalization and World Religions*, 2004, p 103).
- Maathai has encouraged women to reclaim ancestral values and traditions based on care for the earth and communal solidarity. Importantly, her movement has shone a light on women's abilities to restore the land, provide for their families and give leadership in their community. What-is-more, the movement's influence has spread with the development of training programmes that Maathai and other members of the Green Belt Movement have taught in other African countries.



- The Movement has sought to inculcate four core values that have their roots in the African indigenous worldview. (Teresia M. Hinga, “The Hummingbird Spirit and Care of our Common Home”, in *Ecological Solidarities: Mobilizing Faith and Justice for an Entangled World*, ed. by Krista E. Hughes et al, 2019, p 142). Teresia Hinga lists these core values:
 - love for the environment;
 - gratitude and respect for the Earth’s resources;
 - self-empowerment and self-betterment; and
 - the spirit of service and volunteerism.
- These values reflect an awareness of our interconnectedness as humans with the earth, as well as our responsibility for all living things. Maathai began by planting one tree at a time and she inspired others to imitate her. Over forty years later and some fifty million trees have been planted in Kenya, and thousands of locally controlled tree nurseries have been established. And the work continues!

An Indian Indigenous Perspective:

- Indian women have turned also to indigenous practices and knowledge to implement a sustainable agricultural system. Traditionally women played a major role in subsistence agriculture and understood the intricate relationships between people, animals and the land.
- Before women were side-lined by Western powers as unproductive and standing in the way of progress, they had: “...foraged in the forests for food, medicines, fodder for animals, fuels, and mulch for fields in ways that sustained, rather than destroyed the forests themselves... Through maintaining the forests and green cover on the fields and along waterways, they [had] promoted the renewal of the groundwater. Through knowledge of properties of woods and plants, they [had] provided clean water for their families. (Ruether, *Integrating Ecofeminism*, pp 105-106).
- With post-colonialism what became known as the ‘Green Revolution’ was imposed on farmers in India by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund as a condition for receiving financial aid.



- Seeds produced in Western laboratories replaced local seeds with the promise that they would increase crop size and quantity, thus improving the yield. The fact that the seeds were sterile and did not reproduce, so that farmers had to purchase more seeds from the company each year, was conveniently overlooked. As was the fact that large amounts of chemical pesticides, also produced by Western manufacturers, would be needed, alongside large quantities of water, to grow the seeds. The only beneficiaries in this scheme were Western industries who charged high prices for their products.
- This 'Green' innovation was not only costly but also poisoned the soil and depleted the water supply. The solution to the water problem suggested by the World Bank and IMF was creation of large dams. Valleys were identified as locations and those living in these areas displaced, without compensation and adequate resettlement.
- There are numerous indigenous grassroots groups resisting the destruction of their land and its natural resources. The Chipko women's movement was created in 1977 by Gaura Devi to save the remaining forests and plant trees. These women recognise the importance of forests for maintaining water sources like springs and waterfalls. This is a preferable solution to the displacement of peoples to build dams.
- The Chipko women believe that the way forward involves a turning back to recover traditional sustainable agricultural practices. They realise that:
- "Only a society based on a subsistence perspective can afford to live in peace with nature, and uphold peace between nations, generations and men and women, because it does not base its concept of a good life on the exploitation and domination of nature and other people". (Ibid., p 322).
- The challenge implicit in this indigenous perspective encourages a rethink of what we understand by the 'good' life in the global North. Do we think in collective terms about what will be good for all life forms, or individualistically, focusing on what is good for me? Do we see a connection between living ethically and living the good life?



Latin American Indigenous Perspective

- There is a tradition of shamans playing a major role of resisting those who threaten the connections between humans and the more-than-human-world in the Americas. Stories are recounted of uprisings dating back to the European conquest at the end of the 14th century. These Native American movements of resistance have been based on an ethic to protect “all our relatives”, which includes the nonhuman kin of rivers, mountains, animals and spirits of the land. (Amitav Ghosh, *The Nutmeg’s Curse: Parables for a Planet in Crisis*, 2021, p 237).
- Indigenous lands occupy one-fifth of the Brazilian Amazon – five times the area that is under government protection in parks. The lands protected by these tribes are currently the most important barrier to global warming. They store nearly half of the planet’s forest carbon, and every year absorb five per cent of global carbon dioxide emissions. The Amazon forests also contain eighty per cent of our planet’s biodiversity.
- The fight to protect the Earth continues and shamans are once again leading the resistance. This time the battleground is the law courts with multinational companies with interests in mining, lumber and oil.
- In 2007, the UN General Assembly adopted the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which recognised their right to Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) for any activity that affects ancestral lands.
- An example of an Indigenous leader who made use of this law was Sabino Gualinga, who died recently aged one hundred and three. He spent his entire life in the Amazon. A shaman from the Kichwa nation of Sarayaku in Ecuador’s Amazon Rainforest, he taught his community that the forest is alive, which includes the flora, fauna and protective beings that look after all elements of the forest and live among humans. (Kimberley Brown, “[Sabino Gualinga, Amazon shaman and defender of the ‘living forest,’ passes away](https://news.mongabay.com/)”, accessed online <https://news.mongabay.com/>).
- Gualinga is best known for his testimony before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in Costa Rica in 2011, in the trial of Sarayaku vs. Ecuador. From the witness stand, Gualinga, then ninety-two years old, and dressed in his colourful feathered headdress, testified against the state. He explained to a room full of lawyers and government representatives how oil exploration near Sarayaku had harmed the spirituality and harmony of the community. Blasts from the seismic testing had also displaced the nearby spiritual beings.



- He referred to Sarayaku territory not only as a piece of land important for the Kichwa way of life, like hunting and fishing, but rather as part of a living forest, with which the Kichwa have a strong spiritual relationship.
- The following year, the court ruled in favour of Sarayaku, repeatedly citing Gualinga's testimony as a basis for their decision. They confirmed that the government of Ecuador had violated the Sarayaku's rights by permitting an energy company to prospect for oil on their land without prior notification.
- Following their legal victory, the community of Sarayaku decided to put their worldview into writing, for the rest of the world, particularly scientists and policymakers, to recognise the cosmivision that the forest is alive. In 2018, the community launched a website explaining this framework, which they call "Living Forest" demanding that their territory be recognised as sacred.
- There is growing international recognition of the stewardship role of indigenous peoples and of the important contributions they make to climate change mitigation and biodiversity in the territories they live in.
- Grassroots campaigns, often led by women, and focused on the international rights of indigenous peoples to free, prior, and informed consent before extractive industries drill and mine their lands are having an impact.
- Currently only a fraction of one per cent of all climate funding makes it to Indigenous communities on the frontlines of the climate battle. Given the importance of their resistance efforts they need to be adequately resourced.
- We are challenged by the indigenous cultures to live sustainably in accordance with a global life ethic that is eco-centred. We need a new global economic and political order that is ethically based and informed by the learnings and values inherent in indigenous cultures if we hope to live sustainable lives in a renewed creation.



1. What struck you most about the values that underpin Indigenous Cultures?
2. How do these values translate into actions?

Session 5: Crisis of Values: A World Order Falling Apart

Session Outline

1	Input 1 – Populism, Polarisation and Post-Truth by Johnston McMaster		20 mins
2	Group Discussion		20 mins
3	Feedback		15 mins
4	Input 2 – Vladimir Putin and Narendra Modi by Cathy Higgins		20 mins
5	Plenary Discussion		15 mins



- A core concern and focus from the second phase of the Common Good conversations was the need for values. Somehow we were saying that we need to recover values and put values at the heart of politics, economics, environment and our eco-human community. Between December 2021 and February 2022 the world had changed and the conversational context had changed. Perhaps to use a worn out line from W B Yeats, things had ‘changed utterly’.
- Putin had launched into all-out war against Ukraine, an illegal and immoral war, and the world order was thrown into flux and chaos. The Russian war on Ukraine came on top of everything else: Covid, Brexit, the Presidency and legacy of Donald Trump.
- We live in the age of the strongman in politics with democracy threatened around the world by this rise in authoritarianism, autocracy and new forms of fascism. We continue to head towards environmental catastrophe, brutal famine, starvation and poverty in the Horn of Africa, unresolved and forgotten regions of violent conflict, growing displacement of people and a refugee crisis and forced migration. Underlying these multiple crises is a crisis of values.
- What are the values needed for a common good? In this programme we are trying to explore ethical values and negotiate a value-based and ethical foundation for a new local and global house in which to live.
- We are living in a 3P era. That is the description of Moises Naim, a former trade minister in the government of Venezuela and currently an international scholar at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. He writes about how autocrats are reinventing politics for the twenty-first century. These people are described as 3P autocratic, “...political leaders who reach power through a reasonable democratic election and then set out to dismantle the checks on executive power through populism, polarisation, and post-truth”. (Moises Naim, *The Revenge of Power*, 2022, p xv).
- These are people who keep up democratic appearances while furtively undermining democracy. They do it “behind walls of secrecy, bureaucratic obfuscation, pseudo legal subterfuge, manipulation of public opinion, and the repression of critics and adversaries”. (Ibid, p xv).
- Who are the 3P autocrats, immediate past and present? Donald Trump, Venezuela’s Hugo Chavez, Hungary’s Viktor Orban, the Philippines Rodriguez Duterte, India’s Nirendra Modi, Brazil’s Jair Bolsonaro, Turkey’s Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and El Salvador’s Nayib Bukele. And there are others and Naim includes in his critical book Boris Johnson. All of them work through populism, polarisation and post-truth.



- Of the 3Ps we can recognise populism. At its simplest it is about appealing to popular opinion and opposing the real or imagined corrupt elite. Trump kept accusing the media of fake news. But populism is “a strategy for gaining and wielding power”. (Op. cit., pxvi).
- So the populist leader attacks the media, undermines the checks and balances, denigrates the experts, those who deal in facts and science, and sets up as the Messiah delivering us from all the woes. We know that as ‘getting Brexit done’ or producing an ‘oven ready Brexit’, getting rid of those dominating and terrible Eurocrats and taking back control.
- Having established the populist frame, then comes polarisation through the relentless demonisation of opponents. It is a divide and rule strategy, pitting political opponents against each other, and even “family members, friends, colleagues, and neighbours”. (Op. cit. pxviii).
- This can be achieved through issues of race, religion, regional rivalries, historic grievances, economic inequality, social injustice and language. (Op. cit., pxviii). Not just the autocrats but politicians have always used identity as a wedge or way to recruit followers and mobilise people.
- Northern Ireland was built and continues on the basis of identity and political polarisation. In the 3P era it has exploded around the world as a strategy. As polarisation intensifies political rivals become enemies and there is no effort to seek any kind of accommodation, or even a minimal arrangement of governance.
- Along with populism and polarisation we then have the third P, post-truth. English journalist Peter Osborne has written a book, *The Assault on Truth: Boris Johnson, Donald Trump and the Emergence of a New Moral Barbarism*, 2021. His first chapter is entitled “An Introduction to Political Lying”. He is not saying that all politicians are liars. Saying that all politicians are liars is a gift to those who are because the habitual liars are only too happy to exploit the breakdown of honour and integrity, (Osborne, *Ibid*, p8).
- Osborne shows in his second chapter that the 2019 British General Election was carried out on the basis of one lie after another. For example, Boris Johnson, the Prime Minister went on Sky News and he and his Conservative colleagues repeated it frequently that they were building forty hospitals. It was a lie. The government had only allocated money for six hospitals and that was money not for new builds but only for up- grades.



- Johnson put out a statement that Jeremy Corbyn, then Labour leader, had made a speech calling for the abolition of British armed forces. It was a lie. The Labour manifesto for that election said nothing about abolishing the armed forces but rather committed to spending two per cent of GDP on the armed forces. Sky News nor anyone else ever challenged or corrected the Prime Minister's false statements. This was the media letting "Johnson get away unchallenged with lies, falsehoods and fabrication". (Osborne, op.cit. pp17-18, including footnote p18).
- We are in an era of post-truth politics. Truth didn't matter to Donald Trump. "In Xi Jinping's China or Putin's Russia it's a crime not to lie." (Osborne, op.cit. p9). With autocrats and strongman politics and 3P practitioners, Peter Osborne warns of the danger of all of this lying. "If history teaches one lesson it is this: we cannot enjoy freedom without truth, just as we cannot speak truth without freedom. And if we want to keep our freedoms, we can't let liars and cheats get away with it." (Osborne, op.cit. p9).
- Post-truth is about more than lying, even habitual lying. We have always had political liars, again not all politicians, but we have always had political liars for whom truth didn't matter. What is new, Moises Naim claims, is that post-truth goes deeper than lying. Post-truth denies the existence of a verifiable independent reality. "Post-truth is not chiefly about getting lies accepted as truths but about muddying the waters to the point where it is difficult to discern the difference between truth and falsehood in the first place." (Naim, op.cit. pxix).
- Post-truth is about muddying the waters so that we can't tell the difference between truth and falsehood. It is about putting out misinformation deliberately. The word post-truth appeared in the Oxford dictionaries in 2016 and they only include new words in dictionaries because of frequent usage.
- Post-truth became used frequently during the 2016 EU referendum in the UK and in the presidential election in the United States. Because of those two events, post-truth became in 2016 the 'word of the year'. The phrase being used in 2016 was 'post-truth politics'. (Naim, op.cit. pxix).
- And post-truth politics have not gone away but are a global reality and uncomfortably close to home in Northern Ireland. We live in a world where there may no longer be any shared objective standards for truth. We live in the 3P era of populism, polarisation and post-truth, an intentional strategy being used in the pursuit and maintaining of power, even to stay in power for life.



- It might appear to have all the appearances of democracy, democratically elected, but it fundamentally undermines democracy, by-passes constitutional principles or any institutional restraint.
- How did we get to this point? How have we ended up with post-truth politics? How have we so much lying, muddying of the waters and the deliberate putting out there of misinformation? Truth and integrity are no longer values in much of our political and public life. Perhaps it is being challenged by so much fact-checking. Fact-checking is happening with some frequency now. Post-truth has become a culture though.
- How can we recover the values of truth and integrity? What would truth and integrity look like in our public life? The battle for those values is the battle for democracy and how much are we prepared for that? Modern representative democracy was born out of revolutionary courage and creativity. Truth, freedom and equality were values at the heart of that courage and creativity. This is our battle now and “If we fail, we’ll bequeath our children and grandchildren a world that gradually drifts away from the principles of freedom and self-government that ought to be their birth right. And so, win the war we must”. (Naim, op.cit. p266).



