IRISH SCHOOL OF ECUMENICS

Is There A Common Good?

Is the Past Preventing the Future and the Common Good?

Edited by
Cathy Higgins and Kirstie Wright

IS THERE A COMMON GOOD?

IS THE PAST PREVENTING THE FUTURE AND THE COMMON GOOD?

The Junction

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FOREWORD

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 50th 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?

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Lord John Alderdice is former Leader of the Alliance Party of Northern Ireland (1987- 1998). He is a Liberal Democrat life member of the House of Lords and Director of the Centre for the Resolution of Intractable Conflict.

Les Allamby was the Chief Commissioner of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission from September 2014 until 31 August 2021.

Professor Francis Campbell is the fourth Vice Chancellor of the University of Notre Dame, Australia, where he also holds the position of Professor of International Relations.

Jamie Delargy worked as a Current Affairs Editor and Features Editor before assuming the position of Business Editor with UTV. He now runs a website focused on energy and climate change.

Mark Devenport spent more than three decades reporting on the Troubles and the peace process in Northern Ireland for the BBC.

Claire Hanna MP is an SDLP Member of Parliament for South Belfast, elected in December 2019.

Tanya Jones was briefly Deputy Leader of the Green Party in Northern Ireland. She is researching for a PhD in the application of restorative justice to climate injustice at the University of Dundee.

Chancellor Mary McAleese was President of Ireland from 1997 to 2011. She is currently Chancellor of Trinity College Dublin.

Geraldine McGahey OBE is the Chief Commissioner for the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland.

Johnston McMaster is an Adjunct Assistant Professor at the Irish School of Ecumenics, Trinity College Dublin and is a Member of the Council of State of the President of Ireland.

Siobhán O'Neill is a Professor of Mental Health Sciences at Ulster University and Interim Mental Health Champion for Northern Ireland.

Photograph on front cover taken by Lara Finnegan.

INTRODUCTION

One of the initiatives of the Trust Steering Committee of the Irish School of Ecumenics (ISE), Trinity College Dublin, to mark the ISE's 50th anniversary is a three-year education and research project for Northern Ireland and the Border Counties entitled, 'Is there a Common Good?' In asking the question, the ISE recognises the importance of inclusive dialogue and reflection on whether, and how, the common good might exist within the context of contested political relationships between peoples on these islands. Of interest, also, is how the common good frames our responses to global challenges that impact all. In its approach to this project the ISE is not prescriptive, rather the educational methodology respects the need for civic engagement and deliberation as part of the process of understanding what the common good means in the context of Northern Ireland and the Border Counties in the period 2021-2023.

In Phase One of the project a series of virtual civic conversations were held exploring the theme: 'Is There a Common Good? Is the Past Preventing the Future and the Common Good?' Twelve contributions from academics and practitioners with connections to Northern Ireland informed interactive discussions and reflections on this theme. Up to 176 people from Northern Ireland, the Border Counties, the Republic of Ireland and further afield took part in the virtual conversations.

The chapters in this book, from 11 of the contributors, are arranged in the order that they appeared. Each of the keynote speakers had the option to reproduce their reflections from the programme series or adapt the material for publication. The written word is always dated, as time moves on and new events make history of our reflections. Yet, even as the context shifts and changes, the truths contained in the insights and stories shared in this book remain relevant. They aid our understanding of past and present relationships within Northern Ireland, between people living in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, and between the UK and the Republic of Ireland. Grappling with our shared histories and current challenges and opportunities, in light of the research question on the common good, may provide the catalyst needed to create and share together in an inclusive future.

What connects each of the chapters are reflections on the common good from different fields of expertise, and the contributors help us appreciate both the complexity and elusive nature of the common good. In other words, the common good means different things to people in diverse contexts and is not readily reduced to a precise definition. That there is no clarity or consensus suggests that understanding and agreeing what is meant by 'the common good' will require negotiation, dialogue and relationships based on trust. What follows is a brief overview of each chapter, to give a flavour of the wide-ranging reflections educed by the research question, 'Is there a Common Good?'

Francis Campbell in Chapter One, which is entitled 'Is the Legacy of Partition Preventing the Future and the Common Good?', reflects on the complex issue of the partitioning of Ireland. He acknowledges the difficulty of reaching common agreement on the historical outcome, given that people's perspectives have been shaped by differing socio-political, religious and economic variables and experiences. What is easier to measure, Campbell indicates, is the detrimental impact of partition in common good terms, evidenced by the sectarian violence that followed its inception in 1921 in both jurisdictions, and the civil unrest and violence that occurred from 1969 to 1998. Campbell suggests that the halting pursuit of the common good, enabled by the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement, (hereafter 1998 Agreement), has been somewhat derailed by Brexit. He affirms that the 1998 Agreement's three-strand approach, which encompasses relationships across these islands and allows for dual identities as British and Irish, is the common good way forward.

In Chapter Two, entitled 'Learning from the Troubles: Shaping a Common Good Future', John Alderdice shares insights from his time as Leader of the Alliance Party of Northern Ireland (1987-1998). He acknowledges that during this period the leaders of other parties at Stormont and political representatives from Britain and Ireland, agreed that peace, understood as an end to political violence, was the common good objective. What they differed on was how to make it happen and what each was prepared

to sacrifice in order to achieve it. Alderdice credits John Hume with teaching him what the common good required. Hume showed the courage and conviction needed to achieve peace, sacrificing his reputation and his political party's future to engage Sinn Féin in a dialogue on the way forward. A second lesson, which arose from his dealings with Hume, was a realisation that there is a hierarchy of goods in Northern Ireland with identity coming top. Given divergent understandings in Northern Ireland on identity issues, Alderdice suggests that there is no common view of the good represented by the 1998 Agreement, instead the common good challenges us to learn to live peaceably with difference.

Chapter Three, by Mark Devenport, is called 'Can Our Politics Serve the Common Good and a Shared Future?' Devenport knows only too well that the socio-political context is never static. There has been some progress on the pension scheme for those most severely injured during the Troubles, which Devenport calls for in his reflection. This development supports his thesis that whatever we write quickly becomes 'old news'. Devenport holds that the 'ugly scaffolding' of the 1998 Agreement, viewed as necessary to ensure mandatory coalition when first devised, has in intervening years become a barrier to the common good. The political structures, therefore, need to adapt to changing contexts. Devenport's analysis is honest, insightful and laced with colourful anecdotes from a lifetime of reporting on the political machinations within Northern Ireland.

In Chapter Four the focus changes to a well know political figure, locally and globally, the late John Hume. In her paper, entitled 'John Hume: Future Strategist of the Common Good', Claire Hanna offers her reflections on her former political leader's contributions to the peace process in Northern Ireland. Hanna reminds us that Hume's commitment to active non-violence 'coloured his political decisions and life choices' and informed his conviction that any change to the constitutional position of Northern Ireland must be by consensus. Hanna lists three common good priorities for Hume. Firstly, a belief in co-operation across differences; secondly, a determination to alleviate poverty and bring about economic regeneration; and thirdly, a determination to establish a human rights culture in Northern Ireland. Hanna points out that these common good ideals found their way into the 1998 Agreement, which Hume had conceived as the only political solution to Northern Ireland's sectarian politics and violence.

Johnston McMaster reflects on the role of churches and the common good in Chapter Five, entitled 'Irish Churches Serving the Common Good: A Future Vision'. McMaster recognises that churches struggle with questions of how in a secular context they can contribute to public life and a common good. This includes knowing what a new relationship is, or might be, between churches and social and public institutions. He advises that further reflection is required to enable churches to move away from dominating models of power and pietistic spirituality. In a pluralistic democracy, he

reminds us, Christians serve the common good when they advocate for the human and the Earth alongside other philosophies of life.

'Equality Proofing the Future: Human Rights and the Common Good' by Les Allamby, then Chief Commissioner of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC), is the subject matter of Chapter Six. Allamby underlines that democracy and human rights go together, as exemplified by the 1998 Agreement and its promise of a Bill of Rights. He points out that the 1998 Agreement included a commitment to uphold the *European Convention on Human Rights* (1950) and also to the establishment of the NIHRC. He outlines the type of common good work undertaken by the NIHRC to embed a human rights culture into society's systems and structures; and he stresses that success in this area depends on commitment from all sectors of society to a common good future.

In Chapter Seven, entitled 'No future Common Good Without Economic Justice', Jamie Delargy illustrates how historical understanding and knowledge can provide perspectives for adopting a common good approach to current economic challenges. He gives particular focus, also, to the connection between economic justice and the environment. Delargy believes climate change is a result of 'market failure'. He calls for a justice response that enables environmental recovery and makes reparation to those countries unfairly paying for the West's over consumption of fossil fuels.

Tanya Jones explores the way to 'A Green Future: Eco-Justice and the Common Good' in Chapter Eight. Jones indicates that given our interdependent and interconnected world the only sensible way to speak and think is in terms of a common good for all living things. She suggests that we can learn something about treading lightly on the earth and sustaining this 'common home' from indigenous peoples. Jones connects the dots to show how aggressive consumerism has contributed to climate change, biodiversity loss and the emergence of new diseases. Jones believes that envisaging a common good eco-just future, locally and globally, is essential for nurturing hope and inspiring civic action to redress economic and ecological imbalances.

In Chapter Nine, Geraldine McGahey shares her thoughts on 'The Common Good and the BAME Communities: In Search of an Inclusive Future'. She refers to census figures for 2011 to illustrate the growth of black, Asian and ethnic minority (BAME) communities in Northern Ireland and highlights how fear of the 'Other' operates in Northern Ireland to stir up hatred and violence. McGahey illustrates how the more visible presence of BAME communities has resulted in racism with negative consequences for the common good. One example cited, the arson attack on the Multi-Cultural Centre in Belfast in 2021, was condemned by the local community who helped fund-raise to rebuild it. When she wrote the chapter, McGahey could not have anticipated another arson attack on the

same premises in April 2022, which underlines the truth of her comment that a more robust and co-ordinated approach from the police and justice system is required to combat hate crimes. She outlines four common good principles endorsed in the most recent Racial Equality Strategy that will enhance the lives of all in Northern Ireland.

Siobhán O'Neill reflects on 'Teaching Hopefulness for the Future: Mental Health and the Common Good in Northern Ireland' in Chapter Ten. She explains that the promotion of good mental health is essential for the common good of individuals, families and the community. The legacy of the Troubles, and more recently the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, has increased levels of mental illness in the population exponentially. O'Neill explains that recognising the gendered response to stress and teaching hopefulness in schools, and in the community, is an essential strategy for developing coping mechanisms to manage stress and build resilience. She believes that a community committed to the realisation of the common good will foster hopefulness, resilience and empathy so that all may attain good mental health.

Chapter Eleven is an interview with Mary McAleese, entitled 'Valuing a Common Good: Reimaging a Just and Shared Future'. McAleese shares that her commitment to a common good future is rooted in an awareness of an absence of the common good in Belfast during the Troubles, citing her

growing realisation that a Unionist government could not be relied upon to protect the nationalist community. She discovered validation for her critique of injustice in Catholic social teaching, coupled with an awareness of the importance of international human rights thinking and legislation. She recalls significant common good moments that shifted attitudes and changed narratives in the direction of reconciliation and peace. She recalls her visits with Queen Elizabeth II to Messines in Belgium and the Island of Ireland Peace Park to commemorate those who died in the First World War, and the signing of the 1998 Agreement, as milestones on the journey to the common good. While acknowledging that the common good continues to be aspirational, McAleese feels hopeful that we are moving in the right direction.

The civic conversations that resulted from engagement with the material in this book endorsed the necessity and value of explorations on the question: Is there a Common Good? There was recognition by participants on the programme:

- 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.

Deliberations will continue through two further phases and there will be a further publication to share the findings from this education and research project in 2023.

A Word of Thanks

A debt of gratitude is owed to the ISE Trust Steering Committee who have enabled the development of this project, are funding it and continue in a support role.

The success of Phase One of this project is due to collaboration with individuals and organisations from across Northern Ireland and the Border Counties invested in community development, community relations and Inter-Church co-operation. Particular thanks are owed to all who participated in the Advisory Group and eight Regional Groups, and ensured distribution of information on the project, recruitment, ongoing reflection on the feedback and offered guidance on the way forward. Their generosity has been greatly appreciated. Thanks also go to those individuals who helped with the facilitation of groups during the programme delivery and

to all who participated and shared their reflections on the subject matter. We are extremely grateful to the contributors who participated in the programme and provided chapters for the book. Their commitment to progressing the common good is evidenced in their insightful reflections. Thanks, also, to Kevin Burns and Loreto McAuley for their technical support during the virtual conversations.

Two people in particular have contributed hugely to this education and research project. Kirstie Wright provides the administrative support and has gone above and beyond to assist with the editing of this book. Her attention to detail knows no limits. Johnston McMaster has been involved from the outset with the ongoing development and delivery of this project and his considerable wisdom and experience has enriched it immeasurably.

Dr Cathy Higgins

Project Director

IS THE LEGACY OF PARTITION PREVENTING THE FUTURE AND THE COMMON GOOD?

Professor Francis Campbell

This question poses a series of supplementary questions. What is partition? What is its legacy? What is the time horizon for the future? What is the common good? And in what societal space is the common good tested? Therefore, what is the 'common'? Is it Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, the whole island, the UK or both Britain and Ireland? We will return to the geographic test later. However, these questions are not marginal to our consideration. The answers are of fundamental importance to the task set: 'Is the legacy of partition preventing the future and the common good?'

The definition of the common good that I am using, describes it as 'a good that is shared by all in society'. That is not a good simply for the majority. A precise definition of the common good from the Christian tradition, specifically the Catechism of the Catholic Church, is 'the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfilment more fully and more easily' (1995, p. 418). A truly common good, therefore, is one which is shared by all in society and accessible to all. At a global level, the world community would see the efforts to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as a means of achieving the common good.

Partition

And what of partition? Do we have a shared view of what is meant by it? I am assuming that we agree on the definition found in a number of dictionaries that partition is a division of something, or a separation of two or more things. However, once we contextualise it, in this case the partition of Ireland, our different perspectives and understandings might fray as to the why and how. For some it is clear why partition happened, the government of the day in London partitioned the island. For others, they might see the secessionist forces in the Irish Free State as leaving the UK and therefore being the instigators of partition. While the definition is not contested, the application certainly is and that's the legacy we are exploring.

For the purposes of this paper and context, I am defining partition as an instrument or policy which successive British Governments practised in the first half of the 20th century. At the time it was seen as serving as a remedy to problems of divided societies and it was implemented in various settings throughout the first half of the previous century, with notable examples including Ireland in 1920/21, Palestine in 1947/48 and India in 1947.

Partition was practised by many empires and countries and was not exclusive to British statecraft. It was used throughout history from Roman times up to the 20th century and in other imperial contexts in the 19th century. In

Ireland, partition came after disputes over Home Rule – a debate which raged for much of the latter part of the 19th and early 20th centuries. It was not just the governments that borrowed ideas from other imperial settings. The revolutionaries did too. Indeed, Arthur Griffith earlier in the 20th century, cited the example Hungary held out for Ireland as it negotiated greater powers for itself from the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In Ireland, a gradually worsening security situation North and South, culminating with the War of Independence, which alongside unionist mobilisation in the north-east of Ireland in opposition to Home Rule, was the backdrop which gave birth to partition in 1920 with the Government of Ireland Act.

Was it a successful instrument? It depends on one's perspective. It has been described as 'either a well-meaning if ill-judged attempt at a solution to ethno-communal divisions in the context of an emerging and unstable international/imperial system built around the rhetorical principle of ethnic nation-statehood', or a 'disastrous decision which left many unresolved issues'. (Dubnov and Robson, 2019, pp. 21).

As Dubnov and Robson (2019) suggested that if measured simply by the cessation of war then the Irish model of partition was deemed a success and set it up to be used elsewhere. However, if we come back to that timeline and how we define the future and in what timescale, then how would we judge partition some one hundred years on? Stretch the horizon

beyond the immediate years of the early 1920s and partition remained an unresolved contentious issue. Even up to the present it still causes division, as exemplified by the choice of a land or sea border to accommodate Brexit choices.

For some, partition speaks purely of a local history and context, in this case Ireland. For a political scientist, on the other hand, it happened against an external backdrop of decolonisation and world war - first and second – which helped to set the scene and establish precedents elsewhere.

Some political scientists thus see partition as an instrument which tried to help power transition from a dying and outdated form of imperial rule, following the Great War, to something with more informal means of authority, similar to a commonwealth which would be better suited for the post-colonial era. In essence, a sort of restructuring of the empire. For such a theory, the principal architects of partition did not see separation, rather a form of unity as modelled on the Union of South Africa, or the process of federation as occurred in Australia some two decades earlier (Dubnov, 2019).

Key figures in the development of partition as a policy, such as Sir Reginald Coupland and Lionel George Curtis, played critical roles in the partition in Ireland, and later Palestine and India. According to Dubnov, 'for

Coupland, the appeal of partition for Ireland, Palestine and India, lay not in its separation of warring populations, but in its possibilities for offering federation, co-operation, and even unity across empires' (2019, p. 75). So it was less of a remedy to warring factions, and more an attempt to create transnational and decentralised governance for a post-empire age. That was the theory at least. But in defence of those who saw partition as an attempt to move to a new post-empire setting, the 1920s and 30s North and South of Ireland seemed to adopt the more extreme forms of separation, and developments in Belfast and Dublin outpaced the thinking in London. In addition, the political make-up of the coalition government in London severely restricted Lloyd George's scope for flexibility. Ideas had consequences beyond what was initially imagined, and the economic and political instability of the inter-war years raised other pressing problems and complexities.

During these years the Irish Free State shifted quite quickly towards a republican tradition of statehood, rejecting dominion status, while the North gravitated towards a much more unionist dominated state with the removal of proportional representation in favour of the first past the post system, thus further marginalising the Catholic minority. The Council of Ireland proposal, which could have served as a potential for the creation of an Australian style of commonwealth of federal powers alongside largely autonomous states enjoying considerable home rule powers, was never

tested or taken seriously. Though provision for such a Council was within the 1920 Act and the 1921 Anglo Irish Treaty, in the latter the Northern Ireland Parliament was given an opt out. The Boundary Commission proposal, though poorly drafted, was parked in 1925 and the Council essentially abolished.

Seen therefore from other contexts, such as South Africa, Australia and possibly Canada, partition became more permanent than perhaps it was ever intended to be. Such a statement no doubt is debatable, but I do believe that previous and subsequent events elsewhere in the empire illustrated a potentially different pathway which Irish partition could have taken had events or circumstances played out differently, and had London handled it differently.

The presence of Unionist MPs in Westminster during this period and the abstention of Sinn Féin MPs was an added complication. That was further compounded by the post-war coalition government of Lloyd George which was heavily dependent on Conservative support. We can only imagine what might have transpired had Carson become Northern Ireland's first Prime Minister rather than Craig. Would Carson have been more open to influence from London and the push for an Australian and Canadian pathway? Would he have taken encouragement from the words of King George V speaking in Belfast City Hall on 22 June 1921 and sought a

new beginning with those leaders in Dublin? Equally, had Collins survived would dominion status have continued and thus a space for the two parliaments to agree a federal pact or structure? What if Lloyd George had not been dependent on Conservative votes? Of course, we can never know, but all of these variables had significant influence on how partition evolved and we can compare how it evolved in Ireland with other contexts.

Regardless of how partition came about and evolved, it is a fact and it has a legacy which remains disputed and contested. However, the 1998 Belfast Agreement managed for the first time since 1920 to reach consent on the status quo. It moved the old binary structure and replaced it with choice, which allowed for multiple options for identities, which in the past often wrongly conflated faith and citizenship on the island of Ireland. That conflation was the foundation of the 1920 - 21 partition.

The 1998 Agreement, unlike the actions of 1920 and 1921, achieved consent on the present, by including transparent negotiations with Unionists, Nationalists, Republicans and Loyalists and two sovereign governments. That contrasted with examples such as the Long Committee of 1919 which was not inclusive in its considerations. However, the referendum of 2016 on the UK's continued membership of the European Union, and the result to leave, has again forced the debate back towards the binary choice. There is now talk once more of resurgent violence if x or y happens. Talk again

of unions, either risk to the current union with the UK or hopes or fears (depending on one's outlook) about the prospect of a union with Ireland. That's the context today.