Group Discussion:

1. What do we make of the three Ps, populism, polarisation and post-truth?
2. How can we recover the values of truth and integrity? What would truth and integrity look like in our public life?



a. Vladimir Putin

- Vladimir Putin came to power in Russia on thirty-first December 1999, just as the new millennium was dawning. He seemed, to some in the West, a reliable pair of hands to strengthen relations with Western powers. The then, US President, Bill Clinton, in June 2000, described Putin as “fully capable of building a prosperous, strong Russia, while preserving freedom and pluralism and the rule of law”. (Gideon Rachman, *The Age of the Strong-Man: How the Cult of the Leader Threatens Democracy around the World*, 2022, p 4).
- It was not until 2007, when Putin was well into his second term as president of Russia that his seeming good will towards Western powers, and America in particular, began to be questioned. In a speech Putin gave at a security conference in Munich, which was attended by heads of state and government from around the world, he accused the US of using unconstrained military force in international relations and of “plunging the world into an abyss of conflicts”. (Ibid., p 31).
- Putin may have had the Iraq War in mind, a protracted armed conflict from 2003 to 2011 that began with the invasion of Iraq by the United States-led coalition that overthrew the Iraqi government of Saddam Hussein. Putin then warned those present that he would resist a US world order.
- In August 2008 Putin falsely accused Georgia of committing genocide and aggression against South Ossetia. Why was Putin interfering in Georgia’s political affairs? We need to turn to history for context.
- In 1918, following the collapse of the tsarist Russian Empire and the rise of the Soviet regime, the Ossetian territory was divided into North and South Ossetia. (J. Colarusso and F. Tlisova, “Ossetians” accessed online <https://www.encyclopedia.com/humanities/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/ossetians>).
- North Ossetia was defined as part of the Russian state, while South Ossetia was considered to be part of Georgia, one of the republics of the Soviet Union from its second occupation (by Russia) in 1921 until its independence in 1991. After gaining independence Georgia entered into negotiations with NATO in 1994 with a view to joining. (Ibid).
- It took until the Bucharest Summit in April 2008 before Georgia received a firm commitment from NATO that its application to join was successful. This move was backed by the United States, which has provided Georgia with financial assistance since 1991.



Session 5 – Input 2

Vladimir Putin and Narendra Modi

- At the conclusion of the NATO Summit in Bucharest, Putin, who had been in attendance, responded that NATO's enlargement toward Russia would be taken as a direct threat in Russia. Four months later Russia was at war with Georgia on the basis that it was supporting the South Ossetian's right for independence from Georgia. Georgia and Russia signed a French-brokered cease-fire that called for the withdrawal of Russian forces, but tensions continued and South Ossetia remains a contested area. (Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "South Ossetia". *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed online <https://www.britannica.com/place/South-Ossetia>).
- The war has hindered Georgia's prospects of joining NATO for the foreseeable future, consequently Russia achieved its real aim using military force. Further, Western powers not only looked the other way but the US, by then under the new Obama administration, called for a reset in relations with Russia.
- In 2013 Putin backed Obama and the American Government's intervention in Syria to persuade the Assad regime to give up its chemical weapons after it gassed to death over a thousand people engaged in peaceful protesting against the oppressive regime. At the same time Putin critiqued Obama's *Address to the Nation* speech in which he defended an American air strike against Assad if he refused to comply.
- Obama argued that American determination to act when atrocities were carried out across the world was what made America different and exceptional. Putin stated:

It is extremely dangerous to encourage people to see themselves as exceptional, whatever the motivation. There are big countries and small countries, rich and poor, those with long democratic traditions and those still finding their way to democracy. Their policies differ, too. We are all different, but when we ask for the Lord's blessing, we must not forget that God created us equal. (Vladimir V. Putin, "A Plea for Caution from Russia", *New York Times*, September 11, 2013. Accessed online <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/12/opinion/putin-plea-for-caution-from-russia-on-syria.html>).
- Walter Brueggemann commenting on Putin's statement indicates Putin was correct to challenge America's sense of self-importance and self-righteousness underpinned by a sense of God-given entitlement. As was Putin's reminder that all kinds of nation-states have a legitimacy and an equal claim as God's creatures. (Walter Brueggemann, *Tenacious Solidarity: Biblical Provocations on Race, Religion, Climate and the Economy*, 2018, p 142).



Session 5 – Input 2

Vladimir Putin and Narendra Modi

- However, some five months later Putin ignored his own counsel and orchestrated an invasion of Crimea, internationally recognised as part of Ukraine. Putin's denial that Russia was involved in the Crimean invasion in 2014, followed by the farce of a referendum under the watchful eyes of heavily armed Russian soldiers, which unsurprisingly suggested that ninety-nine percent of Crimeans wanted to join Russia, had all the hallmarks of cold war strategising. The truth did not matter, and in spite of Putin's fine sounding words about the legitimacy of nation-states, Russian military actions shamelessly made a mockery of democracy. (Moisés Naim, *The Revenge of Power*, p 220).
- As we know, Putin's assault on Ukraine continued and he sought to take control of the Donbass region in Eastern Ukraine in 2014. Fierce battles in 2014-2015 ended with one third of the regions' territory, its most urbanised part, occupied by two Russian proxy statelets, the self-described Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics.
- Between September 2014 and February 2015, Russia, Ukraine, France and Germany signed several iterations of the so-called Minsk agreements, which eventually stopped the forward movement of troops and reduced fighting significantly. But the agreements were never fully implemented as the Ukrainian government viewed them as a means to reunite Ukraine, while the Kremlin believed they allowed for Russian aligned administration in Luhansk and Donetsk before reunification with Ukraine. (Joe Sommmmerlad, "Ukraine Crisis: What are the Minsk Agreements?" *The Independent*, 3 May 2022).
- The decision of the Russian government to recognise the independence of the two separatist republics on twenty-first February 2022 effectively put an end to discussions of Minsk implementation. Then three days later, Russia invaded Ukraine with full military force and the war continues.
- Thousands of people have been killed, an estimated 6.6 million people have been displaced and the numbers continue to rise. Ukraine and the world has changed irrevocably since the Russian regime dropped the last vestiges of democracy and embraced fully-fledged militarism.
- More recently Putin has used the threat of nuclear weapons against Western leaders supporting Ukraine. He continues to justify his actions as protecting Russian interests from the predatory West who through NATO are seeking to stem Russian power and influence. Yet Putin's own actions reveal a man corrupted by absolute power who is intent on redrawing the map of the world to fulfil his fantasy of resurrecting once more the 'Glorious Russian Empire' from the ashes of the collapsed USSR. He wants to make Russia great again. Does this sound familiar?



- A man of violence, Putin has shown that he has no compunction punishing anyone who tries to undermine him or stand in his way, including former friends and foes. Furthermore, he has rigged the political system to ensure he remains in power as leader of Russia until 2036. Putin's vaulting ambition is matched only by his complete lack of ethics and moral leadership.
- b. Narendra Modi:**
- Narendra Modi was elected Prime Minister of India's 1.4 billion people in 2014. Modi was quick to pin his true colours to the mast. In a speech to the Indian Parliament, shortly after his election, he made mention of Indian suffering at the hands of oppressors for 1,200 years, which he claimed had created a 'slave mentality'. (Rachman, p 75).
 - So how did he arrive at that calculation? Obviously he was going further back in history than the two hundred or so years of British imperialism that began in the mid-eighteenth century. In fact, Modi had in mind the various invasions by Arab Muslims into regions in India from the 8th century, where they took control and, in particular, the Mughal Empire that ruled most of the Indian subcontinent between 1526 and 1857(Ibid., pp 75-76).
 - Modi's ideological reading of Indian history to justify Hindu supremacy, on the basis only Hindus were real Indians, is an example of how notions of purity and an original race can create and ferment communal division. His play on nationalist sentiment was an appeal to the eighty per cent Hindu majority to think of themselves as the only legitimate grouping in India. His strategy to gain populist support by pitting Hindus over against their Muslim neighbours unfortunately has been effective and ensured his rise as a political leader. His leadership demonstrates the impact of religious nationalism on democratic values.
 - So what do we know of Modi and how did he end up a proponent of the Hindu right or Hindutva seeking to establish the hegemony of Hindus and Hinduism in India? Modi was born three years after India gained its independence from Britain into a lower caste family. But to understand his early influences we need to go back further before his birth to life in India under British colonialism. (Ibid., p 76).
 - The humiliation of colonisation inflicted deep wounds on the India psyche and fueled a determination among some to create a strong, proud and independent India. There were competing ideas on how to achieve an independent and united India.



Session 5 – Input 2

Vladimir Putin and Narendra Modi

- Keshav Baliram Hedgewar believed cooperation with Muslims would prove fatal to the project of re-establishing Hindi pride and independence. He established the RSS in 1925, a youth fascist social movement. Boys were lured to join using fun and games with a view over time to creating disciplined and obedient fighters. (Nussbaum, Martha C., *The Clash Within: Democracy, Religious Violence, And India's Future*, 2008, pp 155-156).
- When he was eight, Modi joined his local branch of the RSS and took an oath to “...always protect the purity of Hindu religion, and the purity of Hindu culture, for the supreme progress of the Hindu nation”. (Op. Cit., p 154). Like many other RSS members, Modi went on to join the BJP Hindu nationalist party, which assuaged RSS values. That was in 1987 when the BJP had only two Members of Parliament.
- Within ten years of Modi joining, the BJP grew in size and influence to become one of the largest parties in the Indian Parliament and Modi’s own career within the party was also fast-tracked.
- Modi played down his ultra nationalist credentials as a political leader and instead set about proving his entrepreneurial skills, courting the business community and growing the state’s economy. In 2014 Modi was elected Prime Minister. In 2015, President Obama praised Modi in a Time magazine article, indicating he was the tonic needed to help India achieve its potential. (Rachman, p 79).
- In his first few years as Prime Minister, Modi was careful not to publically make anti-Muslim statements, however he showed his support for those within his party who did by being photographed alongside them.
- Recognising the power of education and the media to further his party’s sectarian agenda, Modi had new textbooks written for schools reflecting the Hindu right ideology and he became an ally of a Hindu nationalist TV station, which used every opportunity to depict Muslims in a negative light and Hindus in a positive one. (Naim, *The Revenge of Power*, p 97).
- When Modi was re-elected as Prime Minister in 2019, one of his first directives was to order a citizenship registration in the State of Assam, which borders Bangladesh and whose population is majority Muslim Indians. The exercise identified two million Muslims without identity papers who were summarily denied citizenship and forced to leave India. This lack of registration papers is to be expected in a country where illiteracy is rife and bureaucracy is weak. (Rachman, p 82).



Session 5 – Input 2

Vladimir Putin and Narendra Modi

- Having piloted the scheme in Assam, Modi ordered that it be extended to the whole of India. At the same time detention camps were erected to contain those Muslims without the proper registration papers.
- Like Putin, Modi's pursuit of power has relied on populism, polarisation and a post truth narrative. Under his rule, democracy, freedom, justice, equality, compassion, neighbourliness and truth have been cast aside and violence, fear and hatred have spread in their demise. There is no common good in a world where ethics are sacrificed on the altar of populism and polarisation and truth on the altar of power.



1. What subverts democracy and what preserves it?
2. How can we hold those politicians accountable who sacrifice ethics on the altar of populism and polarisation and truth on the altar of power?

Session 6: Ethical Foundations for a Common Good World

Session Outline

1	Input 1 - Jewish Covenantal Society by Cathy Higgins		20 mins
2	Group Discussion		20 mins
3	Feedback		15 mins
4	Input 2 - Parliament of World Religions: Global Ethics by Johnston McMaster		20 mins
5	Plenary Discussion		15 mins



- Jews, Christians and Muslims share a commitment to the biblical covenant initiated by God with Abraham who is their common ancestor. Abraham also plays a hugely important role in other faith traditions: the Baha'i Faith, Yezidi, Druze, Samaritan and Rastafari. The covenant story between God and Abraham and his descendants is recounted in Genesis. Abraham is called by God to:

Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing ... and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. (Genesis 12: 1-3 NRVs).

- There are a number of covenant stories in the Bible, which affirm God's desire to be in covenantal relationship with all living things. In Genesis 9, God extends to Noah an unconditional commitment to life and moral law in the first universal covenant with the whole of creation. The oft repeated phrase "every living creature" underlines God's desire to preserve every species.

Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, "As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you..." (Genesis 9: 8-9 NRSV).

- The prophets, Amos, Isaiah and Micah, remind the Israelites that God is in relationship with other nations, even those peoples they view as enemies. For Yahweh did not only deliver them from imperial oppression but also rescued the Syrians and Philistines (Amos 9: 7).
- Isaiah goes a step further and affirms that Egypt and Assyria, imperial oppressors of Israel, are also God's chosen people (Isaiah 19: 24-25), Israel as a chosen people has no monopoly on that claim.
- Micah envisions a great procession of the nations to Jerusalem, all peoples on the way to peace, together; each walking in the name of their god. This is astonishing ecumenism that does not insist on the sovereignty of Yahweh (Micah 4: 5).
- The story of Jeremiah in the Hebrew Scriptures and the story of the Last Supper in the Christian Scriptures both speak in terms of a 'new covenant' relationship.

This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. (Jeremiah 31: 33).



Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood”. (Luke: 22: 19-20).

- ‘New’ does not mean replaced but renewed for a new time and context and in different circumstances. The renewal of the covenant holds out hope that God’s moral law will become inscribed in people’s wills and hearts.
- The Hollywood film, *The Ten Commandments*, starring Charlton Heston as Moses, popularised the covenant story in the Book of Exodus. Yahweh instructs Moses to say the following to the Israelites camped at the bottom of the mountain:

You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. (Exodus 19: 3-8, NRSV).

- The covenant is conditional, the “if” bases the covenant on Israel’s capacity to obey the Torah. Yahweh gives Moses the laws or Ten Commandments as a moral code to live by. The Book of Deuteronomy expands on what, in practice, these new laws look like as a common good charter for ordering society according to a neighbourly ethic and practice that curbs excessive greed and exploitation. The focus is on sustaining social relations of dignity, respect and security. The context for this social ethic is the memory of slavery in Egypt from which Yahweh liberated them. It is a complete rejection of Pharaoh’s predatory economic system based on slavery and violence.
- Let us consider some examples:
 - Debts owed by the poor are to be cancelled after 7 years, so that there is no permanent underclass. (Deut. 15: 1-18).
 - No interest is to be charged on loans to members of the community. (Deut. 23: 19-20).
 - Permanent hospitality is to be extended to runaway slaves. (Deut. 23: 15-16).
 - No collateral is to be required on loans made to poor people. (Deut. 24: 10-13).
 - No withholding of wages that are due to the poor. (Deut. 24: 14-15).
 - No injustice toward a resident alien or an orphan. (Deut. 24: 17-18).
 - And the economy is to make regular provision for the needy and marginalised. (Deut. 24: 19-22) (Walter Brueggemann, *Journey to the Common Good*, 2010, pp 39-40).



- The Book of Deuteronomy anticipates an economy subordinated to the common good and that practices a periodic and disciplined cancellation of debts for the poor. The belief is that in the covenant community no permanent underclass should exist.
- Jonathan Sacks, former Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of Britain and the Commonwealth, noted the impact of this covenantal relationship on the people: “It turns the Israelites from a fractious group of escaping slaves into...a nation, a body politic, a ‘civil society.’” (Jonathan Sacks, *The Home We Build Together: Recreating Society*, 2007, p 106).
- A covenant based society is value based and concerned with: justice, compassion, human dignity, the equitable distribution of wealth and the social inclusion of those without power. A covenantal society is guided by a neighbourly ethic that has the common good at its heart.
- The contrast in the Hebrew Scriptures is between the covenantal model that Yahweh offers and the imperial model represented by kingship, which is a social contract. The Book of Samuel in the Bible recounts the story of the birth of Israel as a kingdom, where the relationship between ruler and ruled creates the state of Israel. Jonathan Sacks helpfully compares the two very different models of society:

Social contract is about power and how it is to be handled within a political framework. Social covenant is about how people live together despite their differences. Social contract is about government. Social covenant is about coexistence. Social contract is about laws and their enforcement. Social covenant is about the values we share. Social contract is about the use of potentially coercive force. Social covenant is about moral commitments, the values we share, and the ideals that inspire us to work together for the sake of the common good. (Ibid, p 110).

Creating Community

- Covenants found communities and for this reason are inherently democratic. Reciprocity and partnership are central to the covenant. A covenantal society practices a politics of responsibility. It puts people first and especially those most in need of support and protection: the young, the elderly, the poor, the refugees, those who need protection from violence or abuse from whatever source, etc.
- A covenantal society is marked by continuous human striving for the common good. Above all, covenantal partnership requires empathy, compassion, and a window to life rather than to death. Hence the highest meaning of covenant is to act with mercy and to pursue justice in our relations with others.



- Instead of a hierarchical, socially stratified society, the covenantal community is to be egalitarian and democratic. Instead of rule through force and violence, the covenantal community is to practice mercy and compassion. And instead of economic deprivation and poverty, the covenant community is to show fidelity to the poor, the widow, the orphan and the stranger.
- The moral imperative in a covenantal society is to ensure the most vulnerable are provided for and made to feel they are respected members of the community.

Jesus' Covenantal Kingdom

- The Jesus Movement and early Christian communities reinterpreted this covenantal community vision for their own time and contexts. The Jewish Jesus and Paul were rooted in the prophetic tradition and like their predecessors they had no political or economic power, but instead had ideological power. The Sermon on the Mount, which includes the Beatitudes, and the Lord's Prayer, is rooted in the Jewish understanding of covenant.
- This same radical understanding of covenantal community informs the vision of God's Kingdom, a concept that can be traced back to the Book of Isaiah. In fact, Kingdom of God speak was shorthand for God's liberation of the oppressed from imperial domination and their inclusion in God's covenantal community.
- The Lord's Prayer, found in Matthew 6: 9-13 and Luke 11: 2-4, is a covenantal prayer with a manifesto for change. It presents a vision of God's Kingdom or covenantal community where the poor will enjoy release from poverty, being assured of sufficient daily bread, and the oppressed will experience liberation from crushing debt. This is a vision of alternative economics.
- It is also a critique of the imperial economic system, which is exploitative, destructive of life and ignores God's will for the world. As this prayer illustrates, the biblical covenant was, and is, a radical economic charter. It was a template by which ancient Israel and the Jesus movement were to construct an alternative economic community to the imperial system. Covenant, then, was good news to the poor and was centred on distributive and restorative justice.



- In summary, covenant is about ethical practice which:
 - produces a moral community that is compassionate and inclusive;
 - endorses a system of just economics;
 - is based on right relations rooted in distributive and restorative justice;
 - creates an actively non-violent community;
 - shows persistent solidarity with the poor and vulnerable;
 - affirms political power relations that serve the common good; and
 - enables the well-being and flourishing of all life forms.

Reading the Signs of the Times

- Then, as now, there were competing ideologies that made the Israelite elite forget about their covenant relationship and the Hebrew prophets often failed to convince them to remember their covenantal responsibilities.
- Their failure to listen and read the signs of the times more often than not resulted in suffering at the hands of imperial powers.
- Today there is growing evidence that our Western socio-economic system is failing us. It has produced a culture that makes poverty, violence, ill health and environmental breakdown more inevitable. We cannot continue to live as if progress is inevitable and not expect that there will not be terrible consequences for our world. The poor and most vulnerable locally and globally are already bearing the burden of our consumer culture and greed.
- Can we make the journey from a “consumer, globalised culture into a neighbourly localised communal and cooperative culture?” (Walter Brueggemann et al, *An Other Kingdom: Departing the Consumer Culture*, 2016, p xiv). Can we make neighbourliness the centre of our social order for the sake of the common good? What would this mean in terms of meeting our local and global challenges to respond to poverty, violence, ill health and environmental concerns?
- The consumer ideology that there are no limits or any restraints when it comes to production, or development and growth, has brought us to this unsafe place, where trust and hope that political and economic powers will act for the sake of the common good is diminishing.



- A neighbourly culture recognises that:
 - ...we have enough without more development. It sees no need to extract from our lands and waters. It calls for an end to the belief that a community or an institution or even a business has to grow to survive and have a meaningful life. (Ibid., p 9).
- There are already examples of good practice that enhance community and promote neighbourliness. The cooperative movement is one example of an alternative to the dominant market economy. It recognises the responsibility of business to build community and contribute to the common good. There is no covenant without relationship. Nurturing our relationships with others is the starting point for building covenantal community and living for the common good.



Group Discussion:

1. According to Jonathan Sacks “social contract is about power and how it is to be handled within a political framework”, while “social covenant is about how people live together despite their differences”. How might a social covenant model change the way we do politics?
2. How might people be helped to make the switch from a consumerist and individualistic lifestyle to a common good and neighbourly lifestyle?



- In September 1893 the Parliament of World Religions met for two weeks in Chicago. It was not really a world event, the world bit being aspirational at that point. It was an American event, organised by American Christians, mainly white Protestants. Very few Asians attended and the only Muslim speaker was from New England and was a white American convert to Islam.
- Of the few who did come from Asia there were challenging contributions. A Hindu from India speaking out of his Hindu tradition challenged the dominant Protestant Christians with a widely pluralistic worldview. A Sri Lankan Buddhist asked the gathering how many had read the life of Buddha. Only five raised their hands. 475 million people follow the religion of love and hope of the Buddha and only five had read a life of Buddha. He made his point as did a Japanese Buddhist who reminded his American audience of the anti-Japanese feeling in America. “If such be the Christian ethics - well, we are perfectly satisfied to be heathen.” (Diana L. Eck, *Encountering God*, 2003, p26).
- It was important that those voices were heard at the first Parliament of World Religions in 1893. This was the first act in the modern interreligious movement, the first big event that could be called ecumenical and it was not churches together but world religions together. There was nervousness, even opposition to the event.
- The Archbishop of Canterbury refused to attend because he said, “the Christian religion is the one religion”. The Sultan of Turkey objected and no Arab Muslims attended. The General Assembly of the American Presbyterian Church strongly disapproved of the Parliament and the monks of a Buddhist monastery in Japan tried to stop their abbot attending. (Eck, *Ibid.*, p25).
- Christianity dominated the Parliament, ten per cent were women, only two Afro-Americans addressed the Parliament and in a Parliament of World Religions meeting in America, the most glaring absence was of the Native Americans. No Native American chief or elder addressed the Parliament and no voice was raised to question their absence.
- While the Parliament met 6.5 million acres of Indian reservation land was opened for homestead settlement and on that day, sixteenth September 1893, some fifty thousand white settlers rushed in one day to claim the land. (Eck, *op.cit.*, p30). The Parliament was silent. Perhaps the Native Americans were not counted as civilised and their spirituality not considered religious. However imperfect and ethically flawed the Parliament of World Religions was, it was a start for interreligious dialogue and understanding and it had challenged white Christian hegemony.



- For various reasons the Parliament did not meet again for one hundred years. In 1993 it met in Chicago and this time it was more truly representative of world religions. Up to eight thousand people attended and that has been the average at every Parliament held at intervals of four to five years. It met virtually in 2021 and prior to that it met in 2018 in Toronto. It will meet in-person in 2023 in Chicago.
- The religions of the world are represented, not just the classical world religions but the indigenous religions, the Native American, Inuit, Aboriginal, Maori, Polynesian, Wiccan, Pagan, philosophies of life, just about every religion, spiritual tradition, wisdom tradition, philosophy of life you can imagine. Its purpose is to cultivate harmony among the world's religious and spiritual communities and foster their engagement with the world and its guiding institutions in order to achieve a just, peaceful and sustainable world.
- Its vision is described as “A world of peace, justice and sustainability”. Its mission, “To cultivate harmony among the world's religious and spiritual communities. To foster their engagement with the world and its guiding institutions to address the critical issues of our time”. (Accessed online <https://parliamentofreligions.org/>).
- The theme for the Parliament of World Religions meeting in Chicago, 14-18 August 2023 is *A Call to Conscience: Defending Freedom and Human Rights*. That is a theme with a contribution to make to the pursuit of the common good. One of the crucial questions for democracy is the future of freedom. In a world where rights are being diminished and hollowed out, freedom and human rights are key issues of our time. Conscience, consciousness raising and consciousness transformation are crucial to a flourishing life together and the local and global, planetary future.
- The Parliament constantly draws attention and will do so in Chicago next year, to its signature declaration from Chicago 1993. Then it made a *Declaration toward a Global Ethic*. The Parliament set out the basis for a global ethic. This was world religions in their bewildering diversity setting out a minimal fundamental consensus concerning binding values, irrevocable standards and fundamental moral attitudes. It was clear that a global ethic was not a new global ideology. It was not an attempt to create a single world religion. As Hans Kung, an influential figure in the 1993 Declaration, put it:



The call for a global ethic does not aim to replace the supreme ethical demands of each individual religion with an ethical minimalism; it is not meant to take the place of the Torah, the Sermon on the Mount, the Qur'an, the Bhagavad-Gita, the Discourses of the Buddha or the Sayings of Confucius...It simply aims to make known what religions in West and East, North and South already had in common, but is so often obscured by numerous 'dogmatic' disputes and intolerable self-opinionated-ness. (Hans Kung, *Yes To A Global Ethic*, 1996, p2).

- In 1993 the Parliament declared fundamental principles of a global ethic:
 - No new global order without a new global ethic.
 - A fundamental demand: Every human being must be treated humanely.
 - Four irrevocable directives. This was the heart of the global ethic and I simply state the four directives without elaboration:
 1. Commitment to a culture of non-violence and respect for life.
 2. Commitment to a culture of solidarity and a just economic order.
 3. Commitment to a culture of tolerance and a life of truthfulness.
 4. Commitment to a culture of equal rights and partnership between men and women.
- These are four commitments, ethical commitments, which require to be unpacked and become a culture, a practice in public and social life. And these ethical commitments and practices are the ethics that the religious and spiritual and wisdom traditions of the world have in common. To realise these directives, or ethical commitments, requires the fourth principle of the global ethic: A transformation of consciousness.
- It was said that, "Earth cannot be changed for the better unless we achieve a transformation in the consciousness of individuals and in public life...This transformation must also be achieved in the area of ethics and values". (Kung, *ibid.*, p25).
- These are important, irrevocable, the bottom line for all the religious, spiritual and wisdom traditions of the world. The Parliament of World Religions is under no illusions that in many areas of our public life together there are differing ethical perspectives.
- Ethics and values need negotiation in relation to bio and sexual ethics, economic, political, social and environmental ethics. I finish with a live illustration. The Parliament of World Religions responded to the United States Supreme Court ruling that reversed the *Wade v Roe* legislation on abortion in July 2022. It is best to quote its response.



Among the world’s religions and also within individual traditions there are a wide range of views on when personhood begins and no general consensus exists. But the effect of the Dobbs (the case ruling) is the imposition by the government of the beliefs of some religious groups on members of other faiths, the unaffiliated, and those whose deep moral values are not rooted in religion, who do not share these beliefs. It thus directly affects those, especially women, who are no longer free to live in accord with their own traditional religious teachings and long-held moral values. (Accessed online parliamentofreligions.org).

- Religious pluralism is the essential context for the partnership of the world’s religions working to bring about a humane future, establishing the equal dignity and human rights of men and women as affirmed by the Parliament’s signature document *The Declaration towards a Global Ethic* (1993). The Global Ethic supports religious freedom, stating that “...guarantees of freedom of conscience and religion are necessary” and it opposes the domination of one religion over another, while strongly holding that the world’s religions share “...a common set of core values” including that “...every human being must be treated humanely”.
- The imposition by the government of the moral values of some religions on others is in direct contravention to the fundamental values of the Parliament as well as freedom of religion and the separation of Church and State enshrined by the First Amendment of the US Constitution.

As a multi-religious society and world, it is important that no religious tradition impose its moral or ethical values on others’ religious beliefs through the agency of government. Such a fundamental principle assures that those who differ are free to practice the values of their own faith confident that, just as they may not impose their view on others, so the views of others will not be imposed on them. (Accessed online parliamentofreligions.org).

- Welcome to our complex world of pluralism, the separation of religion and state, freedom, freedom of conscience and religion and the complexity of values and the common good. In Ireland, as elsewhere, we are still working all this out.



1. Reflect on the four irrevocable directives of the Parliament of World Religions (1993 Chicago).
 - Commitment to a culture of non-violence and respect for life.
 - Commitment to a culture of solidarity and a just economic order.
 - Commitment to a culture of tolerance and a life of truthfulness.
 - Commitment to a culture of equal rights and partnership between men and women.

2. How do we live in a complex world of pluralism, the separation of religion and state, and freedom of conscience and religion?

Session 7: Ethics in Practice: Living As If

Session Outline

1	Input 1 - Victor Frankl and the Search for Meaning by Johnston McMaster and Hannah Arendt by Cathy Higgins		20 mins
2	Group Discussion		20 mins
3	Feedback		15 mins
4	Input 2 - Dalai Lama: Ethics for the Whole World by Johnston McMaster and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf by Cathy Higgins		20 mins
5	Plenary Discussion		15 mins



- Suffering and trauma are the greatest challenges we face as human beings. Violence, war and forms of physical, social and psychological oppression shake the very foundations of our existence. Our lives can be robbed of any sense of meaning. It is the major existential problem we face post-war, post-violence, and post-conflict. It is the core issue in dealing with the past. Meaning is shattered, destroyed but we are meaning-seeking and meaning-making as humans.
- The search for meaning is a deeply moral quest. It is a quest for meaning, purpose and values. If we live in constant existential frustration, life is hell, and if we cannot find any sense of meaning, purpose and values, we will turn to addictions of much variety and our humanness will be lost. It doesn't have to be that way.
- Viktor Frankl was Jewish from Vienna, a professor of neurology and psychiatry at the University of Vienna Medical School until he retired in 1997. Frankl not only survived Auschwitz, but a number of concentration camps. His experiences have been described in these words:

As a long-time prisoner in bestial concentration camps he found himself stripped to naked existence. His father, mother, and his wife died in camps or were sent to the gas ovens, so that, excepting for his sister, his entire family perished in these camps. How could he - every possession lost, every value destroyed, suffering from hunger, cold and brutality, hourly expecting extermination - how could he find life worth preserving? (Gordon W. Allport in the Preface to Viktor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, 2004 ed., p7).

- Frankl is one of the moral heroes of the twentieth century. Out of his horrendous experiences he developed logotherapy, a way of dealing with the nature and cure of neuroses. What lay underneath these neuroses was the failure of the sufferer to find meaning and a sense of responsibility in human existence. Frankl made much of the "will to meaning". He had survived a number of concentration camps where prisoners would and did lose hold of reality. All familiar goals were taken from the person. The only thing that remained according to Frankl was "the last of human freedoms - the ability to choose one's attitude to a given set of circumstances". (Frankl, op.cit., p9). As humans this is our last freedom, our ultimate freedom. When everything else is taken from us, the freedom to choose our attitude remains. We can choose and act on the "will to meaning".



- In the first eighty-three pages of his book, Frankl describes his experiences in a concentration camp. Exiting the camp is another experience. Frankl talks of the moral deformity which comes from the sudden release of mental pressure. There were two other fundamental experiences which threatened to damage a liberated prisoner. It might be true of any person emerging from violence, conflict or a war-time situation of suffering and trauma. The two experiences are bitterness and disillusionment. The suffering and trauma don't end.
- The first word in logotherapy is the Greek word logos which means meaning. Logotherapy "...focuses on the meaning of human existence as well as on man's (sic) search for such a meaning". (Frankl, op.cit., p104). The primary motivational force in a human person is the striving and search for meaning, the will to meaning. Frankl cites research among nearly eight thousand students at an American University. What was very important to them?
- For sixteen per cent of the students it was making a lot of money. For seventy-eight per cent their first goal was "finding a purpose and meaning to my life". (Frankl, op, cit., p105). That is what drives most of us, especially when coming through and coming out of intense suffering and trauma. It is the one freedom we have left and in that freedom we choose and take responsibility for the search for meaning in the world.
- Frankl puts it this way. "The more one forgets himself (sic) - by giving himself to a cause to serve or another person to love - the more human he is and the more he actualises himself." (Frankl, op.cit, p115). That is what he calls "the self-transcendence of human existence". (Frankl, op.cit., p115).
- According to logotherapy we can discover the meaning of life in three ways:
 - by creating a work or by doing a deed;
 - by experiencing something or encountering someone; and
 - by the attitude we take toward unavoidable suffering.