So, is the legacy of partition preventing the future and the common good? Perhaps the diplomat in me will try to say 'Yes' on the one hand, but 'No' on the other, though I do think we have to give an answer in blocks of time and sequence, looking backwards and forwards.

Within Northern Ireland from 1921 to 1972 and from 1972 to 1998, I think it would be hard to argue that the state pursued the common good. It was a society where the good was not for all; and where the polity was based on the majority. The initial use of the propostional representation scheme of voting was replaced with a first past the post system, resulting in the all too familiar issues such systems create in divided societies and with the resulting breakdown of societal cohesion. During this period, the Northern Ireland Government caused considerable alienation to many of its citizens, leading to serious popular unrest from 1969 to the late 1990s.

Within the Republic of Ireland, did partition prevent the pursuit of the common good and the future during this same period? Though it is less explicit when contrasted with the events north of the border, alienation occurred. The state in those years identified too much with the Catholic

Church. The 1937 Constitution in Ireland accorded Catholicism a special place, though not an established place in the life of the Irish State. And certainly, there was a perception of alienation by the mostly Protestant population in Northern Ireland. Also during this time, the overall Protestant population in the Republic of Ireland declined.

One of the legacies of partition was the creation of one state and one province on the island of Ireland where national identities became even more conflated with religious confession. Did that then prevent the pursuit of the common good in the Republic of Ireland – a pursuit of a good for all? I don't think we can answer that question in our time today. However, fear of a single Ireland ruled by Dublin with a close relationship with the Catholic Church was a real concern for many Northern Ireland Protestants and unionists and no doubt would have persisted as a fear for many Southern Protestants and unionists in those early years of the Free State and Republic of Ireland.

I do not want to suggest a direct equivalence however, between Northern Ireland and Southern Ireland in terms of its historic treatment of its respective minorities. In the latter, the Protestant minority was much smaller and therefore likely perceived as less threatening to the state; while in the former, the Catholic population was much larger at nearly 30% and therefore much more of a perceived direct challenge to the Northern Ireland

Government. I point this out simply as realpolitik and not as a justification for subsequent actions. The War of Independence and the Civil War did not become sectarian wars and in subsequent years, the Irish Government seemed more successful at integrating its minorities into the life of the state than happened north of the border.

Reverting to Northern Ireland and whether the legacy of partition prevents the common good there, I put 1998 down as a marker. Of course, that was the date of the Belfast Agreement which replaced the 1920 Government of Ireland Act. A read of the 1998 Agreement, the basis on which it was negotiated, its inclusiveness and its intra north, its north-south and east-west dimensions, surely illustrates the pursuit of the common good – that is a good for all irrespective of creed, colour, gender, class, nationality, or any other attribute. And it contrasts greatly with the lack of inclusion in the build-up to the 1920 Government of Ireland Act. Of course, not all goods were realised in 1998, but the journey was started nonetheless and the commitment clearly for the good of all in society.

And now the difficult and perhaps contentious part of our answer about where we are now in 2021, as we approach the centenary of the creation of Northern Ireland. We can still say that the Belfast Agreement of 1998 is based on achieving the common good, but the legacy of partition is now back on the agenda.

Following the result of the 2016 referendum on membership of the European Union, when the United Kingdom as a whole voted to leave the EU, while a majority in Northern Ireland voted to remain, old east-west, north-south and intra north tensions have re-emerged. Old binary choices are once more to the fore.

The UK and Ireland's membership of the European Economic Community from 1973, and the subsequent creation of the European Single Market in 1992, broadly removed popular perceptions of international borders between EU member states. While not a direct intention of the Single Market, the effect was most profound on the border between the UK and Ireland, especially between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, resulting in much harmonisation to create a single market for goods, services, capital and people. It did much to level differences and it complemented the Common Travel Area between the UK and Ireland. All that helped to provide a much-needed broader context for the 1998 Agreement.

Since 2016, the return of binary politics and choices, linking back to the stark choices first opened up by partition, risks undermining some of the benefits of the 1998 Agreement and the commitment to the pursuit of the good of all. It is too premature to say for certain if this will be a new permanent state of affairs, as the full effect of Brexit has yet to play out. What we do know is that the fall-out from Brexit, and the more

strident approach to implementing the referendum result, such as leaving the Customs Union or Single Market, has led once more to sharp choices and binary divisions, as illustrated by the contemporary tension with the application of the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland.

Such a binary choice has brought us back to the fundamental question of partition, a choice about unification on the island of Ireland and the future existence of Northern Ireland and it being part of the United Kingdom.

As we know, there is provision in the 1998 Agreement for a referendum to be called if it looks like a majority within Northern Ireland are in favour of Irish unification. Up until the post-Brexit period, few thought it could take place within the lifetime of the authors of the Agreement. That is in part illustrated by the lack of detailed drafting or processes related to such a referendum, as it was broadly seen at the time as aspirational.

One of the consequences of Brexit is that it has now hastened that which was once merely aspirational. The offer of a referendum on unity, to be held in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, exists in law and it is a legal right to have such a referendum if it looks likely that it would carry. We should ask if the holding of it prevents the pursuit of the common good by offering such a binary and contested choice. The reverse could

also apply, would it serve the common good to deny the offer of such a referendum choice if a clear majority called for a vote?

Clearly it depends on those earlier questions about how one defines the 'common' and measures the future. The common good after all is a good to be pursued for all, not simply a majority either in favour of joining a unified Ireland or in favour of remaining in the UK. An immediate timescale would certainly seriously test the application of the common good in both directions. But over a longer period of time, involving more considered thought, discernment and understanding of the 'Other', similar to what Australia achieved during its Constitutional Conventions over a century ago, could that help to realise the common good in a variety of settings – intra north, north-south and east-west?

Existing unions or new unions, which in the past cast up grave fears and misperceptions could give way to a new inclusion. Such a process, regardless of the eventual outcome would likely allow space to re-examine old perceptions and address outdated fears which may no longer match reality. For example, I recently watched an interview from the 1970s with John Taylor, now the Right Hon. the Lord Kilclooney, in which he cited three reasons to oppose Irish unification: loyalty to the throne, the influence and power of the Catholic Church in Ireland and financial reasons. Most

would now agree that at least two of those reasons have disappeared and the loyalty to the throne is compatible with various forms of independence from the UK as is shown by Australia and Canada. Equally, and with regards to the continued union with Westminster, the reasons to fear that union are unlikely to rely on the same arguments. In the intervening century, society in Ireland and Britain has changed significantly, and perhaps no more so than in the area of religion where both countries have experienced very rapid secularisation. Thus, whatever the reasons for the original partition, the UK and Ireland are today very different societies from a century ago.

In the short and immediate term, and in answer to our question, I believe that the true test of the common good, and the pursuit of a good for all, not just the few or the many, is best served via the approach of the 1998 Agreement, not just through its balance with intra north, east-west and north-south, but in its wider context of EU membership which allowed us to cast the partition of 1920-21 onto a much wider canvas.

I fear we cannot reach agreement on what we mean by 'common' in a rushed timescale, so all we can do is to examine each of the contexts to see if the common good test could be met by serving the good of all.

Within Northern Ireland it would be difficult for a binary choice to serve the common good as opposed to a majority good. Such a binary choice, as

long as it exists, makes a common good resolution very difficult to achieve. The binary sovereignty question is now centre stage again and regardless of a referendum result, the common good will likely be perceived as not being achieved for all, with one group or other feeling widespread alienation in the short term. An 'either/or' approach rather than a 'both/and' approach, will likely result yet again in a failure to achieve the common good.

Within an all-Ireland setting the same binary choice exists and though percentages might be less pronounced than within Northern Ireland, with perhaps a fifth of a future population feeling alienated at least in the short-term, it could make the pursuit of the common good of all difficult to realise. Potentially, that could be overcome in the context of a unified Ireland by continuing to honour the 1998 Agreement and adhering to all the protections of the Agreement, including support for Northern Ireland as a distinct polity enjoying considerable devolved power. But as with examples elsewhere, such a process cannot be rushed and must involve all parties.

Within the UK a highly divisive result in the Brexit referendum is a reminder that divisive referenda on fundamental choices can create many more unanticipated problems. The Brexit referendum, far from strengthening the British State might just weaken it to the point where its future integrity is threatened through further secession, such as the case of Scotland's independence. And on this island, a Brexit legacy that reinforces

an old or a new form of partition risks threatening the 1998 Agreement. So, is the legacy of partition preventing the future and the common good? Again, I fear that it is because the binary, zero-sum choices are back on the table. But the difference for us, unlike those who went before us this past century, is that we know it does not have to be so. For the period between 1998 and 2016 we managed to find a way to overcome the legacy of partition and its binary choices, and to work towards the common good, not a winner's good or a majority good, but a good for all.

If sentiments settle, and with a less strident English nationalist tone driving Brexit, perhaps once again we can overcome the binary legacy of partition on the island of Ireland by re-enhancing the intra north, north-south and east-west dimensions against a wider European backdrop. Overcoming that binary legacy could be the basis of a new settlement within the UK or a new settlement within the island of Ireland (which would result in a different type of partition for some of its citizens, a partition from the UK). Regardless of how the legacy of partition is overcome and whether the union is with Dublin or London, the common good and the future can only be served by reverting to those three strands set against a wider backdrop. We can only rediscover that approach by listening carefully to each other and not the echo chamber. That way we might begin to understand the 'Other', and persuade them, or they us, of a new approach, thereby opening ourselves up to new possibilities.

If we revert to our comfort zone and relive the politics of the past century then we are confining ourselves to a long, slow path, which will eventually bring us or the next generation back to the same point of 1998, that we can only overcome the legacy of partition and pursue a common good for all by embracing those three strands of relations within these islands. Regardless of whichever union is achieved or retained, its success depends on the cohesion of those three stands.

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LEARNING FROM 'THE TROUBLES': SHAPING A COMMON GOOD FUTURE

Lord John Alderdice

I am delighted to be associated with this initiative of the Irish School of Ecumenics (ISE). I have known of the work of the ISE for many years and have valued its important role in education and the way it has helped people to think about some of the difficult questions faced by people of faith in Ireland and beyond.

In this chapter I will try to deal with three questions that the ISE has tried to face. In the first place I will address what I think we may have learnt from the past and from our experience of working to bring an end to political violence in Ireland. Then I will try to answer the question, 'Is the past preventing the future?' Finally, I will make a brief comment about the need for pluralism.

Firstly, what do I think we have learnt from our troubled past in Ireland and what in particular have we learnt about shaping a common future and finding agreement on a common good?

When I was elected as Leader of the Alliance Party of Northern Ireland

in June of 1987, the community was deeply divided. The editorial in the Belfast Telegraph expressed the view that I was a nice fellow, but the job was obviously impossible. The proposition that the feud in Ireland could be resolved was very much in doubt at that time. For those who did still seek a positive outcome, a common analysis ran as follows: there is deep, historic division and disagreement on a wide range of important issues and the inability to find a resolution has resulted in intractable violence. The way to resolve this endless cycle is to reach an agreement across the community division. However, since it seems highly unlikely that everyone will agree, particularly those who are engaged in or support politically motivated violence, the only practical possibility would involve bringing together as broad a centre ground as possible, with people from the unionist side, people from the nationalist side, and people who did not particularly identify with either of those labels or identities and try to fashion some kind of agreement amongst them. The unspoken assumption, at least unspoken publicly though sometimes said privately, was that if agreement was achieved across this broad centre, it would be politically possible to do whatever was necessary to marginalise those on the extremes. There had been the unhappy experience of internment without trial in the early part of the Troubles. It had been unsuccessful and indeed counterproductive, but there was a view that this was a result of faulty intelligence and it was perceived as being foisted on the nationalist side of the community by the British Government at the behest of Unionists. If both sides were

in agreement, then those who were still using violence could be dealt with more successfully than previously.

As Leader of the Alliance Party, I decided early on to draw together some of the brightest young politicians in the party to re-examine the analysis on which the policy of the party was based. We had a series of meetings and a lot of discussion but concluded that while we could add a few minor tweaks to the policy proposals, there was no alternative to the broad approach the Alliance Party had always taken, and we published a document entitled 'Governing with Consent' (Alliance Party of Northern Ireland, 1988). The basic idea was that if we could get agreement or consent that that would be a common good that everybody would accept. Had I been asked at the time what this common good was, I would have simply described it as peace. It would be a basis to bring an end to the political violence. Whatever else we could not agree about, surely that was something on which we could unite. I embarked on a round of meetings with other British and Irish political leaders, the British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, the Irish Taoiseach, Charles Haughey, and various community representatives. I did not get involved at that stage in meeting with people in the paramilitary organisations because I believed they were not interested in negotiating, since they were committed to the use of physical force. In addition, there were moral or ethical questions. It was argued by many people that for a political leader to meet with them was to proffer them a platform and credibility.

I started to engage in conversations with the Unionist leaders, Ian Paisley and Jim Molyneaux, the Nationalist leader John Hume, and the leaders of other smaller parties including Seamus Lynch of the Workers Party. In addition to the British and Irish Prime Ministers, I met regularly with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and many others, and in all these meetings I was expressing the view that we needed to get a serious talks process underway in order to reach an agreement. The process subsequently began, and we talked around the issues and what kind of agreement there might be. There was a broad consensus that we needed a Northern Ireland Assembly, based on power-sharing and the protection of human rights. There had to be some kind of North-South institution often referred to as the 'Irish dimension', which would facilitate North-South collaboration on various issues. In addition, while Northern Ireland should remain in the United Kingdom, it was crucial that the British and Irish governments cooperated to maintain a degree of stability.

We tried to make progress in the talks, but there seemed to be a limit to how far we could go, and I well remember one particular meeting in Parliament Buildings which was a watershed. There were lots of meetings taking place that I do not remember, indeed sometimes the political talks process was like watching paint dry. It went on and on but did not seem to get very far. When we seemed particularly stuck, and getting nowhere in the formal process, it often seemed worthwhile for the four Northern

Ireland party leaders to meet without the British and Irish governments or anybody else. I would have a chat with Jim Molyneaux and suggest a meeting of the four of us. He would persuade Ian Paisley to meet, and I would talk to John Hume and ask him if he would agree to get together with the others, and the four of us would meet together, alone.

At this particular meeting of the four, we talked around things for a while and then John said, 'You know, I don't believe we're going to get anywhere without me engaging with the IRA'. I remember looking at Jim Molyneaux, sitting on my right, and the blood just drained from his face. As a young doctor, if I'd seen that happening in a patient without knowing what John had just said, I would have presumed that Jim had a burst aortic aneurysm. The blood drained from his face and he said, 'Well that's it, there's no hope then'. He wasn't angry, he just meant there was no possibility of getting anywhere because if John was going to try to reach an understanding with Gerry Adams and the Republicans there was no prospect of this being anything that the Unionists could accept, so even continuing to engage and negotiate with John would be a problem. I remember going home afterwards downhearted that the whole idea of trying to bring together a broad centre had been dealt a mortal blow. What could I do? John had talked to Sinn Féin before and I had been publicly critical of him, as had many others, including some senior members of his own party, but he had clearly reached a decision that looked like it could terminate the talks'

process with Unionists. I knew John quite well by that stage, and I knew that if he had decided something, he was not going to be persuaded to change his mind by me arguing with him. He would have thought it through and come to a very firm conclusion about it. I knew that power-sharing could not happen without John and his Social Democratic and Labour Party, so I could see only one way to deal with this, and that was to test his idea to destruction. I would have to go along with his idea. We could continue to argue about it politically, but we were going to have to go along with him and, if he was right, he was right, but if he was mistaken and found that it would not work, he would then have no alternative but to return to the previous process, even if he did not really believe in it anymore. So that is what happened, and it is both important and relevant to the question we are addressing - what have we learnt about shaping a common future and finding agreement on a common good? When you ask people if they want peace, everybody says they do. However, they do not necessarily mean the same thing by 'peace'. They do not imagine the same context or outcome; they do not necessarily mean they are prepared to pay the price of whatever that peace might be. So, have we found a common good when we hear different groups talking about peace? Not necessarily.

The second thing that people thought was a common good, was socio-economic well-being. John Hume used to talk a lot about this. He would recall his father's words that 'You can't eat a flag' (1996, p. 26) and would say

things such as, 'our challenge is to respect difference and to work together' (1996, p. 144). He believed that together we should 'commit ourselves to spilling our sweat and not our blood' (1996, p. 124) in order to achieve the common good of socio-economic well-being for all. Everyone needs a job. Everybody needs a roof over their head. Everyone needs food on the table. It seems reasonable to assume that socio-economic well-being is a common good. However, there is a fundamental problem with this. When people feel that something else is even more important, such as their identity, and it is under existential threat, they are prepared to sacrifice their socio-economic well-being, and even their lives and those of their family for the cause. This is one of the reasons why sensible, thoughtful, rational, liberally-minded people often cannot understand how others will vote for propositions which are manifestly not in their best socio-economic interests. They will assume that the voters have been misguided or misinformed. People may of course be misled about the facts of a situation, but there are also times when people are prepared to make costly sacrifices of their well-being, and even give their lives to protect something else. Some of my colleagues call these non-negotiable 'sacred values'. They are not necessarily religious values; the life of my child is a sacred value. I would be prepared to sacrifice all sorts of things for the life of my child. The work that my colleagues have done in many different situations demonstrates that in the context of existential threat to themselves, their own community, and its culture, people are prepared to sacrifice socio-economic well-being. It is even becoming clear, through

functional magnetic resonance imaging (FMRI), that when someone is thinking in this way different parts of the brain are operating based on a different grammar and syntax of thinking. If you try to engage in what you regard as a logical and rational argument with someone who is thinking in that way, it simply does not work. You might as well be speaking in another language; and in a way, you are. Their process of thinking is different. We can actually see on the scans that it is a different part of their brain that is engaged. This way of thinking is not about weighing up cost and benefit, but contrasting what is seen as right and wrong, which is a very different kind of thing. When, for example, the British Government believed that the Northern Ireland problem was a matter of socio-economic dis-benefit and assumed that pouring in lots of public money would resolve it (and at the height of Thatcherism there was no reduction in the level of public expenditure in Northern Ireland), all it did on the republican-side was create 'upwardly mobile provos' (Lord Alderdice, 2018). The prospect of economic benefit did not make republicans change their perspective on wishing to leave the United Kingdom. In fact, in situations where these values hold, if you offer people economic benefits to give up their sacred values, they get very angry. Their sacred values are more important than that. So, the offer of a common good like peace or socio-economic benefit, when people believe that more fundamental elements in their identity or allegiance are under threat, will not work. We must find a different way of engaging.

The process that led to what we call the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement is an interesting example of such a different way of engaging. It seems to me, as one of the people that negotiated it, to be a divergent agreement. Now, that may seem to be an 'Irish-ism'. I say that it is a divergent agreement because those who agreed to it, did not agree to it for the same reasons. They interpreted the meaning, the purpose, and the potential outcome in quite different ways. From a unionist perspective it was a deal whereby nationalists and republicans would give up the use of violence, not necessarily give up the wish for a united Ireland but give up the use of violence to obtain it, and they in their turn would make Northern Ireland a workable and acceptable place for nationalists, accepting that it would be governed in a very different way from the rest of the United Kingdom. For nationalists, and perhaps particularly for republicans, the point of the Good Friday Agreement was that it opened the door, without the use of violence, to a political process that could eventually lead to what for them was 'the good' - a united Ireland. For those who did not entirely share either of those perspectives, the Agreement took violence and the threat of violence out of the equation, enabling people, now and in the future, to decide without being forced in one direction or another (with consent) what kind of future they wanted.

It was a divergent agreement because there was not agreement on what

the 'good' consisted of. What is good for the fox isn't necessarily good for the rabbit. We had to fashion an agreement with which people could live in the present without violence, leaving the future outcomes to the next generation to create without violence. This then is what I believe that we have learned from the past – that ending violent conflict is not about reaching a common understanding much less a common agreement on what 'the good', now or in the future, consists of, but rather agreeing on how to disagree without killing each other.

This brings me to the second question: 'Is the past preventing the future?' As individuals we do not start life with the capacity to differentiate between the past (what I remember), the present (what I am experiencing) and the future (what I hope, or fear will happen). The capacity to differentiate between the past, present, and future is a developmental achievement. Gradually, as we mature, we develop that temporal capacity. When a person becomes disturbed with various kinds of brain disorder or mental illness, for example dementia, their capacity to differentiate the past from the present is lost, and they mix up what has happened, or what they hope or fear will happen, with what they are currently experiencing. They may also lose the capacity to differentiate what is inside their mind and what is outside their mind. When someone falls ill with a schizophrenic illness and they hear voices, those 'voices' are their own thoughts, but they are not felt to be part of them. The thoughts are experienced as being said by someone

else. The boundaries of both psychological time and psychological space, which are key boundaries of the ego, are lost.

In an analogous way, when communities feel under threat, these two components of psychological time and psychological space, are shaken up. When a community feels under threat, the past is no longer perceived to be the past, it's felt as though it is the here and now, or in a hopeful or threatening future. There is a story about a man being interviewed by a journalist at Drumcree near Portadown where there were major stand-offs between Protestant Orangemen who wanted to march along a road and Catholic nationalists who now lived along this traditionally Protestant route. The journalist asked the man why he was getting into such a temper about the march being stopped. The man replied by asking if the journalist realised that the Catholics had drowned a hundred Protestants in the River Bann, which was nearby. The journalist asked when this dreadful thing had happened, and the man replied that it happened in November 1641. For that man who felt his community and identity were under threat, time collapsed and he experienced the massacre of more than three hundred years before as evidence of a clear and present danger. If you are living in a community that feels under threat, the past is not the past. In the Balkans, during the time when Milosevic was whipping up powerful feelings by reminding people of battles from a long, distant past, it was not experienced by the people as history - something over and past, but as a real and present

danger. The future would not lead them away from that possibility, on the contrary.

A similar problem arises with psychological 'space'. When people are confident about themselves and their community, they are able to recognise that while some terrible things happened in the past, today is different, and tomorrow will probably also be fine. In addition, if they are not frightened about the well-being of their community, they can be more open to other people coming to join their community and become part of it without the fear that their culture will be destroyed. They can see it as enriching and can welcome the diversity and even accept that through this their culture may evolve and change, but they are not frightened or unnerved by this. However, if people feel anxious that their culture, their way of life, all the things that are important to them are at risk, then they are likely to try to strengthen the boundaries of their community in order .to protect it. By keeping the threatening 'Other' out, they affirm borders and emphasise boundaries.

How can we address such problems? Do they hold us back from a future? Yes, they do, and the only way that I have been able to find to deal with these things is to try to bring the problems out into the open and talk about them, in order to find a better way of healing the disturbed relationship. Ultimately, all these problems that we are describing are about disturbed

historic relationships between Irish / Northern Irish communities and that is what we discovered in working at our peace process. It was not just a question of addressing practicalities such as policing, or the administration of justice, or socio-economic inequity, or political structures. All these things are important, but fundamentally, we had to acknowledge and address a series of disturbed historic relationships between people who are Protestant or Catholic, unionist or nationalist in the North, and between the North and the South, and between Britain and Ireland. We had to create a process which enabled the representatives of these three interlocking sets of relationships to come together to talk about their disturbed history, how they felt about it, and to find new ways of engaging with each other, new ways of relating. When we talk about trying to find common ground, or a common future, or even a common perspective, it seems to me that it's not about agreeing on peace, or agreeing on socio-economic benefit, but it is about agreeing that there is a disturbance in the historic relationships between our communities and that we need to find a way of building new sets of relationships.

That approach is not easy. It is full of problems, and we need to acknowledge that too. There is a prize of good relations, but there is a price too. If people are prepared to pay the price, if they no longer believe that they can win, if they have come to the point where they believe that there needs to be a compromise to get them out of what we sometimes call the

'hurting stalemate', then it may become possible to find a way forward into negotiation. The outcome, as I said earlier, is not necessarily an agreement that everybody understands in the same way. The Belfast/Good Friday Agreement was a divergent one, we even use two names to describe it, the Belfast Agreement and the Good Friday Agreement. The perspectives of unionists, nationalists and those who were not keen to be called either 'unionist' or 'nationalist' were all different. It was important to acknowledge the historic background to those differences, but it was also important to be able to let go of that historic background in order to build a new and different way of engaging or relating. If a community is not prepared to begin the process of letting go and allowing history to be history, then it is very difficult to reach an agreement. It is even more difficult to build on it, and of course, because it is about relationships it is vulnerable, it can be destroyed. Relationships are a dynamic thing. They are not something that can be achieved. If you have a relationship with somebody and you think that it is sorted, then it is already in trouble, because relationships are not something that can be sorted. They are a dynamic engagement which is always vulnerable to running into difficulties, and that is what we have seen with the relationships addressed in the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement. Three sets of structures emerged from the three stranded process that addressed the three sets of relationships: north-south, British-Irish, and within Northern Ireland. The key reason why we experience difficulties, and which has contributed to the Brexit problems, is that

all three sets of relationships, and the three sets of institutions that were supposed to maintain them, have been neglected, ignored, disregarded, not followed through, and not worked at. There is no formula for relationships, they are something that must be worked at to be maintained. You must pay the price for the relationship in order to reap the benefits resulting from it.

Some people imagine that there is a particular constitutional or legal formulation which will sort the problem. It is not the case. When I was the Alliance Party Leader, I would regularly get letters from all over the world describing a solution to the Northern Ireland problem, as though I could give it to the other political leaders and they would slap their foreheads and say 'Ah! That's the solution, why didn't we think of that? That's what we'll do, and it'll all be fine'. That is not how it works at all. We needed to engage with each other and build a different set of relationships. What is the way to the future? It is the building of new sets of relationships between the communities. Are there things from the past that can hold us back? Yes indeed, the memories of what has happened, and the fear that it is going to happen again, can hold us back.

Finally, let me say something about pluralism. I have referred to the need for a divergent agreement because there was not agreement on 'the good'. For a unionist 'the good' was to remain part of the United Kingdom. For a nationalist 'the good' was to be part of a united Ireland. For many

who would not describe themselves as either unionist or nationalist 'the good' was to be part of a united Europe. These are not merely divergences of view that can be argued away. Within each of us there are also such conflicts. I want to be free to conduct my life as I wish. At the same time, I want to be in relationships with others and they will not always want to conduct themselves in the same way as me. I must struggle to address these conflicting wishes within myself. The philosopher, Isaiah Berlin, said that there is no possibility of achieving a full agreement on 'the good' and so, he said, if we are to take account of these genuine differences, we must construct a society that is pluralist in nature (Hardy, 2002). This challenge is a geo-political one. After the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of Soviet communism, Western leaders believed that if China could be persuaded to accept the benefit of liberal market economics, the Beijing leadership would quickly come to adopt liberal socio-political ideals too. This has proven to be deeply mistaken and the Chinese Communist Party has constructed a market economy that may well become the largest state economy in the world, but it has become less free in social and political terms. We are not currently moving in the direction of greater agreement on 'the good', on the contrary, and this is threatening the stability and integrity, perhaps even the survival, of the rules-based international order that was established after the Second World War. Is it possible to find a common good and a common future at a global level? It seems likely that it will be necessary to develop a more pluralist way of understanding 'the

good' and building the future if we are to find a way of sharing our planet without violent conflict.

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CAN OUR POLITICS SERVE THE COMMON GOOD AND A SHARED FUTURE?

Mark Devenport

Good evening and thank you to Cathy Higgins and everyone at the Irish School of Ecumenics for inviting me to talk to you on the theme of politics and the common good.

Bear in mind that, for the last 20 to 30 years, whilst our political leaders have been sitting inside their warm offices at Stormont, or at Hillsborough Castle, holding interminable negotiations about decommissioning arms, recognising the police, devolving justice, reforming our welfare system or legislating for the Irish language, I have been the poor schmuck stuck outside in the wind, the rain, the snow and the hail!

Together with my colleagues in the Belfast press pack, I have spent months on end being kept in the dark by politicians and their advisers, who alternate between providing partial and partisan briefings and resorting to a blanket 'No comment'. Then, after a night without rest or a fitful few hours in a sleeping bag on a BBC office floor, I have had to digest vast tomes of documentation in record time before hitting the airwaves to explain the fundamentals of the latest breakthrough to our audiences. Simultaneously, I may well have been fending off spin doctors, intent on obfuscating the real

import of whatever deal has been agreed by only advertising the parts of the document which put their masters or mistresses in the best possible light.

So, can Northern Ireland's politicians serve the common good? More often I have been left asking myself whether our leaders can get on with it, whether they can see their way to moving us reporters and camera crews into somewhere warm and dry, and whether someone, anyone, can provide us with a hot cup of coffee. The former Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Julian Smith came out of his cosy office at Stormont House on a cold, rainy evening in December 2019 and did just that, thereby guaranteeing himself permanent sympathetic coverage from an easily bought press. Against this backdrop of harsh first-hand experience, I have more of an excuse than most to pronounce a plague on all the politicians' houses. I could repeat the BBC presenter Jeremy Paxman's famous dictum that the proper relationship between a journalist and a politician should as far as possible mirror that between a dog and a lamppost. Or I could quote approvingly the title of the American libertarian PJ O'Rourke's book *Don't Vote. It Only Encourages the Bastards*. Or I could treat you to my favourite etymological explanation of the term politics - namely that it is derived from the Greek word *pollá* meaning 'many' and the word 'tics' meaning 'blood sucking creatures'.

I could do that, but I sense that the Irish School of Ecumenics requires

more than a collection of anecdotes from a talks-weary hack. Moreover, I note that the question I have been asked to address is not whether our politicians do serve the common good and a shared future but whether our politics *can* serve such a purpose. So, you have set the bar a little higher for me than to treat you to a bar room rant.

The other reason I won't simply launch an anti-politician diatribe is that apart from covering negotiations, elections and more dull committee meetings than I care to recall, I have also witnessed the opposite of politics. In the early 1990s when famine struck the Horn of Africa, the Irish aid agency Concern flew me and my BBC Spotlight team from Belfast to the Somali capital Mogadishu to report on how tonnes of supplies donated by the people of Northern Ireland were being distributed. Apart from admiration for the humanitarian efforts of both international and local relief workers based in feeding camps on the ground, I was also struck by the complete lawlessness on the streets of Mogadishu and the surrounding countryside. At that time, the only authority in the city came through the barrel of a gun.

The aid agencies worked in an environment where huge bribes had to be paid to the gang that controlled the airport, the gang that controlled the warehouse, or the gang that controlled the hospital. At one point, I travelled across the peace line, which divided Mogadishu, to interview the

self-styled government of Somalia. In fact, it was just another gang running another section of the city. The interview went well, but shortly afterwards the mood deteriorated rapidly as it became clear that the gang wasn't happy with Concern for not working in its territory. The reason was that the aid agency was reluctant to meet the self-styled government's extravagant financial demands.

An aide to the Somali president pulled Concern's Linda McClelland aside and told her 'Lady, I am the Minister in Charge of ambushes, if you don't rethink your policy, I will have you shot'. As my cameraman looked around for further filming opportunities, Linda whispered urgently 'get me out of here'.

So, if I ever meet a dewy-eyed anarchist who assures me everyone will be lovely to each other if we only dismantle the apparatus of authority and taxation, I shall reply with one word, 'Somalia'. I was never so glad to see a traffic warden on duty as the day we drove through the streets of Nairobi after hitching a ride on a plane heading back from Somalia to Kenya.

Closer to home, during the Troubles I never witnessed such complete anarchy. But at times, particularly around the Drumcree stand - offs in the 1990s, we seemed to be hovering dangerously close to the edge. During the years of direct rule from Westminster, people talked about a democratic

deficit, which was never properly filled by the appointment of local people to unelected quangos. We voted for local representatives, but they were largely powerless. Meanwhile the paramilitaries on either side asserted their own form of control, claiming the right to resort to the gun and the bomb in order to push their conflicting agendas.

So, whilst on a personal level I may have cursed those long hours of negotiations which often left me cold and wet, their higher purpose was to assert the primacy of politics. The intention was to counter the arguments of those who believed violence remained a legitimate or appropriate response to the unfinished arguments over Northern Ireland's constitutional status.

It took a lot of constructive ambiguity, and at times quite cunning political manoeuvring, to get us to the point we reached in 1998. The course of the process was far from smooth. The peace it produced was far from perfect. But the proof of the pudding came in the casualty statistics which demonstrated a dramatic reduction in the numbers who fell victim to political violence in the years after the Agreement, even though, tragically, the worst atrocity at Omagh took place three months after the cross-border referendum which endorsed the Good Friday Agreement.

That said, the Stormont administration created by the Good Friday Agreement, then revised by the St Andrew's Agreement, is an awkward,

cumbersome system of government, which often appears to be programmed with software designed to create delay and disillusionment. Witness the history of cross-community vetoes stopping movement on key issues, the most recent wielded just before Christmas 2020 by the DUP blocking a Unionist Health Minister's recommendation for tighter COVID-19 restrictions. Witness the need for Westminster to step in to fill the vacuum over legalising same sex marriage, reforming Northern Ireland's abortion laws, or approving redress payments for victims of historical institutional abuse. Witness the trail of incompetence and shoddy decision-making revealed by investigative journalists and the judicial inquiry, which uncovered the sorry saga of the Renewable Heat Incentive scheme, the scandal which brought about the 2017 interruption to the Stormont bandwagon. Witness the continuing failure, as I write these words, to implement a pension scheme recognising the plight of those most severely injured during the Troubles.

From the outset, the UK Unionist Bob McCartney was a ferocious critic of Stormont's mandatory coalition. In his view it negated the normal principles of parliamentary democracy. A distinguished barrister, McCartney was Stormont's naysayer-in-chief. That baton has now passed on to another barrister, the Traditional Unionist Jim Allister, who is currently one of those leading the charge against the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland.

Chatting to me in the basement of the Assembly building, Bob McCartney used to compare the Stormont apparatus to the fantastical drawings of the English cartoonist W. Heath Robinson. Heath Robinson's extraordinary imagination conjured up images of convoluted contraptions powered by steam, featuring elaborate arrays of pulleys, working ingeniously to complete some utterly absurd task - the wart chair designed for the automatic removal of a wart from the top of the occupant's head, or the multi movement tabby silencer, guaranteed to automatically spray water at caterwauling felines. Bob McCartney's point was that once you mess with the principle of normal democracy, which enables people to vote-in the politicians they want to rule and vote-out the lot they don't, you have to keep adding Heath Robinsonesque bells, whistles and pulleys to cope with the unforeseen consequences.

Certainly, I found covering numerous elections in Northern Ireland could be at some levels a dispiriting experience. The parties published manifestos with policy commitments on issues like academic selection or climate change. But there was always more than a suspicion that the voters made their choices in order to keep others out, rather than due to any conviction regarding their favoured candidate's fitness to govern. Indeed, the most significant thing many MLAs seemed to do during their terms in office was to sign the register in the Assembly Chamber designating themselves as 'unionist', 'nationalist' or 'other'.

The same parties which made up previous Executives came back, perhaps with slightly altered strengths, in successive mandatory coalitions. When disputes arose, vetoes were used. The enforced conjoining of parties with radically different ideologies and aspirations often led to the lowest common denominator form of administration, translating to policies lacking in dynamism or originality. Stormont Castle, home to the Executive Office, developed a reputation as a building where ideas went to die. If the top two parties were engaged in one of their all too frequent huffs, it was hard to even get a reply to a letter out of the place.

However, the point Bob McCartney and Jim Allister are slow to concede is that the reason the 'ugly scaffolding' of the Good Friday Agreement was erected, was to resolve the serious misgivings Nationalists had about entering any system of administration at Stormont dominated by a Unionist majority. The 'ugly scaffolding' term was coined by the former SDLP Deputy First Minister Mark Durkan. Those Nationalist misgivings dated back to the foundation of Northern Ireland, when Unionists made no secret of the fact that they were drawing the boundaries of the new state in order to guarantee themselves a comfortable majority. 'You want democracy, without all these Heath Robinson contraptions?', Nationalists might well have responded to Bob McCartney, 'Then let's go back to the arguments we had over gerrymandering back in the 1920s'.

That said, Mark Durkan's use of the term 'ugly scaffolding' represents a recognition that the system of unionist or nationalist designation at Stormont is far from pretty. Can you imagine TDs or MPs being asked to make a similar declaration regarding, say, their race or religion? Yet nationalists would also contend that the partition of Ireland, and the partition of Ulster, was far from pretty and if they accepted straight majority rule at Stormont, even if it led to a more efficient form of government, they would effectively be accepting what the Bishop of Down and Conor, Joseph MacRory writing back in 1920 called the 'nameless satrapate made up of the six amputated counties'.

So, the checks and balances were brought in to provide reassurance to nationalists that the minority would never again be subject to untrammelled majority rule along the lines of Northern Ireland's first 50 years. Ironically then, given the trends in demographic and political change, it's been Unionists more than Nationalists who have increasingly resorted to those minority protection measures, like the controversial Petition of Concern. In the words of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, the safeguards were created 'to ensure that all sections of the community can participate and work together successfully in the operation of these institutions and that all sections of the community are protected'. But in recent times it's been the inbetweeners - the others who refuse to categorise themselves as

either 'Orange' or 'Green' and would like to see Northern Irish politics and society evolve beyond those traditional divides which have been most disadvantaged by Stormont's cross-community voting system.

It was particularly notable, for example, that in the cross-community vote, which took place before Christmas within the Executive, the Alliance Party was effectively disenfranchised. That meant that the votes of those who identify themselves as believers in a united community weren't counted in a decision dealing with the balance between health care and the economy. Not, one imagines, what Tony Blair, Bertie Ahern or George Mitchell had in mind.

So, did the Good Friday Agreement create the best system of government in the world? No. Was it the only deal achievable at the time? Probably, yes. Did it bring a halt to decades of violence and suffering? In the main, yes, but not entirely. Can our politics serve the common good and a shared future? Yes, it can, but often it doesn't.

Are there ways in which the Stormont structures could be improved? Yes, but the process will probably be far from straightforward.

Can Our Politics Serve the Common Good?

As the BBC's Ireland Correspondent at the time of the Good Friday Agreement I didn't get many opportunities to go to the cinema. So, I can't

say I saw the movie *Deep Impact*, which was released in the same month as the referendum on the Good Friday Agreement. However, I am reliably informed that the plot involves a seven-mile-wide comet hurtling towards the Earth, threatening to wipe out all humanity. The threat of an extinction level event enables the USA and Russia to bury their differences. The two superpowers cooperate in the construction and crewing of the Messiah, a spacecraft with the mission of diverting the deadly comet by detonating a nuclear bomb close to its trajectory.

I am not sure whether COVID-19 could be categorised as an extinction level event but it has certainly brought more than enough trauma and suffering to our doors. Like the comet in *Deep Impact*, COVID-19 does not distinguish between Russians and Americans, Protestants and Catholics, or nationalists and unionists. Surely this is the time when, just like in the movie, age-old rivalries would be put aside in order to tackle the common foe.

Back at Stormont things didn't start too badly. I remember being called to Stormont's Castle Buildings on March 12th 2020 for a news conference following a summit involving Stormont departmental chiefs and representatives of the emergency services. First Minister Arlene Foster and Deputy First Minister Michelle O'Neill stood together and told us they were taking the threat extremely seriously but for now our schools would remain open, in line with their latest scientific advice.

But this show of unity didn't mask the disquiet behind the scenes. Many parents wondered why, when Taoiseach Leo Varadkar had closed all educational establishments south of the border, parents were still being asked to send their children to classrooms a few miles to the north. The Executive's joint position lasted for just one night. The next morning Michelle O'Neill performed a handbrake turn, hosting an impromptu news conference in the Stormont Great Hall during which she argued that Northern schools and colleges must close immediately.

With the benefit of hindsight, it was the right call. Many parents were already voting with their feet, not sending their children to school. Within a week, the First and Deputy First Ministers appeared together again to announce the formal decision to shut the classroom doors.