The first is fairly obvious. The second, experiencing something, it may be beauty, truth or goodness. Encountering someone, experiencing another human being by loving them. We cannot become fully aware of the essence of another human without loving them.

- When it comes to unavoidable suffering, it is a situation we cannot change. It's not that suffering is necessary to find meaning. Rather in a situation we cannot change we are challenged to change ourselves. We can still find meaning even in the terrible suffering and dying.



- In the concentration camps some humans behaved like swine while others behaved like saints. We have both potentialities within ourselves. For Frankl, “...which one is actualised depends on decisions but not on conditions”. (Frankl, op.cit., p135).
- Frankl’s logotherapy, which was of immense help to many people, helping many to find existential meaning in life, was very Jewish. Over two thousand years before Viktor Frankl, the ancient Jewish people include a book among their sacred writings. It is known as Ecclesiastes. The name or names of those who wrote it no one knows. He, she or they wrote what the Jews consider wisdom. There are questions and situations in life for which there are no answers. You will never get to the bottom of some things. Don’t waste your time asking such questions or trying to change what cannot be changed. It’s a waste and futile. Go and do something good, even some small good. Enjoy what there is of life. Do good and live a good life. Love, even wastefully. Jewish logotherapy two millennia before Viktor Frankl named it. Wisdom for the good. Our human freedom and our responsibility for meaning.



- Hannah Arendt is considered one of the leading political thinkers of the twentieth century. German-Jewish émigré to the United States, she fled Nazi Germany to Paris in 1933 and subsequently escaped an internment camp in Vichy France eight years later, just days before Adolf Eichmann organised for the transport of those in the camp to Auschwitz.
- In this short time, I will introduce two of the core values that informed Arendt's thinking, which by no means exhaust the many ethical principles she drew on.

Political Responsibility

- Arendt grappled with the most crucial political events of her time, all the while trying to grasp their meaning and historical importance. She dated her fundamental commitment to political responsibility to the twenty-seventh February 1933, when the German parliament building, the *Reichstag*, was burned down.
- The Nazi leadership and its coalition partners used the fire to claim Communists were planning a violent uprising and that emergency legislation was needed to prevent this. As a result, a number of constitutional protections were abolished, which paved the way for Nazi dictatorship. These included: the right to assembly, freedom of speech and freedom of the press. It permitted the Nazi regime the right to arrest and incarcerate political opponents without specific charge, to dissolve political organisations and confiscate private property. The legislation remained in place until Nazi Germany was defeated in May 1945.
- It was from this moment on that Arendt, then aged twenty-seven, felt she could no longer remain a bystander but needed to do what she could to resist the Nazi regime and become politically responsible. She began surreptitiously collecting anti-Semitic propaganda material in the Prussian State library to raise awareness at home and abroad of the persecution of German Jewry. Arendt was caught by the authorities and questioned for eight days. A sympathetic police detective released her but she had to escape Germany or risk re-arrest. (Dana Villa, *Arendt*, 2021, p 3).
- A refugee in France from 1933, Arendt became involved in work for liberation, primarily preparing Jewish refugee children for emigration. She continued this work until her detention in *Gurs* internment camp in Southern Vichy after the Nazis occupied France. (Ibid).
- When she escaped to America she continued through her work as a reporter on the war and its aftermath, her lectures and published books, to engage with the issues raised by totalitarianism, what it means to be human, and how to learn the lessons of history to take responsibility for the future.



Critical Thinking

- Another core value that Arendt comes back to again and again in her writings is the importance of critical thinking. This preoccupation was informed by personal experience.
- What disturbed her most when reflecting on the impact of totalitarianism was not what her enemies did, instead it was her friends' unquestioning acceptance of Nazi propaganda. In time, she came to understand that totalitarianism operated by confusing people, muddying the waters so that people could no longer distinguish what was true from what was false. Further, it left individuals not knowing who to trust or believe.
- By creating fear and then isolating people, totalitarianism produced paranoia and suspicion, which it reinforced through the use of terror. As Arendt described it:

The ideal subject of totalitarian rule is not the convinced Nazi or the dedicated Communist, but people for whom the distinction between fact and fiction, truth and falsity, no longer exists. (Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 1973, p 474).

- Arendt realised that the best defence against totalitarianism was to question its version of reality and expose the false foundations and lies upon which it was based. She was convinced that standing up for truth was essential if we hope to hold onto what is real.
- She stated in an interview given in 1974, "If everybody always lies to you the consequence is not that you believe the lies, but rather that nobody believes anything any longer". (Interview with French writer, Roger Errera, 1974. Accessed online <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1978/10.26/hannah-arendt-from-an-interview/>).
- She described critical thinking as a dangerous activity as it put one at risk from those deliberately manufacturing lies and false propaganda. At the same time she recognised that refusal to think was even more dangerous as it robbed humans of the freedom to act, which permitted evil to become more extreme.
- Arendt plumbed history for a role model in the act of thinking and found one in Socrates who understood that thinking as an activity was ongoing, was concerned with making sense of what was happening in the world and did not shy away from complexities and perplexities.
- Arendt like Socrates encouraged the process of what she called "thinking without a bannister". In other words, thinking that does not rely on certainties and doesn't expect solutions but is prepared to let go of the security of a fabrication or illusion of truth, in order to be open to a more liberating and truer approximation of reality.



- Critical thinking for Arendt was about engaging in radical ceaseless questioning in order to enhance our sense of political responsibility and inform our discriminating judgment. She believed that “any politics worthy of the name will embrace rather than reject human plurality, civic equality, diversity of opinion, and public debate and deliberation”. (Ibid., p 17).
- In contrast totalitarianism destroyed the spaces for critical thinking and actions. It left no space for “doubt, mixed feelings and questions that are part and parcel of individual identity”. (David Bromwich, Introduction, *On Lying and Politics*, Hannah Arendt, 2022, p xii).
- Political responsibility and critical thinking, these two values are much needed in our own context at present and in the wider world. Their relevance may explain why Arendt’s body of work is being rediscovered and plumbed for wisdom and hope in this new millennium.



Group Discussion:

1. There are questions and situations in life for which there are no answers. How do we deal with this reality? How do we deal with unavoidable suffering?
2. Do Arendt's reflections on political responsibility and critical thinking have implications for transformative action locally or globally?



- The Dalai Lama is a Tibetan Buddhist, is the fourteenth Dalai Lama and at the time of writing is eighty-seven years old. Most of his long life he has lived in exile or as a refugee in India. Imperial politics are the reason he has had to live in another country and cannot go back to Tibet. In 1913 Tibet declared independence from China but this was rejected and continues to be rejected by China. China considers Tibet to be a part of China and Chinese territory.
- In recent years China has developed the highest railway in the world, the railway in the sky that runs from mainland China to the Tibetan capital, Lhasa. The railway reaches such an altitude that passengers require oxygen masks. It is quite a journey and is a powerful symbol that Tibet belongs to China. Imperialists have in modern times built railways as the symbol of dominance and control.
- The Dalai Lama is the spiritual leader of the Tibetan people and remains, even in the long years of exile, the unifying symbol of the Tibetan State. He is a political figure, a symbol of Tibetan nationhood for Tibetans in Tibet and in exile elsewhere in the world. This is why the Chinese government protests and disapproves when the Dalai Lama turns up or is invited to attend a major event in the West. For example, if he is to attend a climate conference, the Chinese will stay away in protest.
- The West is giving recognition to Tibetan independence by hosting the Dalai Lama. Sometimes the West capitulates to Chinese sensitivities and excludes the Dalai Lama. For Tibetans he is the powerful symbol of their nationhood and their foremost spiritual leader. He belongs to the most dominant school of Buddhism in Tibet, there being four major schools of Tibetan Buddhism. In Western categories we might say four denominations of Buddhism but he is the unifying symbol of spiritual leadership. This is also a symbol of profound moral leadership. Indeed the Dalai Lama is one of the world's moral heroes and leaders. As a moral leader he transcends Tibet and Buddhism.
- One of his remarkable books is *Beyond Religion: Ethics for a Whole World* published in 2011. In the first half of the book he writes of a new vision of secular ethics and begins with a chapter on rethinking secularism. His opening sentence may strike us as provocative and maybe it is. He says things in an upside down kind of way. "I am a man of religion, but religion alone cannot answer all our problems". (Dalai Lama, *Beyond Religion*, 2011, p3).



- He includes his own Buddhism in that, joking that if prosperity and wellbeing depended solely on the blessings of the Buddha there would have been prosperity and wellbeing a long time ago. He is not disparaging or rejecting Buddhism, far from it, or any other religion, he is being realistic. In a scientific age he is concerned for inner values. He has no doubt that after thousands of years of religion there are deeply rooted inner values like kindness, honesty, patience and forgiveness.
- There are the theistic religions such as Hinduism, Sikhism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, all traditions in which ethics is grounded in some understanding of the Sacred or God. There are non-theistic traditions such as Buddhism, Jainism and ancient Indian traditions in which there is no belief in a divine creator. There is Karma, all our intentional acts of body, speech and mind, which have consequences. Along with rebirth this becomes a powerful basis for ethics. So the Buddhist teaching on the deep empathetic connection with all living beings. The Dalai Lama is clear that in all religions there is the cultivation of inner values and ethical awareness. But he wants to go beyond religions. Humans can manage without religion but they cannot manage without inner values.
- For the Dalai Lama spirituality has two dimensions. Spiritual wellbeing, which means inner mental and emotional strength and balance and is part of our innate human nature. We are naturally disposed towards compassion, kindness and caring, whether religious or not. The second is religion-based spirituality which we have from upbringing and culture and is tied to particular beliefs and practices. But the most fundamental thing about all of us is human spirituality, our underlying human disposition toward love, kindness, affection, irrespective of whether we have a religious framework or not. (Dalai Lama, op.cit., p17).
- The Dalai Lama offers two pillars for secular ethics. The first is our shared humanity, our shared aspiration to happiness and to avoid suffering. The second is our interdependence, the key feature of human reality. We are social beings. These two pillars enable us to appreciate the inextricable connection between our own wellbeing and that of others. There is a common and there is a good.
- The foundation of all of this is compassion. Compassion is concern for the wellbeing of all.

Genuine compassion, therefore, is directed not at people's behaviour but at people themselves...Since resentment, anger, and animosity bring us no benefit, it is clearly in our own interests to underpin our attitude to all others with this kind of genuine unconditional and unbiased compassion. (Dalai Lama, op.cit., p 52).



- The Dalai Lama is acutely aware of the question of compassion and justice. Compassion, that wish to see others relieved of suffering, does not mean that we meekly accept injustice. Compassion needs real strength of character and he points to a raft of such moral characters.

Some of the greatest fighters against injustice in recent times, people of strong character and determination like Mahatma Gandhi, Mother Teresa, Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King Jr., Vaclav Havel, and others - have been motivated by universal compassion.(Dalai Lama, op.cit., p58).

- These people cannot be described as retiring or quietist. They are people who combine in their characters and actions: compassion towards others, liberation from injustices and a commitment to active nonviolence.
- It may still strike us as extraordinary to hear one of the world's foremost spiritual leaders say that we need to move beyond religious traditions. By all means draw inner values from our various religious traditions but move beyond religion, transcend religious traditions, if we care for the future of the world, the planet, the local community. This means transcending the dualism of secular and sacred, atheism versus belief.
- The world is more complex than these and other dualisms. For the Dalai Lama we can promote humanity's most positive qualities and nurture such values as kindness, compassion, forgiveness, patience, and personal integrity.



- Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was elected president of Liberia in 2005 at the age of sixty-seven. She was Africa's first freely elected female Head of State. Her election was a culmination of a forty-year career working in Liberia in the department of finance, then for the World Bank and then the United Nations, where much of her work focused on supporting heavily indebted countries improve their economies.
- When elected president, Johnson Sirleaf took on the leadership of an African nation with a population of approximately 3.5 million people from sixteen ethnic groups. It was a country traumatised from two back-to-back civil wars between 1989 and 2003, in which approximately two hundred and fifty thousand people were killed and thousands were displaced. It was also a country in debt to the value of 4.9 billion dollars. In fact, at that time, Liberia had the highest level of indebtedness in the world.
- Johnson Sirleaf's moral leadership had been honed in the preceding years and she had learned that ethical leadership demands incredible courage and can expose you to real dangers, especially in an unstable and violent environment. In her political career as Junior Minister in the Treasury Department she publically clashed with the men in charge on issues relating to financial integrity. She made it clear in public speeches that the government was failing the people they were there to serve and by way of critique stipulates:

People must believe the government to be honest, efficient, and willing and able to mobilise the resources it collected for the common good and not their own self-serving ends. (Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, *The Child Will Be Great*, 2009, Kindle Edition, p55).
- It is no surprise that given her outspoken honesty she had to go into exile twice to protect her personal safety and she served a prison sentence in the 1980s for criticising President Doe's corrupt regime. Speaking truth to power is never without consequences.
- Her experiences of suffering, alienation and injustice inspired Johnson Sirleaf to model an alternative and ethical leadership when she was elected president of Liberia in 2005. She wrote in her autobiography: "Perhaps this should be part of the grooming of leaders: to be put into a position where you suffer what the common person suffers. How else can you really understand what you are working to do?" (Ibid., p 310).
- Johnson Sirleaf sought as president to advance the core principles of democracy: namely, accountability, free enterprise, good governance, respect for human rights, and equitable and balanced distribution of resources.



- One of her first acts as president was to seek debt amelioration, as well as aid from the international community. Within five years of taking office, Sirleaf Johnson had managed to erase Liberia's massive debt of 4.9 billion dollars and secure eighty million dollars of investment in the country.
- In a patriarchal society, she believed empowering women was not only just but an essential ingredient on the journey to peace and prosperity. Drawing on her own experience and understanding of African culture she recognised the need to tackle this challenge on a number of fronts. A survivor of domestic abuse within her own marriage, she pledged as president to bring the full weight of the law against those who violated women and girls.
- Aware that Liberian women were engaging in small-scale marketing, as a means of financial support for families, she created a Market Women's Fund. This fund was used to help build market structures with facilities such as clinics, nurseries, water and sanitation, credit instruments and entrepreneurial skills programmes for women.
- Johnson Sirleaf ensured also that women served in her government as ministers of commerce, justice, finance, and sport and she appointed a female national chief of police.
- She used monies from the eighty million dollar international development fund to target education, health and infrastructure. She established a right to free, universal primary education and created a new national university. During the civil war Liberia's healthcare infrastructure was severely damaged, with less than half the population having any access to medical care. Johnson Sirleaf helped rebuild the healthcare system opening new clinics and training centres in rural areas.
- Her experience taught her that poverty and corruption feed off each other. In 2006, the year after she assumed the presidency, Johnson Sirleaf established a Truth and Reconciliation Committee to probe corruption and heal ethnic tensions. Efforts toward eradicating corruption included the creation of an anti-corruption commission in 2008 with a mandate to look into the misuse of power for private gains and require officials to declare their assets.
- To prevent further coups, a new army was built that integrated women along with those from diverse ethnic groups and all were thoroughly trained. Her efforts at promoting peace and furthering women's rights were recognised internationally when she was one of three recipients of the 2011 Nobel Prize for Peace.