However, this stance of saying one thing, then disagreeing in public and then reversing your policy has been repeated *ad nauseam* by Stormont ministers throughout this pandemic. Sometimes it may be simply down to different politicians drawing different conclusions about how best to tackle the virus. But at times it has seemed obvious that the parties' ideological differences about following Dublin or London, or tilting towards business or the unions, or prioritising the economy over healthcare, have limited the Executive's ability to deliver a coherent response.

It's worth pointing out that Northern Ireland is far from the only administration which has found it hard to cope with the challenges posed by a deadly virus, which moves with such relentless speed and determination. The US President Donald Trump didn't do himself any favours by preferring snake oil remedies involving disinfectant to the considered advice of his medical experts. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson accused Sir Keir Starmer of being the man who wanted to cancel Christmas, before being left with no choice other than to go on the TV himself and cancel the relaxations he had hoped to keep in place for the festive period. The now Tanaiste Leo Varadkar went on RTE early last October to criticise the Irish Chief Medical Officer Tony Holohan for not thinking through a proposal to tighten the Republic of Ireland's lockdown. But later that month the Irish Government was left with no choice but to act on the Chief Medical Officer's recommendations.

So, Stormont's leaders can be forgiven for some of their dithering and disagreement. The requests they are having to make of the public would have been unthinkable two years ago. However, when they hold a lengthy meeting and emerge without any decision, or openly bicker, the public can be forgiven for wishing they lived in a benign dictatorship, rather than under the Good Friday Agreement mandatory coalition system.

The initial argument over the timing of the closure of schools was just the first in a series of damaging internal wrangles over matters like the supply of PPE, the Bobby Storey funeral, Edwin Poots MLA's claims that the second wave was down to behaviour in nationalist areas, mandatory mask wearing, the closure of churches, the cancellation of exams and more. Most recently we saw the Executive agree a timetable for the cautious reopening of our schools, then the DUP expressed in public its disagreement, motivated in part by the speedier plans of Prime Minister Boris Johnson.

Although I believe Stormont's structures have proven to be a handicap in developing a sufficiently flexible and swift response to COVID-19, I don't want to diminish the enormous efforts made by both ministers and their officials to try to deal with the common threat. When they haven't been at loggerheads, some of the joint appearances by the First and Deputy First Ministers, answering reporters' questions in person or online, have boosted public confidence. Senior Stormont officials have clearly been working around the clock to cope with the multiple challenges posed by the pandemic. In recent months, the success of the vaccine rollout is a testament to the Herculean efforts of staff behind the scenes in Northern Ireland as well as across the UK.

Not long after stepping down from the Ulster Unionist leadership to spend more time with his family, Robin Swann MLA took on the challenge of

a health service already reeling under the pressure of massive waiting lists and a dispute over nurses' salaries. That pressure was soon compounded by the pandemic, but so far Minister Swann appears to have coped remarkably well. He has been rewarded by a high approval rating in a recent LucidTalk poll for the Belfast Telegraph with 75% of those surveyed rating his performance as good or great. That was well ahead of First Minister Arlene Foster or Deputy First Minister Michelle O'Neill whose approval ratings were 24% and 23% respectively. Certainly, it doesn't look like Minister Swann has much to fear in being called a 'poodle' by the East Antrim MP Sammy Wilson.

Mr Wilson MP didn't feature in the LucidTalk poll, but his party colleague, the DUP's Education Minister Peter Weir did. Minister Weir's approval rating languished at just 15%. After the various debacles over school closures and exam algorithms he might not be too surprised at this poll result. However, he could at least take heart from the fact that the Northern Ireland public thought he was doing a better job than the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Brandon Lewis who scored a measly 4% approval rating.

So far as Stormont's overall effectiveness in combatting the pandemic is concerned, the same LucidTalk poll found that 55% of those surveyed believed the Executive's actions had impeded the battle against the virus.

By contrast, only 35% thought that Stormont ministers had helped the struggle against COVID-19.

Acknowledging many individual politicians and officials are doing their best within the constraints of our peculiar system, are there ways in which the Stormont structures could be modified in order to enable individuals to serve the common good and a shared future more effectively? Almost certainly yes, but don't expect it to happen any time soon.

In response to the pandemic, the Stormont Assembly made practical alterations to the way it operates, allowing for social distancing in the Assembly Chamber, enabling remote participation in committee meetings and streamlining its proceedings so they concentrate almost exclusively on law-making and the battle against the virus. Recently the technology has been modified to enable MLAs to appear via video in debates in the Assembly Chamber. These changes were sensible, but they amount to housekeeping measures.

Bigger reforms, like abolishing the 'unionist' or 'nationalist' designation system and replacing it with a system of weighted majority voting could make decision-making much easier. However, so far, this seems certain to remain an aspiration rather than a reality. The benefit of such reforms would be to remove the current second-class status enjoyed by united

community or 'other' MLAs whose mandate is effectively ignored when key issues are decided by a cross-community vote. Such a system would also make it easier to override individual parties when a complete consensus can't be reached. However, would either Unionists or Nationalists be happy to abandon their veto power? Experience tells me that when any political party has a potent weapon at its disposal it is loath to surrender it.

On this topic I am reminded of the time between 1999 and 2001 when I covered the United Nations in New York. When the UN was created, the five great powers that represented the victors of World War Two gave themselves vetoes on the Security Council. Ever since then there has been a continuing debate about how the Council could or should be reformed to reflect the changing balance of population, power and economic wealth across the world. Should the EU have a permanent place on the Council? If so, should the UK and France be ejected? What about the absence of major nations such as India, Brazil or South Africa?

One of the more pleasant duties I had to undertake in New York was attending a diplomatic dinner at the Italian Mission to the UN. The Italian ambassador was a veteran diplomat, full of good anecdotes about manoeuvrings in the corridors of power. He told us about a previous German ambassador who had been charged with ensuring his country secured a permanent place on the Security Council. Assiduous lobbying

by Germany led to the creation of an alliance involving Brazil, India and South Africa and the hopeful four felt, from the responses they received from other UN members, that the moment for change had come. But as the date for the key summit approached, it became clear that our dinner host had been energetically lobbying himself to create another pact involving Italy, Argentina, Pakistan and Egypt, intent on blocking any reform.

When the distraught German ambassador remonstrated with his Italian counterpart that they were ruining a key objective set by his superiors in Berlin, the Italian UN ambassador replied, 'I thought we lost World War Two together, why do you want me to lose it on my own?'

The moral of this story is that like reforming the UN Security Council, reforming Stormont could prove to be fraught with difficulties. All the interested parties will mull over the detailed consequences and will almost certainly be reluctant to endorse a change. Although we may see a less frequent use of the contentious Petition of Concern, wholesale reform seems unlikely unless the political realities alter on the ground. A dramatic expansion in the number of united community or 'other' MLAs would potentially force a rethink if their third designation starts to rival the two main ones for size.

In this regard, it will be interesting to see what the impact of Brexit is on

the Stormont structures and the dynamic of future Assembly elections. I don't mean the impact merely in terms of whether I can get my favourite cheeses in the future, or if the Ireland/Northern Ireland Protocol restricts my choice when it comes to pets, potted plants and online shopping. I am referring to the fact that the Brexit deal has acknowledged the deficiencies of the Stormont cross-community voting system by making any future decision on the continuance of the Protocol dependent on a straight, not a cross-community majority. Will this development undermine the designation system in other ways? What impact if any might it have on the crude, but effective message deployed by the DUP in past Assembly elections of 'vote for us or get a Sinn Féin First Minister'?

The 2022 election will provide a test of whether the race to be the biggest party still engages most voters, or whether the more complex issues around the Protocol come to the fore.

Until now I haven't sought to question the whole premise of this discussion by analysing what we mean by the 'common good', so let's do it now. This audience will know better than me that there are different philosophical ideas about what constitutes the common good, depending on whether you are consulting Aristotle, St Thomas Aquinas or Adam Smith. I don't think I have anything useful to add on that score.

What I would say is this: if you are dealing with a *Deep Impact* extinction level event, then it's easy to work out what is in the common good. In the event of COVID-19, putting the minority of Covid deniers to one side, there is a consensus about the broad objective of the need to protect lives before eventually returning to normal social and economic activity. That said, there has been considerable controversy over which steps to take and when.

However, when you widen the debate out to include consideration of Brexit, academic selection, abortion law and so on, how can we define the common good? Something which might appear eminently sensible to you might be anathema to me. Most of us are probably in favour of a shared future, but exactly how should that be defined? Is the recent decision by Belfast City Council to enable areas to vote for bilingual street signs a progressive recognition of our pluralist culture or a worrying move towards greater balkanisation of the city? Why do those who object to bilingual street signs not seem to be equally exercised over flags?

From afar, the objective of bringing down Belfast's peace walls might seem a laudable aim. Back in January 2013, someone leaked to me a copy of a draft report which revealed that Stormont had set itself the target of removing the city's peace walls by 2022. The ambitious plan had been drawn up in response to challenges from visiting politicians like the former New York

Mayor Michael Bloomberg, or the then Prime Minister David Cameron. They argued that the demolition of the walls would send a signal across the world which could have a galvanising impact on inward investment.

After the broadcast I was contacted by a big funding organisation who told me they were making real progress on the ground in persuading reluctant residents of the need to take the peace line down. I said I was very interested in following up the story. A few days later I was out and about in North Belfast filming neighbourhood police officers and loyalist and republican community workers. They explained their plan to take down an unsightly wall and replace it with trees and a green area which would improve the look of the neighbourhood. They recorded interviews with me on the proviso that the material would not be transmitted until after they had got the approval of local people at two community meetings which had been convened that very night. Based on the work they had completed, the activists on both sides of the line felt that the proposed project was in the bag.

But the community meetings turned out to be far from a done deal. Eight years on, my video material has never been broadcast because the approval of local people, frightened about getting a brick through their window, was never forthcoming. What seemed to be in the common good to the Prime Minister or the New York Mayor, wasn't so obvious to those living in the shadow of the wall. A few months after my report, Stormont released an

official version of its Cohesion, Sharing and Integration report. It matched my draft, but the target date had been pushed back a year to 2023. Now that target date is just two years away I don't think anyone expects Belfast to pull down its peace walls on schedule. The point I want to make about the peace walls, bilingual signs, who should be eligible for a Victims' Pension and so on, is that what might appear to be the common good to me, might not look the same way to you.

I recently watched a contribution from the First Minister Arlene Foster to a symposium arranged by Queen's University Belfast related to this year's centenary of the creation of Northern Ireland and the partition of Ireland. The First Minister specifically used the term 'common good', arguing that during Northern Ireland's first century 'our many successes were weakened by the lack of a common purpose. We did not harness the talents of all of our people for the common good.' Looking ahead she argued that beyond 2021 'the common purpose of the vast majority is to make Northern Ireland a success. In our new century,' she continued 'we can use the talent of all, to build the common good of a happier, healthier, sustainable and prosperous place and people'.

Put like that it sounds completely unobjectionable. But of course, in the contribution which followed immediately afterwards, Deputy First Minister Michelle O'Neill reiterated that republicans see no reason to

celebrate partition. The Deputy First Minister echoed the First Minister in looking towards the future, but rather than talking about making Northern Ireland a success, her vision was for a planned transition towards national reunification. So, the two politician's definitions of what might serve the common good were based on their radically different assumptions.

Which brings me back to the point I have been asked to discuss. Can our politics serve the common good? My answer is yes, but more than that our politics is, in my view, the mechanism by which we referee these frequent disagreements and thereby determine what society as a whole regards as being the common good. The decisions we make are influenced by the wisdom and ideology of the individual politicians involved, the mandate the voters give them, the limitations of the systems they are working within and wider realities, like the history, geography and resources which we have all inherited.

I am not convinced that the current political system at Stormont is sustainable. However, I don't know whether radical change is possible through a process of voluntary internal reform. Instead, future elections may make the argument for major alterations to the 'ugly scaffolding' impossible to ignore. Alternatively, the breakup of the UK and/or a border poll may lead to the kind of fundamental change which Deputy First Minister Michelle O'Neill is hoping for.

Whatever structures of governance are in place, the people of this archipelago of Ireland and Britain will continue to need to feed their children, look after their sick and elderly loved ones and seek happiness, fulfilment and prosperity in their own different ways. The pandemic of 2020 and 2021 has stripped our society down to its bare bones, exposing not just the deficiencies of our government and our politicians, but also emphasising the responsibilities that all of us have as members of the same society to do our bit to help our neighbours in pursuit of a common objective. Despite its many drawbacks, our politics can serve and help define the common good and a shared future, but only if we as active citizens work together with our elected representatives in sharing the load.

JOHN HUME: FUTURE STRATEGIST OF THE COMMON GOOD

Claire Hanna MP

'Work together on the issues of common concern,
and the healing will follow'.
John Hume (2000)

Along with common interests, common concerns, and common sense, the common good was a steadfast of John Hume's lexicon and of his ambitions. The common good – what it constitutes, how to achieve it, and how to maintain it, was plainly apparent to him.

Hume stood before centuries of seemingly intractable challenges; he carefully examined them, diagnosed the issues, and prescribed piercingly clear-cut solutions. What's more, he then spent decades advocating for and implementing those same solutions. The comprehensiveness of his vision and the clarity with which he communicated it, transformed what was once a ground-breaking proposal into an orthodox common basis of understanding, but ground-breaking it was.

From his imagination and intellect essentially sprang all the lasting frameworks and resolutions to the issues that we have faced on this island. The centuries-long conception of Ireland versus Britain was reformulated

as three interconnected relationships: within Northern Ireland between nationalists and unionists; between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland; and between Ireland and Britain. The three strands remain a template of genius and, if worked in the spirit that he envisaged, can propel us through and beyond our turbulent present towards the common good.

Hume's Vision of the Common Good

The Irish School of Ecumenics' programme on the common good to mark fifty years since its establishment came shortly after the sad death of John Hume in August 2020. It offered another opportunity to reflect on the magnitude and nuances of John's foresight and his contribution to peace in Ireland.

In May 1964, John wrote two articles in the Irish Times, which were the first explication by him of several themes that he developed over the course of his political life in the next four decades. The articles are notable for their concentration on solving the pressing social problems of housing, unemployment, education and the struggle in the minds of young people for priority between these issues affecting everyday lives, and the ideal of a united Ireland into which they had been conditioned, and which caused such dissonance and frustration in their lives. It is a dual challenge that the SDLP wrestles with to this day.

Those articles eloquently established that the Stormont Unionist government bore main responsibility for the situation. Yet it then launched a robust attack on the Nationalist Party's opposition and its inability to produce constructive contributions on social or economic matters. 'Leadership,' Hume (1964) wrote, 'has been the comfortable leadership of flags and slogans. Easy no doubt, but irresponsible'. Another critique of Northern political nationalism was the 'dangerous equation of nationalism and Catholicism', which had 'simply contributed to the postponement of the emergence of normal politics in the area and has made the task of unionist ascendancy simpler' (Hume, 1964). John was clear in his aim that this equation must be eliminated. He wanted to transform Irish nationalism into a serious aspiration and political concept, rather than something determined wholly by demography. He went on,

> If one wishes to create a united Ireland by constitutional means, then one must accept the constitutional position … if a united Ireland is to come, and if violence is rightly to be discounted, must come about by evolution, that is by the will of the Northern majority … [T]his is the only way in which a truly united Ireland, with the Northern Protestant integrated, can be achieved (Hume, 1964).

It seems self-evident to us now, verging on a truism. Yet that is the measure of its success. It was truly radical. This was the first time that the principle of unity by consent had been articulated clearly and coherently. It turned

on its head the prevailing nationalist position that the only obstacle to unity was Britain and that it was Britain's responsibility to remove the border and unionist objections. Hume issued a challenge to those seeking to reunify Ireland to abandon this rudimentary analysis and propose a dynamic alternative. One of John's most incredible talents was transforming key nationalist tenets from confrontation to co-operation and resisting, as he put it himself, 'the toxic pressure to adhere to traditional tribal imperative' or to 'relax into entrenchment'. A key responsibility of a political leader and one that we see little of now, is to educate followers away from their prejudices, rather than to pander to them. Politicians, John Hume (1995) once said, must 'extend [themselves] to leadership rather than … content [themselves] with spokesperson-ship alone'.

The Common Good as Political Ideology and Public Policy

John was fairly unusual in Irish politics: an intellectual and conceptualiser who was also interested in action. There was really no-one who was his equivalent in the North, and perhaps only Garret Fitzgerald in the Republic of Ireland. John was only 32 when he was elected as Stormont MP for Foyle in February 1969, and already had a considerable record of achievement behind him in the campaign for a university for Derry, in economic development (notably founding a smoked salmon co-operative) and of course as a leader of the Civil Rights Movement. He was one of

many generators of ideas at that time. Yet, uniquely, he appreciated the need for electoral engagement, to slug it out democratically, and to place people in the positions of power where they could instigate change.

The common good in Northern Ireland begins with the common ground, and the culmination of his decades of strategising was spelt out in 1998 in the Agreement's ambition, institutions, human rights framework, and control of our own destiny as a people in Northern Ireland. John Hume (2000) said, 'Work together on the issues of common concern, and the healing will follow'. He continued, 'By working together we can break down borders and prejudices of the past. A new society will emerge in a generation or two but there will be no victory for either side.' An aspect of the common good of which John was acutely aware was the compromise and sacrifice that living well amongst others can demand. He reflected upon and empathised with the 'phobia' that both traditions in Northern Ireland had about 'losing something' and the 'innate fear about having to give something up even if it is only vestigial' (2000). It was imperative for John that political leaders were 'sensitive to such fears without being completely constrained by them' and to use their influence to demonstrate the greater rewards that could be achieved if loss is reframed as an opportunity for development (Hume, 1995).

Hume always understood the conflict in terms of economic inequality as well as civil rights. In one sense, John's analysis, and programme for

the common good, could be viewed as comparable to Maslow's hierarchy of needs in terms of an interconnection between different problems and their solutions. Yet, it was less a pyramid of stages for John but, rather, a symbiotic relationship: tackling economic inequality would pave the way for greater appreciation of political, cultural, and religious difference and common goals. In turn, that would enhance efforts to address economic and other types of disadvantages. He saw the common good in terms of common challenges that transcend the differences between people, the accidents of birth. For Hume, it was through forging solutions to problems, working on the common ground, that trust could be built and that the common good would come to the fore.

It was for that reason that John always held that his proudest achievement was his role in the Credit Union movement, giving people the dignity and autonomy of having their own money, access to credit and to mobility as liberating forces. He knew that economic empowerment and progress wasn't a 'big bang' moment but a slow and gradual process. The Credit Union afforded low-income people the opportunity to plan and to think beyond the next few days, to imagine a different future for themselves and their families and to be able to invest in that future.

Prior to the 1998 Agreement, he considered his greatest public policy achievement to be the establishment of the Northern Ireland Housing

Executive. He emphasised to the Harold Wilson government that public housing had to be removed from the hands of gerrymandered, partisan councils and responsibility transferred to an independent and dedicated agency that would ensure housing was allocated based on need, not religion. Hume's vision was grounded in the reality of people's everyday lives and struggles but it transcended far beyond that. It should be no surprise that Hume determinedly located the party that he founded in the Social Democratic movement.

The European Union

The founding principles of the SDLP also drew on his understanding of European social democratic traditions. He was immersed in European culture, a fluent French speaker and ardent Francophile. John realised immediately the value of the European project to Northern Ireland, both in its basis for respecting and managing difference and in economic terms. He often remarked that the best peace process is a job, undoubtedly influenced by his early experiences of witnessing mass unemployment in the working-class community of the Bogside. He was enthusiastic about how Northern Ireland's MEPs could seize the opportunity of the European Parliament as a forum in which to co-operate for the common good somewhere without the baggage of our own geography and history. The extent to which that enthusiasm was shared by others varied down the years, but John was

unwavering in his view that the European project offered both a model and a vehicle for reconciliation and prosperity for Ireland and Britain. He marvelled at the progress made in such a short space of time between nations once at war,

> If we can leave aside our quarrel while we work together in our common interest, spilling our sweat and not our blood, we will break down the barriers of centuries, too, and the new Ireland will evolve based on agreement and respect for difference, just as the rest of the European Union has managed to achieve over the years - the healing process. (Hume, 1998, p. 1176)

In the European Union, John saw not only the challenges and divisions which other regions and countries had overcome, but the transformative impact on British-Irish relationships that common membership fostered. It was always a question of a divided people for Hume, not the lines on a map that had preoccupied so many for so long. London and Dublin co-operating as friends and equals, as well as its unhindered access to the whole island, were crucial to enabling democratic nationalism to triumph over physical force. John was adamant that both governments had to be prepared to work together for solutions that have the confidence of all communities in the North and that is a lesson still being learned and relearned. Common British and Irish European Union membership was a crucial underpinning of the Good Friday Agreement. It facilitated a closer relationship between North and South that compensated Northern nationalists for the Irish State's

withdrawal of its territorial claim over the North in *Bunreacht na hEireann*, but without threatening unionists, who could legitimately perceive it as incidental to common EU membership. There is no doubt that John would be heartbroken and furious to see that our peace settlement and Irish-Anglo relations have been relegated to secondary considerations in games being played by the UK Government on Europe.

Non-Violence

If one of John's drivers was the creation of pluralist institutions for change, his other was the absolute rejection of the use of violence as a device for solving any political impasse. John spent decades repeating that violence was not inevitable and the majority agreed with him. Yet, for some, one of the great unlearned lessons of Hume is the continuing regard for violence as a political tactic, which considers it necessary, whether perpetrated by state forces, or by paramilitaries. The philosophy that violence is in principle a justifiable political tactic, but just not right now, is both a barrier to true reconciliation and an undetonated landmine under the peace process. While Hume could analyse and objectively consider some of the factors that caused people to choose violence, he never justified it.

John conceptualised and crystallised his ideas on the socio-economic and political situation from an early age and repeated them for many years.

Indeed, it must have been a lonely experience, bumping up constantly against recklessness and intransigence for so long, waiting for the penny to drop with others. He was affectionately teased by friends, and mocked by his opponents, for what became known as his ‘Single Transferable Speech’, whereby he repeated the substance of his arguments again and again. John made no apology for this, the teacher in him believed in repetition of basic concepts and believed that he was getting through when he heard the points that he was making being repeated back to him again.

Those who rejected his analysis and solutions now accept those three strands as the framework and operate within them. Those who fought tooth and nail against the Agreement that he designed now cloak themselves in its language. It is of course to be welcomed as a positive development but is also as a vindication of his strategy.

Critiques of Opponents: Unionism and the Common Good

Throughout his political career, Hume attracted the opprobrium of many unionists and many public intellectuals. It is documented by Ed Moloney that Hume’s great antagonist, the late Rev. Ian Paisley, used to bridle at the widespread praise for John’s moderation and commitment to non-violence by snarling about ‘Saint Hume’ (2008, p. 192). Others grumbled about Hume’s alleged propensity for self-righteousness and apparent tendency

to confuse the radiant truth with his personal vision. Personally, I believe that many unionists knew they were out-manoeuvred in political debate and out-thought by Hume's breadth of imagination. They knew no one to match his intellect. Later, of course, the criticism was heightened by the revelation of the Hume-Adams talks and the apparent eclipsing of the SDLP by Sinn Féin.

John's vision started with improvement in the everyday and material well-being of people, but it didn't end there. He believed in a New Ireland, one governed by all its people, of all traditions, in all their diversity. He was firm in his assertion that he had a right to pursue his legitimate political aspirations if this was done peacefully.

How far did this militate against the ideal of working towards the common good? Hume was often accused of not understanding Unionism. On the contrary, he understood it all too well. For Hume, the primary weakness of the failed 1921 settlement was the injustice done, primarily, to Northern nationalists but also Southern unionists, and the complete absence of common purpose in the neighbouring states as a result of division. As others in Ireland reduce these times to the comfort of slogans and a race to a border poll, more of Hume's words resonate. Speaking to the British Army blocking a peaceful protest march that Hume was leading on Magilligan Strand in 1972 he said, 'You may govern us, but you do not have our

consent' (Mallon, 2020). He would not, in this centenary of partition, wish just to reverse the mistakes of 1921 and to entrap a minority into a state to which they do not consent.

Seamus Mallon, Hume's deputy leader and co-conspirator of many years, was also a man who thought deeply about the common good and how to advance it. He said simply, 'We have two stark and clear choices. We can live together in generosity and compassion or we can continue to die in bitter disharmony' (1986).

Collectively, their lives' work brought an end to the ostensibly insurmountable historical arc of bitter conflict between these two neighbouring islands and the people on them. Other seemingly insurmountable problems and growing entrenchment are currently taking shape in the North. Yet, we now have the benefit of the framework and the rational mechanisms to find solutions that Hume, Mallon and others worked so hard to achieve and implement. No one has yet come up with a better idea than partnership and working on the common ground for the common good.

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IRISH CHURCHES SERVING THE COMMON GOOD: A FUTURE VISION

Dr Johnston McMaster

In 1913 a conference for students was held in Queen's University, Belfast, entitled 'Ireland's Hope'. For five days students reflected on the current situation, placing it in the theological context of the Kingdom or Reign of God. They met in a very tense Ireland. Only four months earlier almost a quarter of a million men had signed the Ulster Covenant pledging to use any means necessary to resist Home Rule. In the more sexist world of the time, more than a quarter of a million Ulster women signed a Declaration. In the same month as the conference the Ulster Volunteer Force was formed and before the year was out, the Irish Volunteers were formed. Both did not intend to be comic-opera armies, and both would land guns from Germany in 1914. By September 1913 in Newry, Edward Carson was declaring that a provisional Ulster Government would be formed if Home Rule was introduced to Ireland.

It was in this context that the students met in Belfast and their five-days discussion reflected the breadth of these challenging times. They were engaging with the reality of economic problems in Ireland and recognising that the major issues to be faced were poverty, emigration, inadequate education, industrial exploitation, political and religious intolerance, and

the problems distinctive to rural and urban life, all in the theological context of the Reign of God. A keynote speaker, T.M. Barker suggested that 'we cannot blind ourselves to the fact that the National Sins - religious intolerance and political suspicion - are at present, indeed, as they always have been, tremendous obstacles to progress' (1913, cited in Ellis, 1992, p. 32). In 1926 a similar conference within the same theological framework was held in Dublin with the title 'Towards A Better Ireland'. This latter conference took place in a post-partition Ireland when a border was in place and the island was struggling to emerge from horrendous violence, bloodletting and killing of Irish people by each other.

In the Ireland of 2021, we face huge challenges. COVID-19 has refused to recognise any borders anywhere. Brexit may never be done and will be with us for a long time in Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England. It is not the first departure from Europe, Henry VIII having withdrawn in what may have been known as 'Hexit'! The fallout from that withdrawal lasted some 400 years. As in 1913, constitutional crises will probably roar down the track in the next decade or so. Social and economic inequalities have been exposed locally and globally by COVID-19. We are now aware and are beginning to face the brutal fact that our Atlantic Western world has been constructed on racial lines, and white supremacy is difficult to change and let go. Ireland, like much of our world, remains patriarchal and we have been shamed in recent months, yet again, by the way we have treated

children with state, church, and public silence. Unlike 1913 we now have an ecological crisis meaning that we are in the last chance saloon on the edge of eco catastrophe. We are surviving in a world where if there is a future it is most likely to be Asia, not America or Europe. Locally, how have we dealt with the national sins with which the students of 1913 were engaging: religious intolerance and political suspicion? A more secular Ireland may have dealt with most of the religious intolerance, there now being more religious indifference. But I wouldn't bet on religious intolerance having been eliminated, and intolerance still has many other forms including secular intolerance. One fears that political suspicion still afflicts our society, especially in Northern Ireland, remaining an obstacle to progress and certainly to a common good. The three strands of relationships, so core to the Belfast Agreement, have been at risk for some time, and with the increasing dominance of English nationalism, the dynamics of the east-west relationships are changing dramatically. Political suspicion does not stay with politicians, the suspicion and mistrust transfer too easily to civic society.

At Queens in 1913 a young generation was concerned with Ireland's hope. Many and increasing numbers of today's generation strongly resist the binary religious identities. They refuse our institutional religion, our historical intolerance and sectarianism, and our stale theologies. They may not speak of the Reign of God but in their secular language is the expression

of their hope for a better Ireland, a more shared island and above all, they hope for a better eco-human world. Today's young people are energised by eco-justice and the imaginative visioning of the common good. They may be Ireland's hope. Unlike the Belfast and Dublin conferences of 100 years ago, the theological framework of the Reign of God may be absent, though it's ethics and values are still at the heart of young people's focus and commitments. Some of us still use this highly metaphoric and symbolic language and are challenged to be bilingual, capable of speaking both Reign and secular language. We do need intergenerational dialogue as together we deal with today's public issues, especially the eco and common good challenges, and overcome the intolerance and political suspicions on our way to building a better Ireland and a better world.

The Road We Have Travelled

By looking back to 1913, or any part of the decade of centenaries, we can see how formidable the religious institutions were. Churches had powerful roles in public life and clergy had considerable authority, not just in the religious sphere but also in the politics of the time. The churches were saying a lot and strongly identified with the respective political aspirations and the Home Rule crisis. Not surprisingly, the dominant slogans of the time were 'For God and Ireland' and 'For God and Ulster'. The two iconic documents then were the Ulster Covenant and the Easter Proclamation, both invoking

God as being core to their resistance and violence, and as being on their respective sides. We may now recognise this as being civil religion, the classic instrumentalisation of God. But it was real and powerful at the time and an indication of the role of religion in Irish society and life a century ago. There were opposing voices, but they were in the minority and there was little theological reflection on the question of God's split personality and the morality of God and guns. In the religious atmosphere and ethos of 100 years ago few believers would have voiced or opted for political atheism and made that moral choice.

In the century and more since then it has all changed. We have travelled on a very rocky road. The religious institutions have moved from a power base to a place with little social and political power. They have gone from centre stage to the margins, from being culturally established to culturally disestablished. Churches have gone from being privileged to being deprivileged. We can describe this in two ways.

Ireland in the last 60 years, especially, has become a more secular society. But what does that mean? And we may not yet be clear about what it does mean. There are three like-sounding words but each different. Secularisation is the reduction in practice of faith but more so the decreasing influence and role of the churches in the public square. Churches control less and less social and public power. Education is a big area where the churches'

role has diminished. A century ago they controlled the educational system and in the new Northern Ireland they have fought a battle for educational control. There is a lot less control now though still significant. We have known for some time, and have been reminded again recently that we cannot afford our segregated education as the cost of the sectarianisation of education is colossal. However, the churches want to maintain the status quo, education being the last power base they have. Secularisation is the reduction of churches' power and role in social and public life. In some cases, it is a consequence of marginalisation and in other situations there has been self-secularisation.

Secularism is the insistence that not only churches but all religions have no role, or place at all, in the public square. Religion is private and politics is public. There is no place for any religious voice in public life and religion should remain in the private sphere. Secularism here is being as intolerant as religion has been in its history. Secularism also runs against everything we have, sometimes literally, fought for as pluralist and participative democracy. Secular fundamentalism is as toxic as religious fundamentalism and both need to be called out for what they are, oppressive and dehumanising.

Secular is very different. Secularisation is the diminishing role and power of religion in public life. Secularism is the denial of any role for religion in public life. Secular is the separation of church and state. It is the

separation of powers. Secular does not mean the end or elimination of faith but the liberation of faith from the politics of power, and that will also mean liberation from the corruption of the politics of power. It means the liberation of churches from the corruption of power within their own systems and structures. In Ireland we now have the separation of church and state, North and South, though in different forms. What we have lived through in Ireland in the last 60 years can also be described as the end of Christendom. Christendom was the European phenomenon that existed from the 4th century when Constantine Christianised the empire. Church and state got into bed together, the state sponsored the church and the church blessed the state, justified, and legitimised its wars. Christendom lasted for over 1500 years and crashed in the trenches and mud of World War One. That is the point where Western imperialism collapsed and so did the Western form of imperial Christianity. It took time across Europe for this paradigm shift to become the reality and it took some extra time to reach the edge of the western seaboard. Christendom, that collusion of church and state, the marriage of throne and altar, has now ended in Ireland. Christendom has died and we are struggling to come to terms with its end and the secular reality of pluralistic democracy.

We are still in the process of realisation and dawning of the new reality in Ireland, churches often lacking the capacity and confidence to engage with public life and the socio-political, economic and environmental

issues of our public time. Serving the common good is a problem because public issues are involved, environmental, political, social and economic, and churches having lost their public role and social power, and having self-secularised, are still trying to work out what has happened and what any new role will look like. In this struggle we may learn something from mainland Europe and the European Union. For the churches this learning is in Article 17(3) of the *Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union* (2016), 'Recognising their identity and their specific contribution, the Union shall maintain an open, transparent and regular dialogue with these churches and organisations'.

The organisations are philosophical and non-confessional organisations. This is important as a model of new church-state relations and of the relationship between faith communities and a democratic and secular Europe. The voice of the churches can be heard in an open, transparent and regular dialogue, along with the other philosophies of life. Faith has a voice in a pluralist, democratic and secular society, with other moral and ethical voices, not as dominating and controlling, but still a real voice with all the other voices. There is a very clear separation between church and state in Europe and a very real place in Europe for the moral voices of faith and philosophies of life. There may be a model here for Ireland, where churches empty themselves of power-over, domination and control, yet have enough

confidence in their identity and specific contribution to embrace this new model, relationship and contribution to societal wellbeing and common good.

It does mean engaging the public space with others, moral and common good partners. So when the churches engage with the European institutions, and as Irish churches we still can, and with public power in Belfast and Dublin, churches do not advocate for themselves, but for the human and the earth. When they act thus, churches are not focused on their own identity and status, but are active instead in the service of the moral values of justice and peace for the good of the most vulnerable in society and the suffering Earth. Churches become a voice with others for human and eco-justice. But before Irish churches can truly serve the common good, they may need radical conversion and the letting go of power; a self-emptying of power, privilege and status that the early Christian leader Paul called for in the church at Philippi struggling to find its identity and purpose in the Roman Empire no less.

A century ago, as Ireland was partitioned, the churches took a major stand. By 1922 they were adamant that whatever else partition meant, the churches would not be separated. This was articulated by Bishop John Orr when addressing his Tuam Diocesan Synod in 1923.

> We of the Church of Ireland love our country. We would not be true members of the Church of Ireland if we did not...We are the Church of the whole, and not of a part of Ireland, and no power on Earth will ever, please God, partition our Church, whatever it may do with our country (cited in Walker, 2014, p. 241).

There is a defiance about the Bishop's statement and the other churches were equally adamant that they would not be partitioned. They have remained as all-Ireland institutions and bodies of people. The Presbyterian Church in Ireland, the Methodist Church in Ireland, and there never has been a Presbyterian, Methodist, Catholic or Church of Northern Ireland. Whatever about the politics, no power on Earth was going to partition the churches. So, it has remained, not without stresses and strains, and we are at a point in history now when the churches in the more secular context, post-Christendom, post-Brexit, post-Covid, need to reflect deeply on their determination of a century ago to be all-Ireland bodies without partition. This resolve of the churches has not gone unchallenged, for example, papers released recently, dating back 30 years, revealed that leaders of one denomination at an event in Dublin insisted exclusively on their unionist identity, while another denomination's leaders kept insisting that they were an all-Ireland church.

No church allowed itself to be partitioned and if that means anything it means that as churches we are morally and spiritually committed to the

wellbeing and flourishing of every part of Ireland, which transcends all political and national binaries, loyalties and identities. Church by its vocation and nature is a transnational, transcultural, inclusive community of faith committed to the common good, wellbeing, flourishing and peace of the planet and whole community of life. Anything short of that is sectarian. If the churches of a partitioned Ireland are to serve the common good, what vision of themselves and their purpose and praxis might they need to have?

Church as Moral Community

We will, of course, lower our voices here. There is much in recent history that indicts all churches. The churches' obsession with sexuality and personal sexual morals has turned the churches into moralistic communities, often a toxic moralism, judgemental, harsh and dehumanising. Churches need to get over their obsession with sexuality and with humility struggle with humanity to find, articulate and rearticulate a larger moral landscape in which the community of life might flourish. The King of Zhao who ruled in north-eastern China nearly 2,500 years ago wisely said, 'A talent for following the ways of yesterday is not sufficient to improve the world of today' (cited in Frankopan, 2018, p. 252).

The wisdom applies to politics, social development, economics and religion. Religions, not just Christianity, are carriers of tradition, though

not traditionalism. The latter thinks itself timeless and unchanging, the former is living and always in transformative motion. The ways of yesterday, even when they worked yesterday, are not sufficient for today. Time makes ancient good uncouth, and faith requires reinterpretation and reimagining for a new context. Therein lies the challenge, to reimagine new ways of being faithful or ethical in the world.

Ethics and values are not shaped in self-isolation but in community, in relation to others and together. We are social beings who live in social communities, and church is a significant community within a wider community. The church or faith community has four significant roles in the formation of character and social conduct. It is an agent of identity, tradition, deliberation and action:

- A community of moral identity formation;
- A bearer of tradition;
- A community of moral deliberation; and
- An agent of action (Birch and Rasmussen, 1989).

Faith communities directly nurture moral capacities and ethical character, and the raw material of any Christian ethic draws on the key themes from its foundational text. In the faith community, as in the wider community, we are shaped by living traditions. There are tensions at times between aspects of cultural tradition and faith tradition, and there may be

tensions with a faith tradition which has fossilised, rather than a living, developing, continuous sense-making community.

As a community of moral deliberation, the faith community is a place of learning on moral issues, seeking new knowledge, a space for ongoing moral dialogue and discourse, so that a faith-based stance is shaped and reshaped for public moral discourse. Authentic democracy is deliberative democracy where all deliberate on the big public issues. The faith community is a community of moral deliberation, where the deliberation is democratised and is not the deliberation of a few or the elite. All of this leads to public action. Faith is not private belief or for private practice, instead the truth of faith is performative in the public sphere. It is not imposed truth, but morally persuasive truth, action in public and is modelled by the moral quality and integrity of the life of the faith community. It is not a moral faith community that has arrived and possesses the last or absolute word. The core faith values of love, justice, compassion, truth, inclusion, freedom, peace and reconciliation, are visible in relation to the human society and the Earth. To serve the common good, churches need to be more humble and intentional about being public moral communities.

Public Church Doing Public Theology

The privatisation of faith, or the institutionalisation of faith, is too prevalent and has little to offer the common good. A church with a role in the

public square does public theology, and public theology takes us beyond confessional, scholastic and evangelical theologies. Public theology is applied social ethics to the major public issues in the life of society and the world. COVID-19 has left us locally and globally facing four major crises. There is a public health crisis, the total wellbeing of the whole community. There is the economic crisis where inequalities have been exposed, economies are broken, and systems need radical change. There is the ecological crisis, the destruction of the eco-system and the Earth's degradation. There is the crisis of institutional racism and of a world, of which we are part, which has been shaped for white supremacy.

These are not four crises but four-in-one. They are indivisible and interconnected, and the way to a new future and common good on the planet requires the four to be addressed together. This is the agenda for public theology now and for the future. Other public theology challenges concern the use and exercise of power: political power, economics, ecology, migration, gender equality, patriarchy, inclusive and shared community-building, in addition to, the common good at local and global levels, technological power and the human and Earth sciences. Churches doing public theology need to learn how to analyse these issues, applying social analyses which are informed, and know how to bring spirituality and social ethics into shaping and reimagining society and the world.

Faith needs to realise that every vision or notion it has of God or the sacred carries with it a proposal for the shape or organisation of society (Brueggemann, 1994). God is not an abstraction which is why in the biblical tradition God is never a noun but always a verb, a doing word, a programme of action. There is a wonderful piece of mythopoetic verse in Hebrew poetry known in the Church as Psalm 82. It portrays a courtroom scene where there is a public inquiry to determine the criteria for authentic 'godness' and who qualifies as authentic gods. The gods are in the dock, and we can identify our contemporary gods of militarism, consumerism, military consumerism, extraction economies, nationalism, patriarchal and racial systems, the church gods of infallibility, of the Bible or Papacy or Church. What is godness and the authentic role of a god? The answer from the public enquiry is this:

> That proper role, so defining for Israel's faith and ethics, is to be guardian, protector, and guarantor of the vulnerable - the weak, the widow, the orphan, the lowly, the destitute - all those who lack resources to sustain and protect themselves... Godness consists in the care for the vulnerable (Brueggemann and Bellinger, 2014, p. 355).