- In October of 2011, Johnson Sirleaf sought re-election claiming she still had work to do and won a second term. Economic progress continued until in 2014 Liberia was hit with the devastating Ebola virus disease. Over the course of the next two years the disease killed more than four thousand eight hundred Liberians, and crippled the economy.
- Since stepping down as president in January 2018 and ensuring a peaceful transfer of power to her successor, Johnson Sirleaf has been building on the lessons learned from the Ebola epidemic. She has become a staunch advocate for community health workers and free primary healthcare as a means to protect against the spread of infectious diseases.
- In 2019 Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was invited to join The Elders, an independent group of global leaders working together for peace, justice and human rights. This is her mantra that reflects her ethical vision and practice:

Be not afraid to denounce injustice, though you may be outnumbered. Be not afraid to seek peace, even if your voice may be small. Be not afraid to demand peace. (Accessed online <https://theelders.org/profile/ellen-johnson-sirleaf>).



1. The Dalai Lama offers two pillars for secular ethics - shared humanity and our interdependence with compassion as the foundation. Is this a way to the common and the good?
2. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf is committed to ethical leadership. Can you think of examples of ethical leadership locally and / or globally? What makes the leadership ethical?

1. **Dynamics of Reconciliation by Johnston McMaster**
2. **Mending the Earth: The Environmental Crisis of Our Time by Johnston McMaster**
3. **Doughnut Economics and the Common Good: A Reflection by Cathy Higgins**

Reconciliation is primarily about relationships. The real strength of the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement (1998) is in the emphasis on the totality of relationships. Three strands of relationships are the spine of the Agreement and without them there is no reconciliation or process of peace. These are the relationships within Northern Ireland, historically understood in binary terms, though the binary approach if ever true, is certainly no longer true. As well as the presence of peoples from different cultures, religions and ethnic groups, there is the growing body of people who identify as neither. They refuse binary religious and political and national identities. This complicates things in Northern Ireland, perhaps a welcome complication, but reconciliation remains relational.

The second strand of relationships are those between North and South on the island of Ireland. Partition has left legacies, having a century ago partitioned Irish unionists and Irish nationalists. Minorities were left beached on either side of the border and the legacies remain. A century on, not everyone has crossed the border and experienced people and life on the 'other side'. There are large gaps in knowledge and understanding and on a small island, life in many ways is lived apart. Even the history of Ireland is separated as though the history of Cork in 1920 had nothing to do with the history of Belfast in the same period, and vice versa.

The third strand of relationships is East-West, or Irish-British. In recent times it has become clear that many politicians at Westminster, especially those with responsibility for governance, have very little knowledge of Irish history. The ignorance is disturbing, yet Irish history is an integral part of British history and British history is Irish history. For centuries the history and life of these two islands has been intertwined.

It is a history of empire, not well acknowledged in Ireland or Britain. Economic relations are inseparable, something completely overlooked by the narrow majority of English people and the Conservative government who voted for Brexit. East-West relations in their totality didn't count, nor were they considered. Now there is the Brexit catastrophe, disastrous for the strand of East-West relations. There is much to be repaired in all three strands, and if they break down completely, or there is a withdrawal of support and commitment to the three strands of relationships, that will be tragic. There is nowhere else to go and in a generation we will simply come back to where we were, and recover the obvious, the three strands of relationships without which there is no reconciliation and peace. In the interim, how much suffering would there be and another generation of young people's lives blighted and destroyed?

The three strands of relationships and the reconciliation between them required political structures. A power-sharing executive and political structure was created in Northern Ireland. Though some find this hard to accept, because it is an issue of power and loss of power, there

is no other way to govern a contested and divided society. It is exactly the form of governance now being suggested for Yemen, after a conflict much more violent and brutal than Northern Ireland's conflict ever was. Yemen is bitterly divided and is the greatest humanitarian crisis on the planet, in many ways a forgotten war. Yemen has never had the international attention Northern Ireland had, nor the levels of external peace monies. Yet the wisdom of international diplomacy now recognises that the future for an almost totally destroyed country (which Northern Ireland never was) is a power sharing model of political governance. It will not be easy but the reconciliation of relationships in Yemen will require such political structures. Reconciliation is not about territory or geography, it is about relationships, about borders in people's minds and interpersonal and social relationships.

Social relationships mean structural relationships, which is why a privatised approach to reconciliation, even an interpersonal approach is inadequate. 'A' and 'B' may be reconciled, and in Northern Ireland there have been remarkable examples of reconciliation between people who once were bitter enemies. In places like South Africa, the Balkans and India/Pakistan, personal stories of reconciliation are to be found. Reconciliation happens and keeps happening, sometimes in a religious context or a more secular context. Reconciliation between unlikely people coming out of terrible experiences is a fact of human experience and life. We are challenged by these experiences. They confront us with the reality that release and liberation from the oppression of a past is possible and that life does not need to be lived in a vengeance mode. Reconciliation also needs to be social and structural and the following social strands of reconciliation are an integrated approach to reconciliation.

Before exploring the six integrated strands of social reconciliation, it is important to recognise that reconciliation is a process not a terminus. There is no utopian reconciliation. There is no moment when reconciliation is achieved or a society has arrived. Reconciliation is always a work in progress, a process that needs to be provisioned and renewed often. There are roadblocks and opposition, always those who for reasons of power and control will always want to disrupt reconciliation. For narrow politically ideological reasons, society divisions and binaries must be maintained, even by violent means; or by encouraging the violent extremes or those vulnerable in society to threaten or use violence. Roadblocks to reconciliation include not telling the truth or the whole truth, sometimes telling blatant lies in public, or appealing to historically conditioned fears, or feeding the community myths and delusional or fantasy thinking. Playing the victim and appealing to victimhood is another way of blocking reconciliation. Social reconciliation is not easy and reconciliation as process provides realism, which can liberate from disappointment, despair and disillusionment.

Social Reconciliation

There are six integrated strands of reconciliation, an integrated dynamics of reconciliation providing a holistic approach:

- Socio-Political
- Socio-Economic
- Socio-Ecological
- Socio-Legal
- Socio-Psychological
- Socio-Spiritual

All six integrated strands are needed for reconciliation. There is no reconciliation without each of them and if we neglect one in a reconciling process, the process itself is incomplete and the pursuit of reconciliation is stunted. The strands are interrelated and interwoven. Imagining the interwoven threads in a carpet or rug may provide a more integrated, interrelated analogy of social reconciliation.

The word “socio” is used intentionally with all six integrated strands. The political, economic, ecological and legal are more obviously social, but in an individualistic culture, the psychological and spiritual strands too easily slip into an individualistic or privatised mode. This is the major flaw in much religious experience and understanding, and of spirituality. Reconciliation is often vertical, between the individual and the sacred, or at most interpersonal between individual ‘A’ and ‘B’. Sacred texts are also read from a privatised or individualistic perspective, which distorts them and leaves the faithful and the religious institution weak on reconciliation. There is no theological praxis of social reconciliation.

Humans are relational beings and have been born relational. All life is social and because we are social beings, always beings-with, so all religious experience, spirituality and reconciliation is social. Socio is used especially with the psychological and spiritual strands to underline that these two important strands are not individualistic but social, relational and communal realities. All life is lived in relationships and insofar as humans can know anything of the Divine or Sacred, it is in relationships and in community with others. The psychological strand has to do with identity and belonging, and there is no identity or identities, however perceived, or belonging, apart from relationships and community. Even our belonging is not confined to one community, political, religious, cultural or ethnic, but to multiple and plural communities, which is inevitably global. In this context reconciliation is social or it is not reconciliation.

1. The Socio-Political Strand

Reconciliation requires political responses and structures. Violence often occurs because there is a political hegemon, a monopolisation of power over others, who are usually expected to know their place. The result is a political domination system at work to the exclusion of some groups or categories of people. When discrimination against minorities occurs, or even discrimination against majorities, there are abuses of power. Extreme examples are totalitarian regimes, dictatorships, autocracies, military rule or rule by political, often social elites. There are other forms of political hegemony such as one-party rule over a period of time. Northern Ireland has been seen as an example of this, a one-party state for the first fifty years of its existence, in which some felt excluded from the social and political systems.

Any reconciliation or peace process needs to address political issues, systems and structures. Power structures especially need to be addressed as do future power arrangements and models of governance. Many countries may long for democracy and freedom but what will this look like? What does it mean to be a pluralist democracy and how can participative democracy be structured and implemented? There is no reconciliation in a broken, divided and conflictual society unless political structures of power are addressed and just power structures, which may mean shared power structures, are put in place. Such political power structures were provided for in the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement to address the divided and contested relationships within Northern Ireland and to enable a process of reconciliation. Now something similar is being called for in suffering and divided Yemen.

2. The Socio-Economic Strand

Reconciliation requires economic regeneration and redistribution. The failure to deal with economic and educational poverty prevents reconciliation. Over two decades on from the end of apartheid in South Africa, the vast economic disparities have not been dealt with. There is still extreme poverty in the majority black community. It used to be possible to blame the white apartheid government but after twenty years plus of ANC governance, little has changed economically.

Social inequalities and economic disparities cause tensions and violence as the poor realise their poverty and lack of dignity, because of a wealthy elite. When consciousness and will are raised, protest and resistance follow. The economically excluded community is no longer prepared to put up with inequalities and poverty. A demand for economic rights can begin peacefully but those with political and economic power feel threatened, and often step up the oppression and

use force to put down legitimate protest and resistance, for which they then blame the poor and excluded. Riots and violence in Belfast and other areas of Northern Ireland in April 2021, have happened in areas of serious poverty, some of the poorest areas.

Some of the areas have the lowest educational attainment levels in Europe. They are areas of economic and educational poverty. There are many reasons underlying this rioting and violence, involving twelve to fourteen year olds and blighting and destroying young lives, giving some of them criminal records. Sinister elements of adults have been encouraging and orchestrating the violence, and their manipulation and exploitation of vulnerable young people is a form of child abuse. Economic and educational poverty remains the serious underlying cause. The perception that this deprivation is only in one community is untrue and unfounded. Serious lack of income, economic and educational poverty are shared in both of the main communities in Northern Ireland. There is an equality of poverty and unless political strategies and manifestos are produced and implemented, rioting and violence will break out from time to time and there will be no reconciliation and peace.

The economic factors need to be taken seriously in any situation of conflict and division, and therefore need to be an integral part of any reconciling process. The Times newspaper declared on the twenty-third January 1943 that:

Next to war, unemployment has been the most widespread, the most insidious, the most corroding malady of our generation: it is the specific social disease of Western civilisation in our time.¹

Eric Hobsbawm writes of the profound effect on the history of the twentieth century of the world economic breakdown between the wars.

But for it, there would certainly have been no Hitler. There would almost certainly have been no Roosevelt. It is extremely unlikely that the Soviet system would have been regarded as a serious economic rival and alternative to world capitalism. The consequences of the economic crisis in the non-European or non-Western world, which are sketched elsewhere, were patently dramatic. In short, the world of the second half of the 20th century is incomprehensible without understanding the impact of the economic collapse.²

Unemployment and economic slump shaped the terrible history of the twentieth century and it played itself out in local communities and nations, large and small. War and violence have been the effects. Reconciliation means that inequalities and disparities have to be addressed

and economic strategies put in place. Economic regeneration is key to reconciliation involving inward investment and entrepreneurship, and the redistribution of wealth and power. Job creation follows to meet the debilitating effect on society of unemployment and poverty. There is no reconciliation without economic regeneration.

3. The Socio-Ecological Strand

Reconciliation requires the healing of eco-destruction and the implementation of eco-justice. Reconciliation and peace call for the mending of the earth. This is an overlooked strand of reconciliation and one that only in relatively recent times has entered our consciousness. We have become increasingly aware of eco-destruction for which, as humans, we are responsible. A consumerist life-style is destructive and unsustainable. The planet cannot sustain our present demand for fossil fuels. Military consumerism not only deals in arms and weapons, killing and war, it creates a whole raft of service industries and provides a disaster economy. Who receives the contracts to build an infrastructure after invasion and war? War and violence have always laid waste the environment. Nature has not fully recovered from the battles on WWI sites and not even recovered from some of the battles of the American Civil War. The extinction of species through human intervention (is it interference?), and abuse, desertification and soil erosion through human greed and the effect of our consumer lifestyles on climate warming are obvious ways by which eco-destruction takes place. Humanity is often at war with nature.

An impressive part of the Korean peace movement is the creation of ecological corridors along either side of the South Korean peninsula. Here alternative energy is being produced and there is a big emphasis on organic farming, all of which is a contribution to a healing partnership with nature, a making friends with nature, not conquering it and in the process destroying it.

Reconciliation has to do with eco-justice and this requires political, economic and personal action. Reconciliation is about eco-friendly policies, renewable and sustainable energy policies, water management strategies, land management, transport and town planning strategies. Waste disposal is also part of reconciliation, the creation of green areas and landscape regeneration. Decisions about personal lifestyle also come into play. Is our purchasing power always based on need or acquisitiveness? How far does materialism and consumerist greed drive us? What could we change to be more eco-friendly? Reconciliation is eco-friendly, eco-justice, living personally, structurally and systemically for the healing of nature and the environment. In simple terms, reconciliation is being friends with the environment, being engaged politically and economically with the socio-ecological strand.

4. The Socio-Legal Strand

Reconciliation always requires a socio-legal response. It requires that critical attention be given to the socio-legal systems and institutions of society. This is especially true and obvious in situations of conflict and violence, and situations of civil war. The Good Friday/Belfast Agreement was a framework for peace. It was not a peace agreement, but a significant legal framework for peace and it is an internationally agreed and legally binding framework for peace. It did not just involve the British and Irish governments, it also involved the European Union and all are obligated to ensure that the Agreement is upheld. The point is that reconciliation requires legal dimensions such as international agreements, systems and structures that have legal status.

The Good Friday/Belfast Agreement provided for a radical review and restructuring of the criminal justice system. It also provided for a review of the policing service. It called for a Human Rights Bill, not only for Northern Ireland but also for the Republic. The work around criminal justice and policing was a significant achievement.

The socio-legal strand of reconciliation also requires the embedding and nurturing of participative democracy. Democracy includes the rule of law and order with no person, institution or government above the law. There is also no meaningful peace process anywhere in the world without human rights. In contested societies, where there are often diverse identity politics, human rights protect us from one another. Policing in Northern Ireland is now human rights-based policing. Human rights always involve responsibilities but responsibilities can never be used to stifle human rights. Within a democracy, reconciliation needs equality legislation, especially where there has been a history of systemic discrimination. Northern Ireland has Section 75 of the Government of Ireland Act 1998 which stipulates that it is unlawful for public authorities to discriminate against twelve to thirteen categories, which include disability, religion, gender and sexual orientation. The recognition of difference in a pluralist democracy needs democratic inclusion and involvement of all, if society as a whole is to be reconciling and flourishing. This means greater commitment through legislation for social and political justice.

There is a local and global dimension to all of this, if reconciliation and peace are to be global realities. It is important that human rights are not just thought of as rights for Northern Ireland. There is the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights. Human rights are universal and include human rights, economic rights, and environmental rights. It is important that there is a commitment to and signing up to rights dealing with areas of life together on the planet. There is now an enormous challenge in the Western world and a Europe where liberal, pluralist democracies are under threat and vulnerable. The

socio-legal strand of reconciliation now needs a determined commitment and work to retain our liberal and pluralist democracies, our hard-won and precious civil liberties, our political freedoms and our representative, deliberative institutions. Northern Ireland struggles with the practice of democracy and may indeed have always lived with a democratic deficit. There is no embedded culture of human rights, though things have improved. The past is not pretty, in part inevitable in an historical sectarian, divided and contested society. Reconciliation always needs the socio-legal strand.

5. The Socio-Psychological Strand

The socio-psychological strand is about deep issues of identity. Identity is a major concern for many people in Northern Ireland. This has meant being trapped in binary identities: British-Irish, unionist-nationalist, Protestant-Catholic, loyalist-republican. The problem now is that the binaries are breaking down and are no longer adequate. We were always more than the binaries but the contestedness of place, religion, violence and politics squeezed many into the either-or. Now a large number of neithers have emerged and the neithers are a diverse constituency. It has been suggested, with some justification, that there are now three minorities in Northern Ireland. This undoubtedly shakes up identity and may well change the face of politics and governance.

In a conflict situation a people's identity is shaken. It can be traumatic. A people's sense of who they are and where they belong are important. There are many situations in the world where cultural identities are in conflict or contested. Northern Ireland is a classic example, but not the only example. Are people British, Irish, Northern Irish, all of these or none? Scottish and Welsh people have a strong sense of identity, but which comes first, Scottish or British, Welsh or British? What is British? If it ever did have real meaning, it is changing or has changed. Increasing numbers of English people no longer identify as British but as English, an indication of the growth in English nationalism. Have people in the Republic of Ireland a stronger sense of being European than do English people? Are Scots more European than the English? Their overwhelming Scottish vote to remain in the European Union might suggest that they are. A significant majority in Northern Ireland voted to remain, which might also suggest a greater sense of European identity than England. But then in the 2016 referendum a small majority of English voted to leave while the numbers who didn't vote were as large as those who did. It may be fair to say that in the United Kingdom identity questions have been in a state of flux for some time, at least since devolution was granted to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland in 1997. The deep psychological issue of identity has been in turmoil in England since then and Brexit has made it more obvious and difficult for England. The level of imperial nostalgia deepens it further.

When borders were redrawn after WWI, many found themselves on the wrong side of the new boundary. In Romania, there are still tensions between the Hungarian population in Transylvania and Romanians. The name of one Romanian city is contested, Sibiu or Hermanstadt? Their version of Derry or Londonderry!

Palestinians do not want to live in a Jewish state, nor do they want to live in a Muslim or Christian state. In fact they do not want to live in a confessional state of any kind, because such a state tends towards being sectarian and discriminates against minorities. To what extent do people on the Korean peninsula, divided by the thirty-eighth parallel imposed by Americans and Russians, live with a conflict of identities? Conflictual identities may only be resolved by the reunification of the Korean peninsula.

In many conflictual situations identity is contested and there are often issues of violence, suffering, grief, loss and victimhood, and a past that needs to be addressed. Experiences of violence and war not only shake and traumatise identities, they change them and there are deep psychological issues to be addressed in the politics of identity.

Flags and emblems are elevated to the status of deities in many places, objects of worship, adoration and loyalty. The flying of the Union and Irish flag become fiercely contested territorial markers in Northern Ireland. They are used often in provocative ways, flying in the face of the other. A flag becomes a total issue, which to some in Northern Ireland, and to many outside Northern Ireland, is totally incomprehensible. But as one of Northern Ireland's most farsighted politicians and an international statesperson, John Hume, said often, "You can't eat a flag". The totalism and worship of flags and other emblems will never deal with the socio-economic issues, the deep-rooted problems of poverty, economic and educational, which blight the elements of the binary communities that seem to find the meaning of life in a flag.

Reconciliation addresses the deep dislocating issues of identity, contested identity and identities imposed by the powerful, often the political elites, as a means of control. Identities are imagined, we make them up and change them, but when they become total we are trapped in our imaginations shaped by fantasies. The psychological trauma cannot be ignored, especially when identities are challenged and in a changing world begin to break down. Some of the deepest human questions are who are we and where do we belong?

6. The Socio-Spiritual Strand

The socio-spiritual strand requires to be taken seriously in the reconciliation process. This may seem like the strand of reconciliation where faith communities come into their own and have their

biggest contribution to make. Faith communities may not come up with political or economic blueprints for society, though the politicians and economists who have these responsibilities include people of faith. If faith communities have a contribution to make to the reconciliation process, along with many other groups in civic society, it is in a socio-psychological and in particular, the socio-spiritual strand. This is not to say that they are the only group in society with the potential for such a contribution. The church has never had the monopoly on spirituality or goodness, not even the monopoly on God! There is no indication by Mark Carney, the former Governor of the Bank of England in his remarkable book, *Value(s): Building A Better World For All*, that he is coming from any faith perspective. It is a book about embedding ethical values in our economic markets; values of sustainability, solidarity and responsibility that can create a world fit for our children, grandchildren and generations to come. *Value(s): Building A Better World for All* is a plan for humanity restored. We might also add, a plan for nature restored. There is no overt faith perspective in Carney's book, but it is full of Deuteronomistic echoes, Deuteronomy being a book in the Hebrew Bible with a profound and radical and just economic strategy. As well as all the classical world religions, the secular also offers a spirituality and values, and the faith and the secular may be two sides of one coin.

There is something, though, in the best and inner nature of Christianity and the other Abrahamic religions, and others, that enables them to address the often forgotten dimension of state craft, reconciliation and peace building. Again the socio-spiritual does not imply a narrow religious dimension. The spiritual is larger than that. It is the recognition that every human person has spiritual intelligence. All humans have intellectual intelligence, emotional intelligence and spiritual intelligence. All of these make up who we are and we are not human without these three inter-related strands of intelligence. They are innate to our being which again is social and relational being.

The spiritual has to do with meaning, purpose and values. No matter how much we may distort our being, intellectually, emotionally and spiritually, or block our development, maturation and growth by the choices we make, we still long for meaning, purpose and values. Issues of meaning, purpose and values are heightened for people in conflict, when a conflict ends, and during a lengthy peace and reconciliation process. Meaning may be shattered in a violent conflict and a divided community, and violence itself always destroys values. Being caught up in a violent conflict is to be caught up in sectarian, racial or ethnic hatred, bitterness, vengeance and deliberate exclusion, all of which dehumanise the other and ourselves. A bitterly divided community is dysfunctional and destructive. The values of love, compassion, justice, non-violence, reconciliation, peace and relational humanity are diminished or destroyed, and take

a long time to recover. Reconciliation needs the socio-spiritual strand and requires it to be integrated with the five other strands. It is the forgotten or neglected dimension, but unless meaning, purpose and values are addressed in the reconciliation process there will be a huge deficit and ultimately a failure to process reconciliation.

Reconciliation to be authentic requires to be integrated. The six strands are to be interwoven and made indivisible. Without an integrated approach to reconciliation a divided community will continue to be divided. And there will always be those who want to keep it that way, the sectarians and gatekeepers of division, some in politics and some in the community. They are to be resisted in the pursuit of reconciliation.

References

1. Quoted in Hobsbawm, Eric, *The Age Of Extremes, 1914-1991* (London: Abacus, 1994) p 85.
2. *Ibid.*, p 86.

One of the most influential people on the planet today is David Attenborough. Through the medium of television he reaches millions of people with his Blue Planet, Frozen Planet and Our Planet series of programmes. He highlights the increasing human population and how we are all going to be fed. There is the problem of depleted oceans, which ought to be the great resource for the food we will have to rely on.

Attenborough has highlighted the serious problem of plastic in our oceans. His words are stark:

The natural world is in crisis - it's not a joke, it's not a fashionable easy choice of words. We really are in trouble and it's no good just mincing about and saying, 'Well, we'll do this', or 'We'll pass that', or 'We'll have another meeting'. We want people to know what's happening. So, that's why we're here.¹

Attenborough insists that the planet is recoverable:

We can put things right tomorrow if we had the will. We could impose marine sanctions tomorrow and solve the problem of feeding the world for the next few decades, but that's easier said than done. And the only way it's going to be done is actually getting the world thinking along the same lines.²

Getting the world thinking along the same lines, Pope Francis calls "ecological conversion".³

The Glasgow conference in Autumn 2021 let us know how far ecological conversion has got with the world leaders. President Biden took part and has already reversed the denial policies of his predecessor, Trump. The U.S. has engaged again with the Paris Agreement. Trump could have tipped the world over the edge, to which already we were perilously close.

It may be helpful to take a cosmic perspective on the environmental crisis. We can imagine a fifteen billion year history of the universe and condense it into a single century.

A FIFTEEN BILLION YEAR HISTORY IN A CENTURY (ONE COSMIC YEAR = 150 MILLION EARTH YEARS)

YEAR	
70	Earth is born
73	Life appears in the oceans
93	Invention of sexual reproduction
95	Multicellular organisms appear
96	Nervous systems develop
97	First vertebrates
98	Mammals including dinosaurs, and plants
5 months	Asteroid hits Earth destroying species including dinosaurs Plant life recovers with even more beauty
12 days	Our ancestors walk upright
6 days	<i>Homo habilis</i> uses tools
1 day	<i>Homo erectus</i> tames fire
12 hours	<i>Homo sapiens</i> are born
AM and PM	We live in harmony with nature
40 minutes	We domesticated plants and animals and invent agriculture
20 minutes	We build and live in cities
2 minutes	Europe becomes technological and expands power through empires The gap between rich and poor quickly widens
Last 12 seconds	Eco-destruction has accelerated dramatically

In the last twelve seconds of the cosmic century we humans have destroyed:

...nearly half of the Earth's green forests, the lungs of our planet. We have released immense amounts of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases into the atmosphere setting loose a dangerous cycle of global warming and climate instability. We have created a gigantic hole in the ozone layer, the

protective skin of the planet. We have seriously undermined the fertility of the soil and its capacity to sustain plant life: sixty-five percent of once arable land destroyed. We have released tens of thousands of new chemicals into the air, soil and water of the planet, including nuclear wastes radioactive for hundreds of thousands of years. We have destroyed hundreds of thousands of plant and animal species, fifty-thousand disappearing each year. As humans we now waste forty per cent of all energy available for land-based animals on the Earth. If we carry on in the next eight cosmic seconds, (thirty-five years) we will waste eighty per cent of energy.

We have managed all this in the last twelve seconds of the cosmic year. So much destruction in a very, very short period of time! The Earth has been around for 150 million years and we Johnny-come-latelys are destroying it in two hundred years. And all this destruction and abuse of Earth has only made a handful of people very rich. In 2009 the world's 793 millionaires were worth more than the poor half of humanity. The richest twenty per cent earn two hundred times more than the poorest twenty per cent. In relation to income the richest one per cent received as much as the poorest fifty-seven per cent. A planet evolving for over four billion years is being devoured by a very small minority of human beings. Or to look at it from another perspective, far more energy is being devoted to the so-called war on terrorism (which, to a large extent, amounts to a war to protect oil supplies and to continue 'business as usual') than to the threats that are actually destroying life at an unprecedented rate.⁴

The accelerated destruction of the Earth began with the Industrial Revolution which began in the mid-eighteenth century. It was a British thing, built on the backs of black slavery, which moved to other parts of Europe and elsewhere and it built a major industrial, capitalist economy. One historian of the British Industrial Revolution writes:

And both Britain and the world knew that the Industrial Revolution launched in these islands by and through the traders and entrepreneurs, whose only law was to buy in the cheapest markets and sell without restriction in the dearest, was transforming the world. Nothing would stand in its way. The gods and kings of the past were powerless before the businessmen and steam engines of the present.⁵

It was the Revolution that began global warming by increasing the release of carbon dioxide and other heat-trapping gases into the atmosphere. In Europe and America agrarian societies became industrial and urban with wealth in fossil fuels, especially coal and oil to power economies. So the level of greenhouse gases grew and have seriously impacted the atmosphere. Scientists were sounding alarm bells by the mid-twentieth century. The Rio summit of 1992 issued a wake-up call and created the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Then came the Kyoto Protocol, which did not come into force until 2005. The US, then the world's largest emitter, failed to ratify the protocol. Universally it is now agreed that global warming should be kept below 2°C. That is the threshold and if we go to above 3°C or 4°C we will initiate a "tipping point in our planetary system from which there will be no turning back".⁶

Former Irish President Mary Robinson's quotation is from a speech she made to honour English economist, Barbara Ward. Robinson invoked Article 1 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights that:

'All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights'. She goes on to claim that...'When it comes to the effects of climate change, there has been nothing but chronic injustice and the corrosion of human rights...If there is a climate change problem, it is in large part a justice problem'. She believes we need to remember the rights of both today's poor and tomorrow's children, and continues: 'To deal with climate change we must simultaneously address the underlying justice in our world and work to eradicate poverty, exclusion, and inequality'.⁷

Whether we recognise it or not, as Europeans we are beneficiaries of the Industrial Revolution. We are where we are now, relatively privileged, some living elsewhere in the world would say 'very privileged', and we will not feel the full force of climate change. Millions in Africa will and are already the victims.

Robinson tells the story of Constance Okolett, a Ugandan farmer who came to a Climate Change Conference in Cape Town. She said, "I have seen live what is happening on the ground...we the people at grassroots level are suffering the worst effects of climate change". She told how her village and her farm have been devastated since 2000 by drought, flash flooding, and erratic seasons. "In eastern Uganda there are no seasons anymore. Agriculture is a gamble". Constance and her villagers believed that God was wreaking vengeance on them for wrong doing. Now they know that the unpredictable weather has nothing to do with God and punishment, a theology they may have learnt from white, privileged missionaries. "It was not until I went to a meeting

about climate change that I heard that it was not God, but the rich people of the West who are doing this to us. We are asking that they stop or reduce their emissions".⁸

We will hear more and more from Africans like Constance whose livelihood is being destroyed by climate change, and the next wave of refugees to the rich Atlantic West are likely to be eco-refugees, and the journey to the wealthy, responsible West will go on for the foreseeable future. We have made the major contribution to climate change destroying the lives of Africans and others, and our Western governments, perhaps with our support, will close our borders to the fleeing eco-refugees. "A new ethic is required - a new attitude towards discharging our responsibility for caring for ourselves and for the earth."⁹

Earth Destructive Scientific Philosophy and Theology

The world crisis is underpinned by destructive scientific philosophy and destructive theology. The 'father of the scientific method' is considered to be Francis Bacon (1561-1626). For Bacon the universe was a problem to be solved and he strongly emphasised that knowledge is power. By power he meant power-over, domination, control. It is said that he replaced the values of good and evil with useful and useless. At a time of colonial expansion into the so-called new world, this opened the floodgates to plunder, enslavement and limitless economic gain. In Bacon's scientific method nature was described in feminine terms as 'at your service' and 'to be made your slave'. Feminists see Bacon as deeply misogynistic, with a hatred of women and with patriarchy at the heart of the scientific method. Nature is to be subdued and controlled and science is the instrument through which 'man' will violently subjugate 'feminine' nature. The way was open for the exploitation and indeed rape of nature, and women also, rape itself an act of brutal power over another. Influenced by Bacon, science became the quest for power over, control and subjugation. This underlying scientific philosophy persists:

Given the male bias of classical science, it should not be surprising that it has been so sharply marked by clearly patriarchal methods and attitudes. As Jane Goodall notes, this macho science excluded 'feminine' qualities from its methods such as 'sensitivity, gentleness, warmth, compassion, and intuition'. The withdrawal of these qualities from science also removes ethical constraints against the use of violent and exploitative techniques, as is seen in excessive use of animal experimentation - often for further dubious research.¹⁰

The destructive scientific philosophy and method has been patriarchal giving license to a process of industrialisation without ethical constraints against exploitation, "which in turn has led to new patterns of domination over women and their exclusion as partners in both science and in socio-

economic development”.¹¹ The impact of Bacon’s scientific philosophy and method has been particularly destructive in relation to economics, how we relate to the Earth and gender relations.