The verdict on authentic godness is power in the service of compassionate solidarity with the marginalised and vulnerable, and that includes the suffering Earth.

That kind of godness was missing from the Ulster Covenant and the Easter Proclamation, though there was a faint echo drowned out by the godness of nationalistic rhetoric and the godness of guns and violence. And where did the worship at these altars lead us in the 20th century, locally and globally? Public Church doing public theology will need to be aware that all its God-talk, its public theology, is a proposal for social organisation, a programme of social ethical public action. And this is not another attempt at theocracy or church dominating and controlling the public square, but the churches voicing their moral and ethical vision along with all the other voices in a pluralist democracy, in the service of the common good.

Without doing public theology, Irish churches will make little contribution to the common good and may not have a future. The challenge is to become Public Church doing public theology, and the bigger challenge behind that is to develop a new hermeneutics, a new way of reading sources and tradition.

Hermeneutical Keys for Public Theology

Being Public Church in a secular world, where church and state are separate and faith and political power are not a dualism but a dialectic and interactive tension, requires new and quite different hermeneutics. Hermeneutics are the principles of interpretation, the lens through which we interpret, make

sense of theology and ethics in the contemporary world. Public Church, an active faith and moral community, will need a multiple hermeneutic approach and praxis. There are at least five keys:

- A socio-political hermeneutic;
- An economy of life hermeneutic;
- An ecological hermeneutic;
- A social justice hermeneutic; and
- A peace hermeneutic.

The first recognises the socio-political context of the entire Bible, and not only that we are reading a political text, but that all its writings are written in the shadow of empire and all that an imperial or domination system means. The economic hermeneutic reads the foundational text through the lens of covenant and money, realising that every biblical book has very significant things to say about money, possessions and economics, so comprehensive that it may be critically asked why the Church has never noticed, or ignored, such a central and core biblical focus. Has the Church kept us in the dark about the Bible and its radical approach to money and economics?

The ecological hermeneutic will affirm the intrinsic value of everything, the interconnectedness of things and that nature has a voice, which humans

have in the modern world ignored. The social justice hermeneutic will recover the key word most frequently used in the foundational text, 'justice'. Justice is core and central to the Hebrew Bible, Christian Testament and the Qur'an. Justice is about 10% law and order and 90% social, restorative and distributive justice. A faith ethic without justice is not an ethic at all. Justice is the hermeneutical benchmark for all human and eco-life. Not surprisingly a peace hermeneutic is the climactic point of all these hermeneutical lenses. Peace does not come through victory or war, nor through militarism and military security, despite everything our Western imperialism has told us. Peace, and sustainable peace, come through justice. Peace, or *Shalom*, or *Salam*, is the total wellbeing of all life, the whole community of life on the planet. Peace is eco-human flourishing, a planetary common good. It is through these hermeneutical lenses that Irish churches can find critical perspective and a voice that can speak values and ethical meaning and praxis to social, political, ecological, and the racial and technological-scientific challenges facing us in Ireland and the world today.

Can Irish churches serve the common good? A contribution may be possible if: church can be an intentional, moral community, a confident and humble Public Church, can do public theology in new hermeneutical keys that enable an ethical public voice and can engage with the public challenges of our time. But not as powerful institutions dominating social

and public life and not in self-isolation either, but through partnerships and collaboration with secular - human philosophies of life, and other faiths and religious traditions. In this, churches in the public square may need to remember and be reminded that it is not in the spirit of Christ to act as a *prima donna* among the world faiths and philosophies of life.

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EQUALITY PROOFING THE FUTURE: HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE COMMON GOOD

Les Allamby, Former Chief Commissioner of the NI Human Rights Commission

Human rights are not a panacea for all societal ills but do provide a framework for the protection of minorities, a recognition of structural disadvantage and the need to progressively tackle inequalities within a rights-based framework. Human rights are rooted in a global ideal and part of a much wider transition of society including the protection of individuals and communities from oppressive behaviour. Seeking to ensure the translation of international human rights standards signed up to by the UK Government into promoting and protecting the rights of everyone in Northern Ireland is at the heart of the NI Human Rights Commission's work.

The NI Human Rights Commission's Origins

Global and regional human rights grew out of conflict. For example, the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948), *European Convention on Human Rights* (1950) and the *Refugee Convention* (1951), all emerged in the decade after the Second World War. Reflecting this, the NI Human Rights Commission emerged from the Good Friday Agreement (also known as the Belfast Agreement) enacted by the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Both human rights and equality were central to the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, there was a section devoted to it entitled, 'Rights, Safeguards and Equal Opportunities'. Among other things this section:

- Created the two Human Rights Commissions across the island. The NI Human Rights Commission replaced a poorly funded and non-statutory Standing Advisory Committee on Human Rights;
- Promised a Bill of Rights, creating rights supplementary to those in the European Convention on Human Rights (1950) reflecting the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland and drawing, as appropriate, on international human rights standards. The Bill of Rights was to recognise the need for equal treatment with particular reference being made to a general obligation on government and public bodies to fully respect the identity and ethos of both communities in Northern Ireland, a clear articulation of non-discrimination, and to ensure equal opportunities in public and private sectors;
- Committed both governments to incorporating the European Convention on Human Rights (1950) into domestic legislation. The UK was already doing so through the Human Rights Act 1998, the Irish Government subsequently did so. It also outlined how the Irish Government will ensure an equivalent level of protection of human rights that pertain in Northern Ireland;

- Set out specific rights, including:
  - To seek constitutional change by peaceful and legitimate means;
  - To free political thought, freedom and expression of religion;
  - To pursue democratically national and political aspirations;
  - To freely choose one's place of residence;
  - To freedom from sectarian harassment;
  - To equal opportunities in all social and economic activity regardless of creed, class, disability, gender, or ethnicity;
  - To full and equal political participation of women.

The 'Rights, Safeguards and Equal Opportunities' section of the 1998 Agreement also recognised the centrality of acknowledging and addressing the suffering of victims of violence, recognised language rights, the importance of economic development, and the place and sensitivity of emblems and symbols. In addition, Strand One of the Good Friday Agreement (1998) sought to create a civic forum as an umbilical cord between citizens and the institutions of government. The emphasis on regional and international human rights standards had the virtue of drawing on global and European rights initiatives not derived from the conflict in Northern Ireland. In effect, human rights are neither 'green' nor 'orange', despite a local debate that sometimes attempts to suggest otherwise.

The NI Human Rights Commission was created through the *Northern Ireland Act 1998* with a mandate to review the adequacy and effectiveness of law and practice in relation to human rights, with corresponding statutory powers to provide advice, undertake research and educational activities, conduct investigations and take legal action when necessary. The Commission also operates under the *Paris Principles* (United Nations General Assembly, 1994) for national human rights institutions, which requires all human rights commissions and institutions to be independent and pluralist, properly resourced with an accreditation system managed by the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions.

Like our counterparts elsewhere in Ireland, England, Wales and Scotland, the Commission has 'A' Status, allowing access to the UN Human Rights Council and full membership of the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions. Moreover, the Commission chaired the Commonwealth Forum of National Human Rights Institutions (CFNHRI) from 2015 to 2018, providing a platform on the wider international stage. Alongside the Rwandan Commission, the NI Human Rights Commission is now in a secretariat role for the CFNHRI.

The Commission is funded by the Northern Ireland Office and reports to Westminster (making us different from the Northern Ireland Equality Commission and both the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children

and Young People and the Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland, all of which are funded through NI Government departments). Nonetheless, our role is to respond to what is happening locally on devolved matters including justice, health, the environment, social security and education, as well as in Westminster on reserved issues, including terrorism, tax, and immigration.

The International Stage

The NI Human Rights Commission operates on the international stage, feeding into the UN and treaty monitoring of the conventions signed up to by the UK Government, including the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (United Nations General Assembly, 1966) and the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (United Nations General Assembly, 1966), alongside the *International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination* (United Nations General Assembly, 1965), the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (United Nations General Assembly, 1979), the *UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (United Nations General Assembly, 2006), the *Convention on the Rights of the Child (*United Nations General Assembly, *1989)* and the *Convention against Torture* (United Nations General Assembly, 1984).

Regionally, the Commission engages with the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers and its role in monitoring the implementation of European Court of Human Rights judgements and in appointing individuals to the Committee of Experts of the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages. My experience of the UK Government is that they have an almost bi-polar approach to international treaties and institutions – simultaneously traducing them, while trying to reform from within for both national and wider progressive reasons. The European Court of Human Rights and (paradoxically until the referendum to leave Europe) the European Union, are just two examples.

It is important also to remember that the UK has a dualist system, whereby the government will sign up to international treaties without requiring parliamentary approval but will only implement them into domestic law through legislation brought to Parliament in Westminster. The most obvious example is the incorporation of the *European Convention on Human Rights* (1950) into domestic law through the *Human Rights Act 1998*. One of the more interesting recent developments has been the willingness of Wales and Scotland in different ways to embed international human rights standards into devolved legislation.

Another experience as a Chief Commissioner is that Northern Ireland on an international stage is seen as a relative success, inasmuch as delegations

beat a path to our door to look at police reform, new institutional structures, the adherence to human rights standards and a relative absence of violence; rather than focusing on a report card covering an adversarial political culture, political instability, an inability to effectively deal with the past and increasing inequalities around income and wealth.

The importance of the 'Rights, Safeguards and Equal Opportunity' section of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement has come home to bear in the decision of the UK to leave the EU following the 2016 EU referendum, something none of the architects of the Agreement foresaw more than two decades earlier. The Commission didn't take a view on whether the UK Government should stay or leave. However, once the die was cast, understanding the human rights implications, and maintaining existing protections did become an issue for the Commission to consider. Through work done with the NI Equality Commission, the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission and many others, a commitment to the non-diminution of rights under the 'Rights, Safeguards and Equality of Opportunity' section of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement was secured from the UK Government (Negotiators of the European Union and the United Kingdom Government, 2017).

Alongside the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, the NI Human Rights Commission initiated research on what the exit from

the EU meant for policing and justice, citizenship, the Common Travel Area, and wider questions of rights and identity. The Commission also raised with the UK and Irish governments and the European Commission what the 'non-diminution' commitment means in practice. Ultimately, the commitment was enshrined in Article 2 of the Protocol on Ireland/ Northern Ireland contained within the *Agreement on the Withdrawal of the UK from the EU* (2019). As a result, Northern Ireland will keep pace with six European Union directives covering the equal treatment in employment, self-employment, access to goods and services and social security, alongside freedom from discrimination based on racial and ethnic origin. In addition, it will also cover non-diminution from existing rights created under EU directives on victims, parental leave, and maternity rights. The scope beyond that remains to be seen given the need to translate what parts of EU law fall within the scope of the 'Rights, Safeguards and Equal Opportunity' section of the Good Friday Agreement (1998) and the need to identify any reduction of rights based on having left the European Union. Once again, human rights and equality is being seen as a valuable safeguard against future significant political and economic instability, in this case arising from leaving the European Union.

What this development illustrates is that the European Union views the peace process as something it retains a genuine shared interest in, alongside the two governments as co-guarantors of the 1998 Agreement. Moreover,

it demonstrates the continuing importance of equality and human rights as cornerstones for future stability and protection.

The NI Human Rights Commission's Work

In practice, then, what does the Commission and human rights have to offer in seeking to equality-proof the future?

During my term as Chief Commissioner I have applied a number of rubrics. One is that the NI Human Rights Commission must deal with the difficult issues which divide communities but if that is all it does, then that is problematic. Equally, a commission that only engages in less contentious issues is derogating from its responsibilities. As a result, the Commission has to engage with the human rights implications of dealing (or otherwise) with the past, the rights of prisoners as well as victims, address economic and social rights including access to abortion services, treatment of asylum seekers, and other marginalised groups. This inevitably makes the Commission unpopular at times. In addition, the Commission has to work on issues which resonate with all of our everyday lives, including access to health care, housing, social security and employment. The Commission has also initiated a Sport and Human Rights Forum, a Business and Human Rights Forum, produced animations and short films on carers' rights, support for victims of domestic violence, the exploitation

of migrants, young people and mental health, LGBTQ+ rights, and climate justice. Additionally, the work has focussed on the wider case for societal participation, particularly for those disadvantaged by ill-health, disability, a lack of income or other circumstances. This is an area that human rights is increasingly focussing on at a global level.

The work must always be based on the platform of international and domestic human rights standards. Furthermore, to use a phrase often heard in European Court of Human Rights judgements, it must ensure rights are 'real and practical not theoretical and illusory'. The Commission policy responses used to set out human rights standards with relatively little reference to the practical substantive policy issue being consulted on. I used to point out that an astute civil servant could simply place all the carefully compiled standards into an annex and state that 'due regard' had been paid to them without any change to the policy being planned. So the Commission has to outline what a human rights-based approach looks like in practice.

The following are three examples of where this has been applied, two of which worked and one which didn't. The NI Human Rights Commission undertook a public inquiry into healthcare in hospital accident and emergency departments, 'Human Rights Inquiry - Emergency Healthcare' (2015). The inquiry involved taking evidence publicly from the Health

Minister, departmental officials, senior health care managers and clinicians, through to patients and their families. In questioning the chief executives of Health and Social Care Trusts about applying a human rights-based approach in the workplace, the inquiry often got a quizzical response until outlining what a human rights-based approach actually entails. In practice, it means that rights and responsibilities should be delivered in a reciprocal way with staff respecting patients and vice versa. It involves providing information in an open and timely way, meaningful participation in developing policies and practices, proper and transparent governance with effective redress and accountability when things go wrong. Most chief executives suddenly replied that they strove to do this but didn't place it within a human rights-based framework. In effect, the gap was much smaller than imagined. A chapter of the inquiry report set out what a human rights-based approach would look like in practice. The Commission agreed a pilot with the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust, which never got off the ground as senior clinicians would not play ball. In effect, senior clinicians saw a human rights-based approach as just another bureaucratic requirement when they already had their own professional standards and contractual requirements, and didn't have time for other initiatives given the pressures they were already under.

More positively, we commissioned a Cumulative Impact Assessment of all tax and social security policies between 2010 and including those in the

pipeline to 2022 (Reed and Portes, 2019). The impact was broken down by income deciles, age, disability, gender and household composition, though not by community background, and race. In the case of community background, this was because of additional hurdles to get access to data which we couldn't afford. For race, the sample size of the Family Resources Survey and Living Costs and Food Survey is too small so measuring black and minority ethnic groups inequality as a whole is not possible, never mind by individual ethnic communities. The unsurprising outcome of the research was that those bearing the greatest burden from social security and tax changes were those on the lowest incomes. Also adversely impacted were women, particularly lone parents, and those households containing an adult or child with a disability. The research was used to produce a refreshed and costed further mitigations package assessing its redistributive impact. The Commission worked with officials and politicians to develop the work, though the conclusions and recommendations were the Commission's own. There was a recognition in the Department for Communities of the value of the work and hopefully any future mitigations package will analyse the redistributive impact of any proposed interventions. The Commission is now embarking on work assessing the effect of public expenditure by income decile, household composition, gender, disability, and other factors. This is an example of where doing work on economic and social rights can stimulate a wider debate on practical policy matters, which has genuine traction.

The Commission entered into a partnership with the Northern Ireland Civil Service to examine how principles behind human rights approaches could be better understood and more effectively deployed in decision and policy making. This was designed to go beyond simply meeting statutory requirements to seeing human rights as a positive tool in public policy. In practice, it meant understanding the distinction between absolute rights, which must always be adhered to (for example, the right to life, freedom from torture, inhuman and degrading treatment), and qualified rights which may be restricted in specific and limited ways (such as the right to family and private life). The concepts adopted within the European Court on Human Rights and its judgements on qualified rights include that human rights compliance entails policies being regulated by law, having a legitimate aim, going no further than necessary and being proportionate.

The initiative involved training the next generation of civil servants on the development of human rights standards, their purpose and aims, global and regional oversight, and the conceptual approaches adopted. As a result, online modules have been developed and updated annually and are now available to all civil servants through the Centre for Applied Learning. The partnership was championed by both Sir Malcolm McKibbin and Sir David Sterling during their tenures as Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service. It is the type of practical initiative that I have always supported during my time at the NI Human Rights Commission.

A further mantra is that the Commission must engage widely with individuals and organisations. There is little purpose in only talking to those who agree with you. Again, an example to illustrate this in practice is the Commission's legal challenge to abortion law which was controversial and was based on the platform of human rights. Early on in the legal challenge, the Evangelical Alliance responded by holding an evening prayer vigil and protest outside the Commission's premises during a human rights festival organised by the Northern Ireland Human Rights Consortium. The Commission opened up its premises, contacted the Alliance and offered to host the group for coffee after the vigil. It was a private initiative and entirely a matter for the Alliance as to whether or not to take up the offer. The December evening was particularly cold and at an earlier event the Evangelical Alliance had been verbally abused so they arrived at our premises chastened. In that light, coffee and a private discussion was most welcome. Both the Commission and the Alliance talked about their work and the vigil was conducted in the Commission's premises. Following the engagement we agreed to meet, recognising that there were significant differences on key issues. From unlikely beginnings, a partnership initiative was forged around an animation on freedom of conscience and religion looking at the issue both globally and locally and a seminar followed. The work carried risks for both organisations – there is no meeting of minds on the issues of abortion or same sex marriage and the two organisations still clash in the public domain. Nonetheless, the language deployed has

been more respectful while still robust. The legal challenge in 'Lee v Ashers Baking Company Ltd and Others' (2018) was also being taken at this time by the Equality Commission. This led to the two commissions convening a joint faith forum so that they and church and faith organisations could better understand each other's views. Engagement is important, but so is how we engage and that is about not demonising those with different views. This applies to individuals, organisations, and political parties.

The NI Human Rights Commission has become much more involved in economic and social rights issues, which is to recognise that those left behind are not entirely from one community background. In effect, disadvantage is often about income and class alongside, for example, race, gender, disability and sexual orientation. The current political debate about disadvantage needs to focus empirically on where economic disadvantage lies. That inevitably means recognising the role of social class, which cuts across community backgrounds.

Human rights, therefore, is not a panacea for all ills, but it does provide a framework for the protection of those most disadvantaged and a recognition of inequalities. Economic and social rights are rooted in the idea of, and the need to, progressively realise rights as part of a global ideal about a positive societal transition. It recognises that countries and communities are on a journey to a fairer and more progressive society across the globe.

This is some challenge given global inequality. Nonetheless, in practice, that's where the heart of human rights and the common good lies.

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NO FUTURE COMMON GOOD WITHOUT ECONOMIC JUSTICE

Jamie Delargy

Just a few miles from Cushendun where I was brought up is a mountain called Tievebulliagh. It's quite famous in geological terms because along with Rathlin Island, it's a source of a very hard rock called 'porcellanite'. As the name suggests, the dark stone looks a bit like lumps of porcelain. But what makes it all really fascinating is the discovery that Antrim porcellanite was taken by Neolithic craftsmen and turned into axes which have been found right across these islands (Jope, Morey and Sabine, 1952). Dispersion on this scale suggests that a culture of trading had already developed here over 4,000 years ago. It's evidence that commerce, far from being alien to our traditional way of life, has long been part of who we are. The practice of making, bartering and selling has been embraced because it mostly makes life better. That's worth remembering as we consider the apparent shortcomings of commerce.

Can a Capitalist Economy be a Just Economy?

One of the downsides of commerce is its tendency, in a capitalist form, to produce undesirable outcomes such as great inequality, which appears to

be at odds with the notion of the common good. There is, of course, the issue of whether inequality is, or is not, an essential element of the capitalist system but there's little doubt that it is often a feature of it.