We have also had destructive theology with its own version of Bacon’s patriarchal scientific method. The battle that has raged in Western theology over creation versus evolution has had a devastating bearing on our relationship with nature and the Earth. The reading of the Genesis creation texts as history and science has been destructive and this has been part of our European history of interpretation, but more so a dominant reading in the United States, where fundamentalism is more prominent. United States fundamentalism has been influential in the Protestantism of Northern Ireland and Genesis as history and science, or in total conflict with science, would be the primary interpretation of many within churches. It may not even be confined to Protestants! Such theology has had consequences as all theology or philosophy has. The creation versus evolution, religion versus science battle, has led to a theology of disinterest and disengagement with ecology and environmental concerns. In a more extreme form it has led to a denial that there is any environmental crisis, that climate warming is fake news or a conspiracy theory. The theology even believes that God is going to destroy the world anyway and only the ‘saved’ will be raptured away to glory. This is really racist theology because the ‘saved’ raptured to glory will be white Anglo-Saxons. There is no place for black and Asian peoples in this theological scheme of things. It is also a capitalist economic racket given its literature and media production are by far the best-sellers on the planet. White people are making millions out of this theology of Earth destruction and future glory. It has not only been described as a racket but the greatest heresy of all. Whether in its extreme or mild form, it is influential and shapes a white Western theological scenario in which we have no worries or responsibilities for the environment.

Destructive theology has also read the Genesis command to have “dominion over all the earth” (Genesis 1 v28) through Bacon’s scientific method as domination, subjugation, control. This reading has also been patriarchal. Bacon actually used the Christian interpretation of the Genesis ‘fall’ of man to reinforce his patriarchal concept and method. Because of Eve’s sin nature fell out of man’s control, but the fall through woman’s fault will be reversed and restored to male domination through scientific knowledge. Scientific ‘man’ is God’s representative exercising domination over all that is. Bacon combined the Western interpretation of the Genesis story with his scientific philosophy and set in place a programme of action or praxis that was about the domination, exploitation and abuse of the natural world. It needs to be critically asked if domination of nature, power over nature, is what the Genesis creation text really intended. What if the traditional Western reading and fundamentalist interpretation of

Genesis has not only misunderstood but distorted and misconstrued profound Hebrew poetry? Has there been a complete failure to see the mythopoetic nature of the text in its historical context and so contributed to a destructive theology of the Earth? Meanwhile we are in a destructive theological tradition, which has been our Western worldview for some centuries. It is no accident that these centuries are the centuries of Western imperialism, expansionism, industrialisation, black slavery and rampant capitalism. Now we face an Earth crisis of human making and our human future is seriously threatened.

“In the traditional Western worldview of the cosmos, God reigns over men, who rule over women, children, plants, and inorganic matter, in that order”.¹² Our traditional theological worldview is that of a ladder with God at the top, men on the next rung down, women on the next and so on, with each rung down inferior to and dominated by the rung above, with nature on the bottom rung and of little value other than to be exploited and controlled. It is a combination of bad theology, a destructive image of God, bad anthropology, destructive patriarchy, bad ecology, and bad scientific philosophy, nature to be used and abused for human, mainly male purposes.

The scientific and theological enterprises are ethically deficient and inherently destructive. This does not mean that we abandon scientific and theological approaches, because they have been so destructive over the last few centuries and have contributed to the Earth crisis. We need to deconstruct our way of thinking, our scientific method and our theological framework. “We must, in effect, change our whole ‘mind-set’, learn a whole new language.”¹³

Living with the Earth

Ecology is the web of relationships of which we and all of nature are a part. The destruction of one part of the web has consequences for all the rest. Humans are not above nature but part of it and what happens to plants and species affects us. The future of the human community and the eco-community of life is bound up together. For too long we have thought in anthropocentric terms, a human-centred world, where we are what matters most and everything else exists only for our use. If something is not of use to us, it is of little or no value. Anthropocentrism has been destructive. We need to move to a biocentric, life-centred way of looking at things and behaving. Biocentrism is seeing the whole community of life in a web of interrelationships and interdependence. Within this community of life we are all in a partnership. To imagine in kinship terms, humans, animals, plants, sun, moon, soil, stars, insects, bees, we are all brothers and sisters, needing each other and sharing a universe together. As humans we are primarily Earthlings, an identity that is greater than and transcends any cultural, national or religious identity. Earthlings places us in an indivisible and inseparable relationship with all of life, and

a relationship of interdependence. This is what it now means to learn a whole new language, a new way of imagining life and a whole new way of seeing things and living with the Earth.

Across the Earth people are realising this and finding ways of living with the Earth. President Biden appointed Deb Haaland, the first Native American cabinet secretary in United States history, with a brief for public lands. With her Native American spirituality, rooted as it is in nature, she will pursue a bold agenda for climate justice. This marks a reversal from the previous administration, which denied a climate crisis.

Haaland's Native American spirituality will reflect that of Chief Seattle who famously said:

Every part of this earth is sacred to my people. Every shining pine needle, every sandy shore, every mist in the dark woods, every clearing and humming insect is holy in the memory and experience of my people....We are part of the earth and it is part of us. The perfumed flowers are our sisters; the deer, the horse, the great eagle, these are our brothers. The rocky crests, the juices of the meadows, the body heat of the pony, and man (sic) - all belong to the same family... What is man without the beasts? If all the beasts were gone, men would die from a great loneliness of spirit. For whatever happens to the beasts, soon happens to man. All things are connected.¹⁴

Kinship and interconnectedness are at the heart of many indigenous spiritualities, including the Irish and Maori and Aboriginal spiritualities, which are also ways of life with the Earth.

Meanwhile, the United States neighbour, Canada has an approach that is environmentally important, but Prime Minister Trudeau finds policies being voted down by the Conservative opposition party. In April 2021 the government attempted to introduce a proposal that recognised the climate crisis as real. Despite a plea by the Conservative Party leader to rally round an ambitious climate agenda and not be a Party branded as "climate change deniers", the Party rejected the government's policy shift by fifty-four per cent to forty-six per cent. Canada is the world's fourth largest oil producer. Earth friendly policies and climate change action are being resisted often by those with vested interests in industries and businesses. Mending the Earth and profits and shares are often in opposition.¹⁵ At the Glasgow conference Prime Minister Trudeau committed his government to ending international public financing for fossil fuel and to reprioritise support for clean energy. Other world leaders made a similar promise. Convincing their governments to follow this strategy remains the challenge. Our shared future depends on it!

Fishing communities along the southern coast of India have been fishing as much plastic out of the sea as fish. They threw the plastic back into the sea. But this has now changed. The fishers have taken an initiative to clean up the ocean. What was happening before was damaging aquatic ecosystems and killing fish. Now bottles, ropes, toys, shoes, discarded fishing nets and polythene bags are sorted, then washed, shredded and recycled into material added to asphalt for local roads. Bags have been provided by government to collect the rubbish, the plastic processed and sold to the roadbuilders. Not only has the initiative created jobs but the recycled plastic makes the roads more resilient to India's extreme heat. A community which involves three thousand fishers and boat owners have never been so united and effective in saving the ocean. Children are also becoming inspired.¹⁶

Many more stories can be told of resistance to environmental policies by the climate deniers acting often from economic self-interest. Yet there are more stories emerging of positive action and partnerships with the Earth to resist the human-induced catastrophe and mend the Earth and engage for climate justice. It is a global challenge far beyond any single government or country to resolve. A global environmental crises requires a global response. Young people realise this, which is why young people have protested on a global scale inspired by a young Swedish person, Greta Thunberg, who has addressed world political and economic gatherings. The Earth and eco-issues will define the identity, goals and purpose of young people, transcending the narrower national, cultural or religious identities.

At the other end of the age spectrum, in his nineties is David Attenborough. Attenborough in his remarkable book, his witness statement and vision for the future, calls for the restoration of the Earth's biodiversity. We have created the crises. We must re-wild the world:

Homo Sapiens, the wise human being, must now learn from its mistakes and live up to its name....And we have one more thing - an ability, perhaps unique among the living creatures on the planet - to imagine a future and work towards achieving it.

We can yet make amends, manage our impact, change the direction of our development and once again become a species in harmony with nature. All we require is the will...Our future on the planet, the only place as far as we know where life of any kind exists, is at stake.¹⁷

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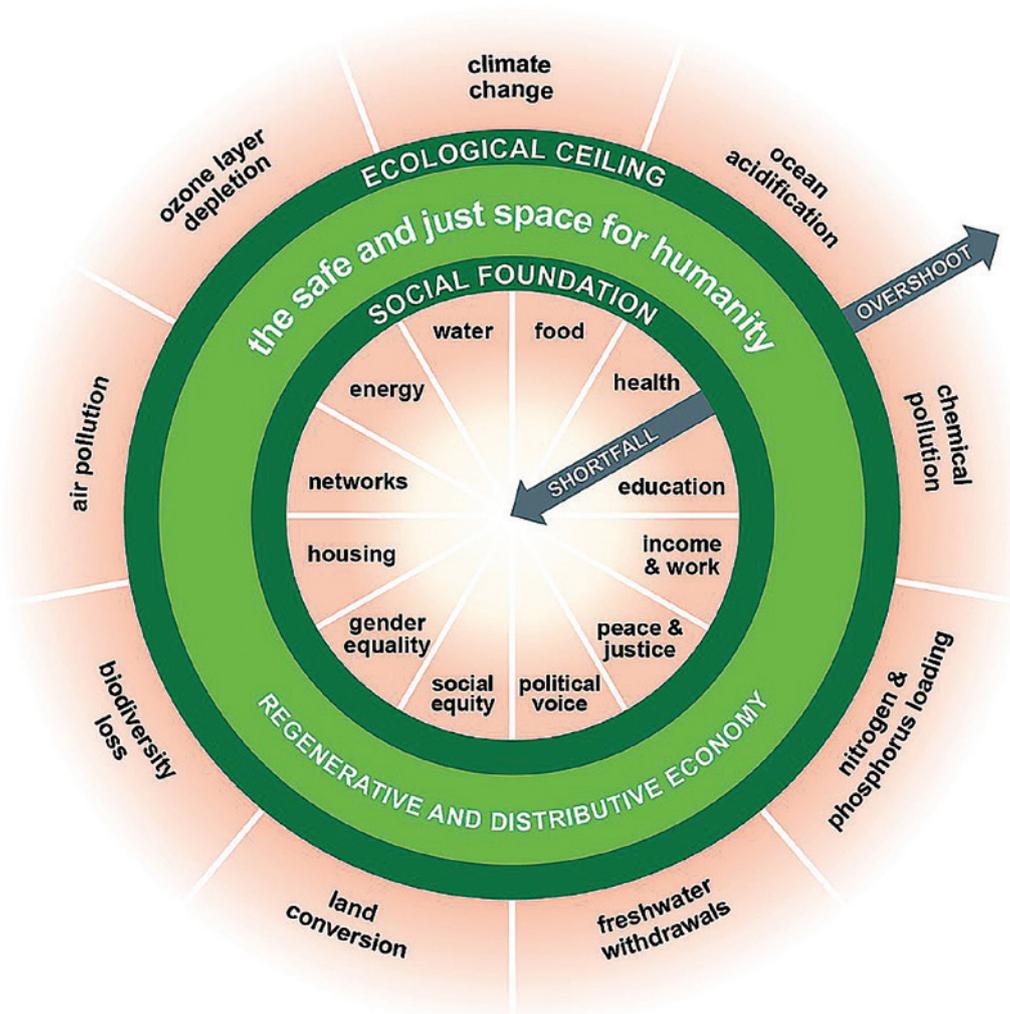
Kate Raworth in her book *Doughnut Economics: Seven Ways to think like a 21st Century Economist* takes as her starting point that an economic system which is embedded in consumerism, and assumes endless economic growth, is unsustainable, unrealistic and ethically untenable. Raworth advocates for a different model of economics that meets the needs of all people and does not overshoot the ecological ceiling that would endanger our living planet. This reflection on her book will outline the seven fundamental changes to thinking and dynamics Raworth suggests are needed, if we hope to transform our economic model to meet the human, ecological and climate changes necessary to advance the common good.¹

Step 1: Changing the Goal

Raworth points out that the economic goal over the last seventy years has been to improve the national output, or GDP, as a basis for growing the economy and ensuring economic progress. She argues that determining a nation's economic health by measuring the market value of its goods and services has "led us astray" and contributed to the social and ecological crises threatening democracy and the future of our world. Her perspective is supported by the popular protests in the UK over the poverty crisis, growing inequalities of income and wealth and underinvestment in public services. These claims of injustice have found expression the world over, in civil unrest in France and Spain, in Hong Kong and India, in Chile and Columbia, and in Lebanon and Iran. Raworth suggests a different goal is needed to overcome the challenges we face collectively. A goal aimed at "meeting the human rights of every person within the means of our life-giving planet".³ She offers an economic model which provides a strategy or "compass" for ensuring the common good of all people in a way that is ecologically sustainable. She calls it "the Doughnut" because of its shape.

As you can see from the diagram⁴ on the next page, the inner ring of the Doughnut is divided into twelve segments representing the social foundation for the human flourishing of people everywhere. They are an inventory of the basics of life that are every human's right and are included in the United Nations Sustainability Goals agreed by its one hundred and ninety-eight member countries in 2015, with the intention of achieving the majority of these by 2030. To go below this inner ring to the centre of the doughnut is to deny human rights and ignore human deprivations such as hunger and illiteracy. Economic policies developed on the back of this model recognise the interdependence of the twelve basic needs for enlarging people's capabilities for leading fulfilling and flourishing lives.

Doughnut Economics And The Common Good: A Reflection



The outer ring of the doughnut represents its ecological ceiling. To go beyond this circular boundary is to risk critical planetary degradation and the loss of biodiversity. The diagram lists the consequences of breaching this safe limit: climate change, ocean acidification, biodiversity loss and air pollution. It provides a visual reminder of the direction of travel, if we continue to ignore the warnings to shift our thinking and lifestyles toward sustainable living that is in-balance with the Earth.

Over half the world's population currently live in towns and cities and it is expected that by 2050 this figure will rise to seventy per cent. Given that the shift in our world is toward greater urbanisation, Raworth reminds us that we have an opportunity to forward plan to meet people's needs for housing, transport, water, sanitation, food and energy, in ways that reduce our carbon footprint and reinforce the necessity for ecologically balanced living. She asks:

Can new transport systems replace traffic queues of private cars with fast and affordable public transport? Can modern urban energy systems replace fossil-fuel power with rooftop networks of solar power? Can buildings be designed to be largely self-heating and self-cooling? Can food for the city be produced in ways that help to store more carbon in the soil; and provide good jobs at the same time? ⁵

Step 2: See the Big Picture

Raworth believes we need a new big picture to replace the neoliberal economic model that separates the market from the state and its social responsibilities and gives the market free rein. Former British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, one of the principal proponents of this economic model, along with the then president of the United States, Ronald Regan, went so far as to deny the existence of society, claiming, “There are individual men and women and there are families”.⁶ In this neoliberal model finance is defined in solely market terms, as the business of growing savings by making profitable investments. Raworth indicates that the false belief that the economic system was infallible meant there were no overseers or regulators to monitor the system and spot any irregularities. What-is-more, to fully realise its potential the belief was that trade needs to operate on an international basis without barriers. This perspective denies the inequalities that exist within and between nations, as well as the detrimental and ethically untenable exploitative consequences for countries in the Global South. Raworth offers a further critique indicating it was an economic model that viewed the natural world or the commons, whether the land, the forests, the rivers or the seas, as an inexhaustible resource to be mined for energy and materials, or controlled for economic benefits in the supply of food and goods. Finally, she notes, this model reduced people to their role as consumers and believed its own consumerist propaganda that people can only become their best selves and find fulfilment by buying and consuming more. With hindsight we now know the dangers inherent in neoliberalism. It has facilitated ecological destruction on an unprecedented scale, led to the near collapse of social and financial systems, contributed to the undermining of democracy and brought about global inequalities that threaten the lives and livelihoods of the most vulnerable in our world. It is time for a new economic model to reverse or compensate for the damage done.