Curbing its excesses, understandably then, has long been a goal of the critics of capitalism but reform may not be that simple. While there is force in the argument that the common good demands strict equity in the world of work, commerce and finance, it is possible to counter that to stimulate entrepreneurship and to incentivize effort one must tolerate a degree of inequality in income and wealth. Otherwise, why would businesses invest their money only to see the profits appropriated by governments? Similarly, why would individuals work long hours if they weren't well rewarded? If society wants to generate the cash that ultimately pays for investment in health, education and the arts, it may be that disparities in earnings, perhaps to quite a large degree, have to be accepted as a harsh but human reality.

However, even if one is not persuaded by the argument that businesses should be lightly taxed and their owners free to earn many times what their employees get paid, there are grounds for being cautious about intervening in markets. That's because all things being equal, free markets determine the prices for goods and labour efficiently and that's very useful. But all things are not and never will be equal, which is why there is a case for devising mechanisms to ensure that markets are serving all our needs.

The assumption underlying the analysis so far is that there is only one viable economic system, which incidentally, holds sway in most of the world. While there's scope for debate on that, for me personally, it's hard to resist the comment of Cambridge economist Joan Robinson who said, 'The misery of being exploited by capitalists is nothing compared to the misery of not being exploited at all' (1962, p. 46). Many people, some perhaps reluctantly, will concede that capitalism, despite its deficiencies, has benefitted mankind. Sir Winston Churchill said of democracy that it:

> ...is the worst form of Government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time; but there is the broad feeling in our country that the people should rule, continuously rule, and that public opinion, expressed by all constitutional means, should shape, guide, and control the actions of Ministers who are their servants and not their masters. (Churchill, 1947, para. 207)

Could this rationale be applied to capitalism with the same proviso that the economic system is there to serve the people and not control them? As noted earlier, what disturbs many people are the inequalities, sometimes gross, that capitalism produces. There's little doubt that aspect engenders resentment or worse. These sentiments are attributed by some to envy but it's natural to experience a moral queasiness over the flaunting of excessive wealth when others' struggle to make ends meet. However, distaste only

takes one so far. It is not a foundation on which one can build a critique of capitalism. Apart from a general appeal to the common good then, what remains in the armoury of those who want to justify a case for keeping capitalism in check? It's critical that the arguments are sound as they have to overcome a human desire to make as much money, and to pay as little tax on it, as possible. And that's aside from the fact that economies are extremely complicated organisms, the operations of which are detailed in baffling language. Even if you would like to modify the workings of capitalism, would you know how to do it efficiently? It's understandable that many nowadays feel they are simply unqualified to offer practical proposals on how to better run an economy. The task is far too technical and complicated.

Perhaps that's one reason why debates on how an economy should operate are being increasingly left to professional economists. That's understandable, as unlike the rest of us, economists appear to know the right instruments to fine-tune or fix economies, and how to apply these instruments so that the wealth of countries continues to grow strongly and steadily. Except, of course, as the financial crisis showed, they don't. While it would be downright foolish to ignore the experts, it would be wise to recognise that there are limits to their knowledge. This is another good reason why non-economists should not be intimidated out of the debate over how to manage wealth and create jobs.

Applying Ethics to Economics

The question then is how, from an ethical perspective, those who may have some knowledge of how an economy works, but are not experts on the subject, can contribute to this debate. In common parlance, what can they bring to the party? Their function, it seems to me, is not to attempt to finesse economic policies, which would be beyond their capability, but to offer views on the fairness of those policies. Are these plans delivering for the common good or simply helping the rich get richer? To evaluate policies, one needs a set of standards and, in my view, the appropriate ones are human rights. These are powerful weapons which can be effectively deployed to ensure the common good is protected even as countries grow increasingly wealthy.

At this point the question arises as to whether those committed to promoting an ethical civic society from within the Christian tradition have anything distinctive to add to a debate around the issue of human rights. I believe they do because, as I hope to illustrate, the Christian heritage shared by the Anglican, Orthodox, Pentecostal, Reformed and Roman Catholic churches played its part in shaping the Western mindset; and human or natural rights are among those concepts it helped to foster.

That assertion may jar with those who would reckon that the culture of human rights is a relatively recent invention, dating back to the

philosophers John Locke or Hugo Grotius in the 17th century, with their expression evident in the American Declaration of Independence or the French Revolution. In fact, it has been argued by Tierney (1992) that the origin of modern natural rights theories is to be found in medieval law studies, particularly those undertaken by canon lawyers in the 12th century.

The context for this development was the creation and then interpretation of the *Decretum Gratiani,* a codification of church law which Berman called 'the first comprehensive and systematic legal treatise in the history of the West' (1977, p. 921). As commentators discussed a key term, '*ius naturale*' or natural right, they extended its meaning. On occasions they portrayed *ius naturale* as an innate power or faculty. When writing about it in this way Tierney says, 'they meant primarily an ability rooted in human reason and free will to discern what was right and to act rightly' (2004, p. 6). This new formulation opened a path to the creation of rules of conduct dictated by natural law and to the positing of innate natural rights.

According to Tierney, by 1200 the canonists had created a language in which natural rights theories could readily be expressed. However, they didn't leave it at that, about 50 years later rights to property and self-defence, as well as marriage rights, were defended on the basis of natural law. Tierney instances the declaration of one natural right, which is of

particular interest to any discussion of economic justice. It deals with the entitlement to appropriate from a rich person what one needs to stay alive (1989).

At this time, wealthy people were obliged to give to the poor. The canon lawyers were clear on the subject. But this of itself did not necessarily confer a right on anyone to take without permission what he needed to stave off starvation. Some of the decretists, whose task it was to comment on the legal code, clearly thought there was a case for going further. Armed with their new understanding of *ius naturale,* they produced various formulations, eventually devising a statement that a person taking what he needed was not stealing but exercising his (natural) right. What's more, he could assert that right by appeal to a bishop acting as a judge.

Taking what was essential for survival is thus a power that individuals are endowed with simply because they are human. On the face of it, this proposition looks very much like what we would recognise today as a statement of a human right. Tierney says, 'The notion of natural rights or human rights had a long history in Christian thought before it assumed its more secular modern forms' (2005, p. 43).

The canonists were devising rules appropriate to the Middle Ages. Since then, manufacturing and trade have obviously become much

more sophisticated, especially with the introduction of money and the development of capitalism. A major development was the invention of the joint stock corporation, a business owned by shareholders and often overseen by managers who act as agents for the owners.

Most people who work, not for themselves or for public bodies, will be employed by companies. Ensuring they are treated fairly and are not exploited is an important goal. How best to achieve that aim is a matter the Christian churches have addressed. A major contribution to the debate came towards the end of the 19th century with the publication of a Papal Encyclical on the Rights and Duties of Capital and Labor called *Rerum Novarum*. However, two themes in it suggest a very conservative mindset. Pope Leo XIII seemed exercised by a fear of socialist revolution and an almost obsessive worry about the nationalization of private property. If not a workers' charter then it must nevertheless have proven uncomfortable reading for many industrialists. The document is unsparing in its depiction of the plight of many working people, spelling out the urgent need for reform: '…we clearly see…. that some opportune remedy must be found quickly for the misery and wretchedness pressing so unjustly on the majority of the working class'. It lays the blame for their condition on their employers and unbridled capitalism, '…working men have been surrendered, isolated and helpless, to the hardheartedness of employers and the greed of unchecked competition' (1891).

Rerum Novarum is studded with references to rights, with several mentions specifically of natural rights. Admittedly, the first time the Pope uses the term it is to attack socialism and defend private property. Later though it is instanced in defence of various interests including those of workers.

In words that still resonate today Pope Leo XIII (1891) pays a warm tribute to the role of working people in the growth of the economy, '…it is only by the labor of working men that States grow rich'. The remedies he proposes for good industrial relations are both philosophical and practical. Employers had a 'great and principal duty … to give everyone what is just'. At the same time workers were encouraged to organise themselves into unions to promote and safeguard their own interests. It is this reference which has prompted some to see the Encyclical as a foundation for trade unions. It seems more appropriate to read it as an endorsement of workers' organisations with a religious outlook. Nevertheless, the Pope's words were a shot in the arm for the campaign to create trade unions. Over time these organisations grew in size and number, allowing them to defend the rights of workers.

As a lifelong member of the National Union of Journalists and a father of the chapel in my former workplace, I naturally believe that trade unions continue to be the best organisations to press the case for better pay and conditions and protect the interests of staff. But in a trend that would

concern Pope Leo X111, in the private sector trade union membership has been declining.

The drop in popularity may be partly due to a belief that unions don't carry the same clout as they used to. In 2020 in the UK, fewer than 1 in 7 private sector workers were a member of a trade union compared with 1 in 2 in the public sector (Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, 2021). While I'm not arguing for a return to the industrial battles of the 1970s, I am convinced that governments should act to make trade union membership more attractive. That means strengthening their negotiating rights, it also may involve staff representatives joining the boards of companies. But I'm not going to be prescriptive here. What is important is what works for all interests.

For all its limitations, *Rerum Novarum* marks an important contribution to the Christian critique of capitalism, which continues to this day. And as business evolves new strategies, so must the analysis of capitalism. There are many aspects of commerce which demand review and comment, but one highly influential concept particularly stands out as in need of change.

The Case for Reforming Shareholder Primacy

For a considerable time now, corporate governance has been dominated by a belief that the prime obligation for directors of a firm is that they

maximise returns for shareholders. This approach is grounded not only on the obvious responsibility of managers to look after the interests of the owners of the firm, namely the shareholders; it also receives endorsement because it appears to be economically efficient - that is, it maximises wealth creation. This latter point is important because it provides comfort for those who want to back a strategy that is not just good for shareholders but for the country as a whole.

While usually identified with Anglo-Saxon countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States, the shareholder primacy approach has now taken root in continental countries.

In the UK, shareholder primacy is regarded as a key principle in company law. Section 172(1) of the *Companies Act 2006* says that 'A director of a company must act in the way he considers, in good faith, would be most likely to promote the success of the company for the benefit of its members as a whole'. In this context the term 'members' refers to shareholders.

The *Companies Act 2006* makes it clear that directors must have regard for other matters such as the interests of employees (s172(1)(b)) and the impact of the company's operations on the community and environment (s172(1)(d)). Nevertheless, the reference to the promotion of success of the company has encouraged a view that shareholder profits should be maximised at the expense of other interests.

There are two main concerns with the shareholder primacy view. If the primary function of corporations is to serve the interests of shareholders, it would be reassuring to know that shares are widely distributed and owned by all classes in society and are not concentrated in relatively few circles. Secondly, it would be good to know that boosting profits, which is what shareholder primacy amounts to, is always in the long-term interests of both shareholders and stakeholders. On both counts there are reasons to be doubtful.

According to figures from the Office for National Statistics (2021), most households in Great Britain don't own shares directly. In Northern Ireland, where incomes are lower, share ownership is likely to be even lower again. Admittedly in April 2020 almost 8 in 10 employees in the UK had workplace pensions, which will have exposed them to equity markets (Office for National Statistics, 2021). But the amounts saved can be quite modest. In the period 2016-2018, the median wealth held in active occupationally defined contribution schemes in Great Britain was £3,300 (Office for National Statistics, 2019). That means many individuals are not set to gain a lot from rising share prices. Shareholder primacy doesn't much benefit them, but it may well impact on them because of strategies companies use to boost their stock prices.

The accusation here is that shareholder primacy stimulates the adoption of some practices which may not be in the interests of society. Since directors

are required by law to promote the success of the company for the benefit of shareholders, interpreted as a need to boost profits, there is the worry that it incentivises short-termism. Investment for which the benefits will only be seen in the long term is postponed in favour of declaring profits today. Similarly, companies can choose to eschew investment and use profits to buy back and cancel shares, which increases the value of the remaining equity and of course, cutting staff numbers offers a quick way to save money. Again, what is in the interests of investors may not be good for society.

Economic Justice in the Era of Climate Change

The shortcomings of the existing shareholder primacy approach are rendered even starker by the climate change crisis. There is a general acceptance that to combat global warming individuals and institutions need to change their behaviour. Fossil fuel use must be cut or eliminated and energy generated instead through renewable technologies. It may be that in the long term such a strategy will save companies and households money, but it's not a given. What is certain is that in the short to medium term a transition to a zero-carbon world will be a cost to homes and businesses.

When directors of companies mull over what to do in these circumstances, they will be aware that the law allows them to consider other stakeholders

when making decisions. However, a new campaigning group says that this form of deliberation can only be undertaken while pursuing the success of the company in the interests of shareholders, a condition which if accepted, would naturally limit directors' scope for action. The Better Business Act coalition in the UK argues that there has been a failure to align the interests of shareholders with those of wider society and the environment, which 'has contributed to a set of enormous challenges that threaten peoples' health, wealth and the natural world' (no date-a). It wants the Government to amend Section 172 of the *Companies Act 2006* in order that as they see it, the interests of shareholders are advanced alongside wider society and the environment. The coalition says the new wording, if accepted, will mean that, 'In situations where a director has to choose between the company's intention to create positive social or environmental impacts and the interests of shareholders, the directors would no longer be compelled to default to prioritising shareholders' (Better Business Act, no date-b).

The deficiencies of the free market become absolutely clear in relation to externalities. This is especially concerning because of climate change. If I buy fossil fuel, I will pay a price which covers the cost of extracting it from the ground, refining it if appropriate, and transporting it to my home or business. What the charge doesn't cover is the damage done to the environment through the emission of carbon dioxide produced by burning fuel, and by extension, to everyone else in the world. It's an externality, an

indirect charge not caught in the original transaction. Market failures like this require intervention by governments to sort them out. They simply won't resolve themselves of their own accord.

Climate change is a market failure like no other. It is a crisis which grows more urgent by the day as evidenced by ever more intensive storms, floods and wildfires. It can't be sorted by one country alone. Global warming requires concerted action by governments across the world. Principally, it will mean massive investment in renewable energy to replace fossil fuels. As noted earlier, in time it may be that switching from coal, oil and gas to wind, solar and hydro, will collectively save the world money. But in the short term it will impose huge costs on all countries, including those that can least afford it and on all sections of the population, including the less well off. On the face of it, that's not fair. Richer countries have a disproportionate responsibility for climate change, as they have consumed fossil fuels more intensively since industrialisation. Moreover, poorer people simply do not have the resources to spend on electric cars, heat pumps, solar panels and large batteries to store the excess power generated. A concern for the common good nationally and internationally demands that the burden of combatting climate change is spread in a just and equitable way. The problem is not just a matter of deciding who pays how much but finding the means to deliver a solution.

Economists generally favour carbon taxes as a way of curbing our thirst for fossil fuels and incentivising switches to renewable energy. But these levies, if universally applied, can be blunt instruments. A worldwide carbon tax would hit developing countries harder than advanced economies because the former tends to generate a greater share of their output from manufacturing than services. In domestic terms a heavy tax on petrol or diesel would have a greater impact on motorists living in the countryside than urban drivers. It would also hit families hard who, unable to access the lower carbon fuel available from the natural gas network, are forced to burn more carbon intensive home heating oil. And then there is the issue of free riders, those who benefit from the sacrifices made by others. Carbon taxes imposed within just one country will put its manufacturing at a disadvantage when compared to other countries where the levies are not introduced. It's all too easy to envisage cheaper imported goods displacing home produced items and putting local factories out of business.

There are solutions to all of these issues. A carbon border adjustment mechanism in one country for example, which imposes a special levy on goods imported from another country that declines to impose an appropriate carbon tax, creates a level playing field for manufacturers in both states. Aviation remains a unique challenge. The longer the journey, the more carbon dioxide generated. Depending on the rate of carbon tax a flight from, for example, the UK to Australia, could prove prohibitive for a

family on a modest income and it's possible to conceive of close relatives not being able to meet up because of the costs involved. Unless kerosene, the fuel commonly burnt by planes, can be replaced by cheap environmentally friendly fuel, this is a problem that may have to be dealt with by regulation. A system of rationing could ensure that the well-to-do are not able to jet off when and wherever they like while the less well-off are marooned at home.

The whole world has a vital common interest in cutting net greenhouse gas production to zero. An overworked phrase perhaps, but this is a rare case where failure really is not an option. It is essential to avert an environmental catastrophe, which would disrupt the lives of hundreds of millions of people and deny a number, impossible to estimate, of the most important human right of all, the right to life. A global plan of action is called for and reaching agreement on who should bear most of the costs will be a challenge. Canon lawyers from the Middle Ages, if transported in time to today, would surely argue that the developed world must dig deep down into their pockets to assist poorer countries in protecting their citizens. They would presumably also say, on the basis of their understanding of natural or human rights, that if we don't reach out a helping hand to those countries then they would have the right to take from us what they need in order to keep their citizens alive.

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A GREEN FUTURE: ECO-JUSTICE AND THE COMMON GOOD

Tanya Jones

The common good is a slippery beast. It is quite easy to recognise it on the horizon, but up close it can be surprisingly tricky to grasp. So, I plan to begin simply by shaking one of its paws in passing and letting it gallop on. As is well-known, the prefix 'eco', as in both 'ecology' and 'economy', comes from the Greek for 'home', and is connected with Latin and Gothic words for 'village' and Sanskrit for 'house'. So, one way of thinking about the common good as eco-justice might be as the way that we live together in what Pope Francis has called 'our common home' (2015). That home, the Earth, comprises private and public, shared and contested, controlled and wild spaces. We will begin our journey in one shared space, a heath in Dark Ages Britain, and end it in another, a busy traffic junction in twentieth century North America. In the first half of this chapter, I will be looking at the relationships between environmental and justice issues, how we cannot, I believe, confront one without the other; and how a green future is necessarily a just future and vice versa. In the second part of the chapter, I will suggest some of the ways in which that future can be imagined and realised, and what we can do to be a part of that work. So first, to the heath!

The Relationship between Environmental and Justice Issues

In Act III, Scene IV of Shakespeare's play *King Lear*, having fallen out with his daughters over questions of status and deference and exchange, Lear goes outside onto that heath, into the 'contentious storm' (1978, p. 1093). There he encounters, perhaps for the first time, the harsh realities of climate, of cold, rain and wind. Only hours or minutes before he had been arguing his need of 100 followers, but now 'the art of our necessities is strange' and the warmth of 'vile' straw becomes precious (1978, p.1093). And, from acknowledging his own environmental vulnerability he goes on to recognise that of others, those for whom it is no novelty.

> Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are,
> That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,
> How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,
> Your looped and windowed raggedness, defend you
> From seasons such as these? (Shakespeare 1978, pp. 1093-1094).

For Lear, newly enlightened, this is not just a situation of misfortune, calling for a charitable response. It is a matter of responsibility and of justice. He continues,

> O, I have ta'en
> Too little care of this. Take physic, pomp,
> Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,
> That thou mayst shake the superflux to them,
> And show the heavens more just. (Shakespeare 1978, p. 1094).

The word 'superflux', with its oddly modern feel, here means 'superfluous possessions, extravagant and indulgent wealth'. When the wretched of the Earth are in the centre of the storm, Lear's justice requires not that the resources of the rich should trickle down, but cascade, as the magic money trees are shaken to their foundations.

Today that storm rages wilder than ever before. We are, we know now, in a climate emergency. That is so widely accepted, thanks in no small part to the tenacity of our own children, we have to take care not to lose the shock value of pending ecocide. Familiarity is a soft and suffocating cushion, as we will see. But what is not so readily admitted, though the same children have told us so, is that it is also a crisis of justice. Across the world, those least responsible for greenhouse gas emissions and who benefit least from the fossil economy, are poisoned and dispossessed by its worst collateral damage. They also have the fewest resources to adapt or cushion the blows and the least access to international decision-making, having already been oppressed by centuries of colonialism. These are the people suffering the cruellest climate impacts. But 'impacts' is a mealy-mouthed word; these are assaults on human bodies, on their homes, their children, their food, their water and their peace. These blows fall again and again with each season's elemental failure. And it is growing worse!