In its place, Raworth calls for an economic model fit for the twenty-first century in which we can “create a thriving balance” that: respects the Earth’s boundaries; recognises and enables societal connections and networks that build social cohesion; creates financial systems that allow for a more equal society and strengthen public services; is accountable to the state while also empowering the state to serve the public good; recognises the community has a shared

responsibility for the stewardship of the commons and access to its resources. We need an economic system that challenges businesses to treat their workers fairly, to support local food production and to see the household as a core contributor to the economy through paid and unpaid labour.⁷

Step 3: Nurture Human Nature

Raworth sees it as essential that economists understand humankind differently in order to develop a more holistic economic model. The neo-liberal economic model defined what it is to be human in market terms as consumer. This one dimensional perspective reduced the complexity and richness of human identity and human needs. Raworth suggests key descriptors to be included in any future profiling. Humans are: social, reciprocal in relation to others' needs, fluid in values and therefore open to change, interdependent and influenced by the behaviours of others, and dependent for their survival on the natural world.⁸ She cites an example used by the philosopher Michael Sandel to illustrate the importance of understanding human complexity in making monetary decisions.

An *Earning by Learning* programme was set up in low-achieving primary school in Dallas and it paid six-year-old children \$2 dollars for every book that they read. While children's literacy skills showed marked improvement over the year, researchers were concerned that long-term the children might have been socialised into thinking that reading books was a way of making money and not something a person engaged in for its own sake.⁹

This example illustrates the potential for financial markets to corrupt human values worth preserving, which motivate us to act in ways that enhance our lives and the lives of others and care for our shared planet. She believes that changing social and ecological behaviour will be more effective if ways are found to connect with people's values, rather than with their purses or wallets.¹⁰

Step 4: Get Savvy with Systems

The failure to reduce CO₂ emissions, and stay within the 1.5 C of global temperature rise required to reduce the worst impacts of climate change, is already resulting in loss of life in all its diversity and destruction of our shared world. Raworth holds that it is imperative, therefore, that we understand how systems operate and their interconnection, whether economic, ecological or socio-political, if we hope to redress any imbalance and protect against negative outcomes.

Raworth explains that stocks and flows are the core elements of any system and that they can accumulate or dissipate. This principle applies across our systems, to money in the bank, people

on the planet, fish in the sea, or trust in a community. The stocks and flows are connected by what Raworth calls feedback loops which either: reinforce or amplify what is happening resulting in either positive or negative outcomes; or they balance the system and stop it from exploding or imploding.

Raworth gives a few examples to illustrate how these feedback loops work. For instance:

1. Reinforcing feedback has negative consequences when an isolated playground fight between two children escalates into a full blown bust-up involving multiple children.
2. It has a positive outcome when interest earned on savings increases future interest payments, allowing wealth to accumulate.
3. Our bodies use balancing feedback to regulate and remain healthy: we start to shiver if we become cold to warm up and when too hot we sweat to cool down.¹¹

To see the big picture, Raworth advises, we have to remember that our systems are not stand alone, but interact with each other and this significantly complexifies the outcomes. To illustrate this she points to the dynamics of global economic development marked by “growing social inequalities and deepening ecological degradation”.¹² Add to this a political elite interested in short-term economic and socio-political gains at the expense of the common good of society as a whole and the outcome is indeed bleak. Consequently, if we hope to ensure the future of the world we need to rebalance. Raworth stipulates that what is needed is the emergence of a just and democratic system committed to the redistribution of wealth and ecological sustainability so we can thrive within planetary boundaries. She believes that understanding this empowers us to work toward realising this systemic vision.

Step 5: Design to Distribute

The emphasis on economic growth and progress over the last seventy years has resulted in millions of people, predominantly in the Global South, living well below the social foundation for human flourishing. Raworth cites some deeply troubling statistics which are a result of the failure of economic design:

Worldwide, one person in nine does not have enough to eat...one in eight young people cannot find work. One person in three still has no access to a toilet and one in eleven has no source of safe drinking water. One child in six aged 12-15 is not in school, the vast majority of them girls....And more than half of the world's population live in countries in which people severely lack political voice.¹³

Raworth reminds us that nature shows us how to create a thriving system through diversification and distribution. What is needed therefore is a reviving of small, diverse enterprises in place of large-scale organisations. She quotes the findings of network theorist, Sally Goerner and her team:

Economic development must become more focused on developing human, community, and small-business capital because long-term, cross-scale vitality depends on these.¹⁴

Raworth underlines that we are not starting from scratch in developing fairer and more sustainable models of practice. There are already employee-owned companies and member-owned cooperatives committed to distributive enterprise. The challenge, as she sees it, is to develop economic networks that distribute value in the form of materials, energy, knowledge and income in a more equitable, shared way. Further, meeting the basic needs of all will require a redistribution of wealth in the form of land, money, enterprise, technology and knowledge within nations and between nations, and from the Global North to the Global South. Meeting these needs locally and globally, nationally and internationally, is a common good imperative.

The reality is that we now have the technology to assist with the redistribution of wealth globally. Among the many examples Raworth cites are the opportunities created through worldwide access to mobile phones and mobile banking. It is now possible to “create a phone book of the world’s ‘bottom billion’ and to text digital cash directly to them”.¹⁵ Such a scheme would allow the poorest families to meet their basic needs, thus advancing the possibility of their inclusion in the Doughnut’s social foundation. Monies, she suggests, could be raised if a global tax was introduced on extreme personal wealth:

An annual wealth tax levied at just 1.5% of their net worth would raise \$74 billion each year: that alone would be enough to fill the funding gap to get every child into school and deliver essential health services in all low-income countries.¹⁶

Supplementary tax schemes aimed at multinational corporations and industries that damage and destabilise the natural world, she suggests, would boost public revenue for public purposes, including the production of greener energies.

Step 6: Create to Regenerate

The space between the two rings of the doughnut, Raworth identifies as the safe and just space for all to flourish in, where industries and business enterprises own their responsibility to develop practices that take seriously the challenge to develop a regenerative and distributive economy. This calls for creative thinking and innovative design which reconnects with nature and brings us back below the Doughnut's ecological ceiling. Raworth makes the point that we cannot thrive as humans unless and until our shared planet is also thriving. This would allow us to meet the demands for adequate food and fresh water, for clean air and a stable climate that supports life and the creation of healthy and resilient communities throughout the world.¹⁷

How might businesses respond to the reality that their design models are destabilising the Earth by overshooting the boundaries of its life support systems? Raworth cites five responses she has encountered when presenting the concept of the Doughnut to a wide range of business leaders.¹⁸

1. There are the climate deniers who refuse to accept the reality of the climate crisis and their role in accelerating it. Their response is **to do nothing**. As they see it, their business model is delivering maximum profits and their shareholders are happy. Any environmental taxes they might have to pay will be considered a cost of doing business.
2. The reality of climate change is being experienced by manufacturers who depend on worldwide suppliers when their supply chain becomes vulnerable to rising global temperatures or falling water tables. Still wearing their 'need for profitability hats' this group are prepared to make changes to their business design and **do what pays**. They look to cut their greenhouse gas emissions and reduce their industrial water use which will help to reduce their costs.
3. A third response is to take the reality of climate change seriously and switch the business model to a sustainable one in order to **do our fair share**. Taking cognisance of the recommendations made by Earth-system scientists or required by national policy targets this group act accordingly. The problem with this response, Raworth indicates, is when **doing our fair share** is replaced by **taking our fair share**. The focus then shifts to polluting questions: how many tonnes of carbon dioxide can we emit; and how much ground water can we withdraw?

4. A fourth response, which Raworth notes shows a true step-change in outlook, is to **do no harm**. In other words, the ambition becomes to design products, provide services and run businesses that have zero environmental impact. For instance, Nestlé's dairy plant in Jalisco, Mexico, meets its industrial water needs by condensing the steam that evaporates from the cow's milk, instead of withdrawing water from much needed public water supplies.
5. Finally, a fifth business response is to **be generous**, that is to go beyond **doing no harm** in order to **do more good**. Businesses that operate this design model are concerned to give back to the environment by being regenerative. The intention is to leave the world in a better condition by embracing biosphere stewardship.

Raworth provides examples of business leaders committed to this notion of generosity and one such leader she profiles is Janine Benyus, who designs urban landscapes using the natural world as her inspiration. Benyus' ambition is to create 'generous cities' in concord with their local native eco-system, whether nearby forest, wetland or savannah. She is challenging architects and planners to design:

Rooftops that grow food, gather the sun's energy, and welcome wildlife.
Pavements that absorb storm water then slowly release it into aquifers.
Buildings that sequester carbon dioxide, cleanse the air, treat their own wastewater and turn sewage back into rich soil nutrients.¹⁹

Raworth cites global examples of businesses committed to regenerative design that are situated in California, in Bangladesh, in Kenya and in Brazil. These initiatives inspire hope that businesses can transform to become socially and environmentally regenerative by design. To help the process a financial system is needed that is itself regenerative and committed to redesigning investment and currency that is in service to life. Raworth names leaders in the financial field committed to transforming financial systems so that they deliver long term social and environmental value.²⁰ She reminds us that regenerative business models and financial systems also need government support in the form of lower taxes and preferential public procurement.²¹ She leaves us in no doubt that we have the capacity and creativity to design an economy for the common good if the momentum for a more generous and sustainable way of living gains enough critical mass to make it a reality.

Step 7: Be Agnostic about Growth

A key starting point in the journey toward a common good economy is the recognition and admission that the principle of endless economic growth that informs mainstream economics is

deluded and dangerous. Raworth reminds us that nothing in nature grows forever and to expect or demand economic growth is to ignore the social and ecological consequences. It is for this reason that she emboldens us to be agnostic about growth and instead create an economics that thrives. She points out that even the founding fathers of classical economic theory recognised that endless growth was an impossible feat. She quotes John Maynard Keynes who a century ago asserted that:

...the day is not far off when the economic problem will take the back seat where it belongs, and the arena of the heart and the head will be occupied or reoccupied, by our real problems – the problems of life and of human relations, of creation and behaviour and religion.²²

Raworth introduces us to the ‘S curve theory’ which has been applied to the global economy. She explains that according to the theory different national economies are situated in different places on this curve depending on whether they are low, middle or high income countries. Ireland, Britain, France and Germany are high income countries that are close to the top of the S curve with growth falling off. On the other hand, low and middle income countries, situated near the middle or lower region of the S curve, can expect to grow their GDP and can be helped to do so in ways that are both distributive and regenerative. With sufficient international support these countries can enable their populations to attain the basics of life, which would provide the necessary social foundation for thriving.²³

Raworth indicates there are economists who argue that the proponents of the S curve are too pessimistic and that continued GDP growth is possible in high income countries, if these countries can find ways to reduce sufficiently their CO² emissions to ensure we get back within planetary boundaries. Raworth warns that close monitoring would be essential if this economic model were to be employed to ensure the rate of decoupling from dangerous emissions keeps pace year on year with GDP growth.²⁴

There are also economists, she notes, who take an opposing view, who believe that in high-income countries it is unrealistic to expect enough green growth to raise GDP significantly. Instead they insist that the focus needs to be on developing a “new economic paradigm that measures economic value in totally new ways”.²⁵

Raworth recognises that it is too soon to know how GDP will respond if and when we transition to a greener economy within the Doughnut’s safe and just space, or how it will manifest once we begin to thrive there.²⁶ She raises important questions for deliberation within civil society, as well as within global economic and political forums: Are we financially, politically and socially

addicted to growth and could we learn to live without it? Can we begin to equate a successful economy with one that thrives in balance and supports the flourishing web of life? Is an ever-growing income the best aspiration to offer? And what really matters to us in life, in other words, what do we value most?

She ends her book with a timely call to action, reminding us that our choices and actions matter:

Ours is the first generation to properly understand the damage we have been doing to our planetary household and probably the last generation with the chance to do something transformative about it. And we know full well, as an international community, that we have the technology, know-how and financial means to end extreme poverty in all its forms should we collectively choose to make that happen.²⁷

Sobering words indeed! But a timely reminder that we can make a positive difference to those living with socio-economic injustices and those experiencing climate devastation now, while also ensuring a safe and just future for those yet to be born.

Raworth's socio-economic framework, her doughnut economy model, has reconciliation at its heart and is value based. It recognises the importance of delivering on its social foundation in a way that promotes social equity, gender equality, and peace and justice between peoples and with the Earth. It takes seriously the socio-economic responsibilities and the reparations owed the Global South by the Global North to rebalance our world, and that as a people and planet we will only thrive together. The doughnut economic model counters the "moral vacancy" that characterises the GDP model by endorsing justice, fairness and rights as essential values shaping our relationship with each other and with the living world on which we all depend. It is an economic model that serves and enhances the common good for all people and our shared Earth.

References

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20. Ibid., pp 235-237.
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23. Ibid., pp 252-255.
24. Ibid., p 261.
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This educational resource has been developed for the Irish School of Ecumenics project *Is There A Common Good?* Civic conversations formed the basis of the project's educational approach and enhanced understanding of the complexity of explorations into the common good. Participants who engaged in these conversations affirmed that:

- the common good is about sharing the good things of life in common;
- it is an ethical vision for our society and world that takes seriously our responsibility to, and for, each other;
- it is concerned with the values we live by, and the consequences of how we live; not only for ourselves and other people, but importantly for other life forms, and the planet; and
- the common good is concerned with the flourishing of all life.

This educational resource is for a wide spectrum of civic society. For those engaged in community relations, community development, community education and teacher training colleges, reconciliation and peace building, religious sectors and intercultural organisations.

This educational resource will provide opportunities for learning, understanding and action on the themes of common good, reconciliation and social values. Engagement provides for civic conversation and the building of inclusive relationships. There is particular focus on six integrated strands of reconciliation: socio-political, socio-economic, socio-environmental, socio-legal, socio-psychological and socio-spiritual. The focus of the educational resource will be both local and global drawing on the wisdom traditions of East and West, and Indigenous communities. Attention will be given to a range of individuals, past and present, who have embodied ethical leadership and creative vision.

By engaging people in conversations and learning the resource will equip participants to be practitioners of reconciliation and peace building, as essential components of a society in pursuit of a societal vision of the common good. The resource will engage participants in critical thinking and equip them to draw from diverse wisdom traditions in shaping foundational ethical values for a societal common good. As local and global citizens, the resource will enable participants to realise interdependency and rich creative diversity in identifying shared values and ethics for the good and flourishing of a human and eco life.



This project has received financial support from the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council which aims to promote a pluralist society characterised by equity, respect for diversity and recognition of interdependence. The views expressed do not necessarily reflect those of the Community Relations Council.