No great surprise then, that few of our leaders follow King Lear out onto

the heath. It is so much more comfortable indoors, imagining techno fixes. 'Chasing carbon unicorns' (Stabinsky, 2021, p. 1), a new report calls it because the glory of net-zero is that you can put any number you like into the emissions column. You can pile on fracking and extra runways and Arctic drilling and anything you please, as long as you fantasise something for the debit side. Sadly, tragically, it looks as though, when we reach those magic dates for global net zero commitments of 2050, (France, Denmark, Spain, Hungary and Luxemburg), and 2045, (Sweden and Germany), many of those negative emission technologies, those carbon offsets, those nature-based solutions, will turn out to have been fantasies all along. Meanwhile the figure that really matters, the remnant of the worldwide cumulative emissions budget, the figure that would have kept the Earth's temperature rise at least under two degrees, will have been long exceeded. That is one reason why climate justice is not just a moral issue, it is a practical imperative. More than ever, we need the wisdom and experience of those who know how to live upon the Earth, how to tread lightly, how to sustain habitats and ecosystems, how to grow food without poisoning the soil and water, how to plant with a calendar of generations and how to flourish with enough. If corporations and states are allowed to take those last scraps of harmoniously lived land, to scrape them bare for monocultures that count only in a carbon ledger, our hope is gone. There are no prizes in the race to zero; we only win together, and we need to be running for our lives right now.

Climate change is the biggest environmental crisis, but it's not the only one and not the only ecological emergency that is also a crisis of justice. Air pollution causes seven million early deaths every year, especially among the poorest, those with no choice but to breathe the toxic fumes of others' mobility and profit (Gardiner, 2019). Extractive industries including mining, fossil fuels and factory farming, create sacrifice zones where local communities and ecosystems pay a terrible price, often literally with their lives, as Creation is reduced to commodity. Concrete behemoths of infrastructure such as motorways, runways and gargantuan dams stand as memorials to economic dogma, corporate brutality and political status-seeking long after those who once lived there are gone; heartbroken, dispossessed, sometimes murdered. And meanwhile, up close, we do not recognise environmental emergencies, even as we live through them. Amidst all the discussion and activity about responses to COVID-19, how much have we heard about its causes? Deforestation, intensive agriculture and luxury consumption have driven an unprecedented emergence of new diseases, zoonotic spill-overs of which this is only the latest, and the nearest to home (Malm, 2020). The likelihood of a global pandemic was predicted, just as its grotesquely unequal effects are witnessed, and the outcomes of minority world callousness, of vaccine nationalism, pharmaceutical protectionism and overseas aid cuts are all too easy to envisage.

Drawing towards the end of this section, I would like to suggest some of

the dimensions of these environmental and climate injustices. Firstly, in space, they are global but they are also local. People of these islands have been responsible for, and complicit in, both historic and contemporary oppressions and ecological harms. But those injustices are also inflicted, albeit in, perhaps, less egregious forms, on people living here. Whose children suffer the worst pollution-inflicted asthma? Whose homes are swamped by repeated floods? And which border counties, still raw from conflict, are supposed to be grateful for the toxic attention of fracking and mining industries?

Secondly, injustice spreads far beyond the human to ecosystems, species, families of living beings assaulted and obliterated by disrupted seasons, lost habitats, storms, starvation and ultimate extinction. There is a wide spectrum of thought and belief about the rights of nature, how far they should be recognised and protected. But wherever we stand in that debate, whatever words we use for nature or Creation, whatever our concepts of stewardship or dominion, we can agree that they do not deserve this.

And thirdly, more than ever, the sins of the fathers are visited on the children in a torrent of intergenerational injustice. It's a bitter experience to read accounts of climate justice from less than twenty years ago, which envisaged that by the time serious impacts occurred their recipients would be so rich, so technologically advanced, as scarcely to need anything that

we could have done. We like the sound of a Seventh Generation Principle that the decisions we make today should result in a sustainable world seven generations into the future. That's a good idea, we say, they should bring that in some time. And meanwhile the time has trickled away and today the first and second of those generations stand outside in the climate storm. Sometimes we mock them and call them 'snowflakes' for feeling the cold; and 'woke' because they cannot sleep soundly. Or sometimes we praise them for teaching us when they should have been at school, for pouring out their youth in responsibility, so that we can play. 'You'll fix it,' we say, in brisk encouragement, though the tools are broken and all the materials gone. And we think we are being kind.

We would do better to tell the truth. That, of course, requires that we face it squarely ourselves first, neither denying our privilege nor flagellating ourselves for the system we did not choose. Climate change is not going to be 'fixed' in the sense of being reversed with no ongoing effects. The global heating already in the system will play out, and much will be lost. Even if, by near-miracle, the climate was calmed to equilibrium, the other overshoots of planetary boundaries, including biodiversity loss, ocean acidification and depleted soil nutrients, would remain. The temptation is to stop there, to despair, to succumb to the latest iteration of climate denial, not 'it isn't happening' or 'it isn't human-caused' but 'it's too late'. It isn't. It is too late for the perfect, but not for the good. We may well, to our collective shame, fail

to meet the Paris targets of 1.5, even 2 degrees of warming. But every fraction of a degree matters. There is no point on the thermometer at which we shrug our shoulders and go home. There is no other home to go to. And in terms of justice, of the common good, everything matters, every species saved from extinction, every home and habitat, every human life lived to its fullest. In the worst dystopia imaginable, we could still make moral choices, and we can now. In the second part of this chapter, I explore some of those contemporary choices and how to make them truly just, truly effective, and truly green.

Re-imagining and Realising a Green Future

As we think about eco-justice, we can approach it from two perspectives, the ideal or the non-ideal. Ideal justice in this context asks, 'What would a just society look like? What is our vision of that green future, that common home in which everyone flourishes?'. The non-ideal, on the other hand, starts where we are: with the broken, the suffering, and the existing injustices. As the first part of this chapter suggests, that is where I believe we need to begin. Without an honest appraisal of the depth and particularity of the overlapping crises, we risk relying on responses that are glib and shoddy, strategies that promise a new Earth before trickling away into hot sand.

Neither can we do without our visions. We already spend too much time measuring degrees of optimism for the future. Looking only around us,

at those all too present wrongs, the scale will rarely register at all. Then the danger is that the new fatalistic denial I wrote of, 'it's too late', will gnaw away at our hope and our energy, and we will burn, in spectacular apostasy or a quiet smouldering despair. We need, both individually and collectively, to imagine the ideal, not just in its broad foundational concepts of participation, protection, and peace, but in tangible detail. What would it feel like to walk in a wood that was recovering, season by season, its living ecosystems and to know that process was happening everywhere? What would it feel like to eat and drink, to travel, to warm our homes in the knowledge that none of our wellbeing was at the cost of someone else's? What would it feel like to know that you would find welcome, safety and care no matter where you went and which boxes you would have ticked on the old diversity forms? We are not starting from nowhere; we can see around us real life manifestations of all these hopes. We can watch, listen, thank, join in, and extrapolate. Awakened by the creative arts, we can journey further into our imagined futures, unaccompanied or in community. I can attest personally to the liberating joy of writing a little utopian fiction.

And when we have our visions of justice, whether in story, song, or manifesto, we can hold them before us, along with that knowledge of present injustice, keeping the two aligned, like leading lights guiding us into safe harbour. Then our questions to every proposed answer are twofold:

'Does this help to heal the existing injustice?', and, 'Does it bring us closer to our envisioned future?'. Guided by those lights, I would like to suggest some particularly important channels in policy, what governments can do; in law, what courts can do; and in relationships, what we can all do.

In November 2021, the UN Climate Change Conference (COP 26) will take place in Glasgow. It ought to be the place, above all, where global climate justice happens, but the history of international climate negotiations shows something rather different. As Todd Stern, an American negotiator is reported to have said, 'If equity is in, we are out.' (2011 Okereke, 2014, para.1). The 2015 *Paris Agreement* was the first to include any mention of climate justice, but even there it was grudging, describing it as important only for some; and, crucially contained only within the non-binding preamble. COP meetings, no matter where they are hosted, mirror the power dynamics of the earth they purport to protect. Rich countries have large, well-resourced delegations with corporate lobbyists speaking softly at their shoulders. The poor, those most in need of urgent action, have to spread their few people too thinly, are shut out of key conversations and forced to accept the crumbs of vague, congratulatory aspiration which fall from the minority world's table. Cop 26 was no different.

Nations like ours, which are rich, well-connected, well-informed, with expertise in climate science, finance and law, with bullish rhetoric about

ambitious action, could make a real difference. It is not just the stuff of headlines, the mitigation targets, though we desperately need robust means to make those binding and achievable. But it is also the quiet, essential mechanisms for adaptation and compensation for that loss and damage which cannot be adapted away. The *Paris Agreement* made outline commitments to finance, technology and capacity-building. We need to see those happen and to see them paid for. Many readers will remember, or perhaps took part in the Jubilee 2000 movement, demanding that our governments act to cancel unjust debt. And it succeeded, at least in part. While there is still much more debt injustice to redress, its urgency intensified by the pandemic, that campaign sent a powerful message from civil society that we expected action. Climate justice requires that we do at least as much again, using our moral voice to inspire or to shame and to counteract, as far as we possibly can, those whispering voices of business as usual.

Those whispers are at least as close when it comes to domestic climate and energy policies. The problem now is that everyone: governments, corporations, parties of all political hues, appear to be in consensus about the need for environmental action. It is that soothing familiarity I mentioned in the first part of this chapter, and it requires us to lift the smooth platitudes to scrutinize the policy detail. Does the plan involve shifting subsidies away from the fossil fuel industry to genuinely sustainable

alternatives? If counting emissions, does it acknowledge those of aviation and shipping, and those virtual emissions embedded in outsourced production? Does it represent a truly just transition; offering healthy and rewarding livelihoods to workers in industries whose time has passed? Does it offer genuine transformation rather than mere substitution, toxic capitalism with a greenwashed rinse? Does it acknowledge and work to dismantle structural inequalities, which underpin environmental racism and injustice? And if not, how can we make infuriating us, as voters and citizens, more uncomfortable than disappointing corporate cronies?

The role of law, of courts and legal mechanisms, in enabling a green and just future is a crucial one. In the case of many environmental harms, affecting both human and non-human health and wellbeing, necessary legislation already exists, but is ignored with impunity. Especially in Northern Ireland, it is often left to individuals, campaign groups and NGOs such as Friends of the Earth, to bring about effective enforcement. In other situations, such as that of the first Irish Climate Act, legislation itself can be held in the light of judicial scrutiny, as in Climate Case Ireland, 'Friends of the Irish Environment CLG v The Government of Ireland and Others' (2020). Human rights, those minimum thresholds of decent existence, are often central to such cases, where rights to health, to family life, to a healthy environment and to life itself are threatened by present or potential impacts. It is a fascinating time for climate litigation, with principles and

precedents breaking down jurisdictional boundaries as courts across the globe wrestle with the same issues. And yet those jurisdictional boundaries still act as barriers to much of the most needed justice. States, on the whole, owe human rights obligations to their own citizens and residents, not those whom they harm on the other side of the world. The movement, founded by the late Polly Higgins, calling for ecocide to be recognised as an international crime against humanity represents, perhaps, a potential remedy and deterrence for some of the most egregious injustices (Higgins 2015). We are not all lawyers, but there are many ways in which we can support and learn from ground-breaking initiatives and local struggles.

Meanwhile, the universal nature of climate change, rather like that of COVID-19, both creates new global relationships and illuminates those that already exist. Emissions anywhere can produce impacts everywhere, in a web of responsibility and interdependence. No man is an island, but perhaps now neither are islands themselves, especially as they sink beneath the rising sea levels.

How can we acknowledge and explore these relationships, allowing the empathy created by connection to fuel our work for justice? This is the issue I am looking at in my present research, asking whether the principles and practice of restorative justice, based on the creation and repair of healthy relationships, can offer the means and spaces to address climate

injustice. Many of those spaces already exist, perhaps especially when encounters cannot be in person. There are opportunities for us to listen to those who bear the heaviest burdens both globally and locally, to hear their stories without interruption, to amplify their voices and learn from their experience. Those will not always be comfortable conversations. Structural oppressions, by their nature, are internalised by those they privilege, carried in the assumptions that we do not even know we are making. There is work to be done in dismantling those assumptions, and we as the privileged must do it for ourselves.

In conclusion, maybe there is no such thing as eco-justice, not as a separate category. Ultimately, there is either justice, our cooperative flourishing on a shared earth, or there is injustice, a diminishing fortress on a burned planet. There is a green future, or there is no future at all, at best survival of an armed and armoured few. If there is to be good, it has to be common and rooted in a rediscovery of our shared commons, resources of the Earth that are enough for all. Behind all of these concepts stand humans and nature in their homes, or, increasingly, exiled from those homes. Whether and how they continue to live depends to a great extent on choices made now, by those who claim to speak for us. Our responsibility, grave but not overwhelming, is to participate as far as we possibly can in making those choices the right ones.

Like Lear, we have taken too little care of this, but we too have a contentious storm to teach us. Our contemporary heath, perhaps, is the intersection described by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), as the perilous place where the thundering traffic of racism and patriarchy combine. For the victims of climate injustice, it is also the intersection of colonialism and fossil capital. If we can stand at that junction, in humble solidarity with those who have no other place to stand, perhaps we too can be sufficiently exposed that we feel what wretches feel. Or better, to know ourselves also as wretches, in its oldest sense of strangers and exiles. There is no way back to the garden, but there may be a common to explore, together.

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THE COMMON GOOD AND THE BAME COMMUNITIES: IN SEARCH OF AN INCLUSIVE FUTURE

Chief Commissioner Geraldine McGahey OBE

I'm delighted to be joining you all to talk about 'The Common Good and BAME Communities: In Search of an Inclusive Future'.

My input will concentrate on the issues and challenges faced by our black, Asian and ethnic minority communities in Northern Ireland, although many of the issues will be the same as those experienced in Ireland, across the UK, or indeed wherever they live.

I want to touch briefly on the interesting concept of the common good. Although it does not appear to be used as much now as it once was, the common good remains an important concept for envisioning a shared society in which all citizens can prosper and thrive, and where everyone shares in the benefits of society. It is not elitist or self-serving for just some or specific groups in society.

As you will know, Northern Ireland is in its centenary year and much has changed over the last 100 years. We have endured 40 years of conflict and thankfully we have lived in relative peace for the last two decades. During

this time, our population has changed too, our demographic is now very different from 100 years ago, or indeed 20 years ago. People from all walks of life, backgrounds, races, and ethnic minorities, have now chosen to make Northern Ireland their home.

We know from the 2011 Census that people belonging to minority ethnic groups equated to 1.8% of the population of Northern Ireland or 32,400 citizens, whilst the proportion of the population born outside Northern Ireland was 11% which is 202,000. Also, according to the 2011 Census, Northern Ireland remained the least ethnically diverse region of the UK (Northern Ireland Department of Finance and Personnel and NISRA, 2012). You will be aware that we have just recently held another Census and there is much speculation that the results will most likely show an increase in the size of our minority ethnic population.

With the arrival of new people, come new ideas and new needs, and we have to work together to help those who have come from other places to settle into our society happily and successfully. As human beings we are inherently different with a diverse range of ideas and concepts about how far we must go to reach a vision of a shared society, one that is welcoming and open to those of different races and ethnic backgrounds. The common good can help us to develop a framework and decide what elements we need to enable us to realise that vision of an inclusive and shared society. But if

we are to use the concept of the common good then we must seriously consider the question, ‘What kind of society do we want’?

I think it is safe to say that the common good is about a vision of society where we all can flourish and live up to our full potential. It does not mean that there has to be a one-size-fits-all approach, but it should be inclusive of those with different views or ideas, to share equally in the ‘good life’.

Four principles of the common good inform the NI Equality Commission’s praxis. The first principle relates to human dignity, which recognises the equality of all humans and that every human life is worthy of respect. The second underpinning principle relates to understanding our human interconnectedness and interdependence. Solidarity is the third principle, recognising that the conditions for pursuing a good life cannot be achieved through justice and equal rights alone but can only be achieved if people see themselves as members of an interconnected community. Finally, the fourth principle supporting the common good is that of civic participation and taking an active role in society. One of the NI Equality Commission’s current corporate objectives seeks to increase participation in public life not just by women and disabled people but also by people from ethnic minorities.

I took up post as Chief Commissioner just as the Covid-19 pandemic hit in 2020. I had a vision of the work I wanted to do and one of the issues I

wanted to concentrate on was race - to explore how we could work with, and further support, our black, Asian and minority ethnic communities. I could not have foreseen the impact of the pandemic, or the worldwide ramifications of the tragic death of George Floyd in America during 2020.

Due to the pandemic, I did not get to hit the ground running as I had hoped, but with perseverance and the use of new technologies I did manage over the last year to chair a number of meetings with a wide range of people in the race sector in Northern Ireland.

I must say, I learned a lot from those meetings. The BAME communities in Northern Ireland are very diverse and, despite their diversity, they all face the same or similar issues in relation to attitudes, racism, prejudice, accessing support and funding. The pandemic also highlighted similar experiences faced across the sector including: the working conditions for members of these communities in care homes and food processing plants; the impact of zero-hours contracts on workers; children with little or no access to technology which was required during the periods of home schooling; language barriers; lack of accessible communications from the health sector in relation to the pandemic, and employees worried about their residential status and employment rights after Brexit.

Participants in these meetings were also in agreement that they would benefit

from capacity-building training and investing in their own communities to better represent themselves and to have their voices heard. This was about ensuring that there was consistency in representation and developing the message and communication within and across the sector. There were strong feelings about the need to encourage and support participation in public life by those from BAME communities living in Northern Ireland. While there is good and important work going on across the race sector, this work is quite fragmented, and it is a challenge for the groups to actively work together on a regular basis to call out or tackle the common issues they face.

There are many reasons for the BAME communities taking the approach they currently do, but a more cohesive approach to the common good would, in my opinion, give them strength in numbers, a stronger voice and therefore better opportunities to achieve their goals. This ultimately would create a more inclusive future for them, the wider community and future generations in Northern Ireland.

The Black Lives Matter movement and the differential impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on minority ethnic groups have thrown racism into the sharpest possible focus. The issue of racial discrimination is not new to Northern Ireland. It can and does take many forms, from slogans daubed on walls to physical attacks. People tell NI Equality Commission staff

about their experiences of harassment or unfair treatment in the workplace, of being denied a job or dismissed, or being abused or refused services.

However out of bad sometimes can come good. The racist arson attack on the Belfast Multi-Cultural Centre in January 2021, which had been at the forefront of helping those most in need during the pandemic, delivering food parcels etc., was condemned across the board. Within a few days a public JustGiving page had raised in excess of £70,000 to contribute to the rebuilding of the centre. I personally was uplifted by the public statements of support and solidarity from across civic society after this truly awful racist attack on a much needed and used community resource.

In 2020, Judge Marrinan published his independent review of hate crime legislation in Northern Ireland. The NI Equality Commission welcomed the report, but we were strong in our response, citing that the NI Executive, the Department of Justice, the criminal justice agencies and others, need to work together on a robust, co-ordinated and effective policy response to tackling the persistent and growing problem of hate crime in Northern Ireland. This includes working together to combat prejudicial attitudes and to promote equality and diversity.

In 2021 we have seen the publication of two pieces of work reporting on progress towards racial equality, or lack thereof. These are: the Commission

on Race and Ethnic Disparities Report (the Sewell Report); and in Northern Ireland, the Executive Office's Northern Ireland Racial Equality Indicators Report: 2014 – 2019. Both reports raised interesting points. It is hard not to agree with the 2021 Sewell Report that racism is not as prevalent as it was, but it is our view that there is still a great deal of work to do before anything like equality for everyone is achieved.

We have noted with concern that in the Executive Office 2021 Northern Ireland Racial Equality Indicators Report, almost one in three people reported that they were prejudiced against people from minority ethnic communities, which is an increase on previous surveys, and apparently those respondents were happy to be open and honest about their prejudices. In addition, the report worryingly states that a record high of 45% of young people have witnessed racist bullying or harassment in their school.

We also know from PSNI statistics that there have been 6,502 race hate crimes reported to the police in the last decade, the numbers peaked in 2014/15 but thankfully official statistics have been on a downward trend since 2015/16. These race hate crimes have not been against one section of our BAME communities. Official statistics show that in 2019/20, 10% of crimes were perpetrated against people described as black (mainly African origin); 17% against Asian (mainly Chinese and South Asian) and 39% against White (including Eastern European). Interestingly, also in the

2019/20 financial year, only 3.8% of racially motivated cases of criminal damage, such as arson attacks on homes and other buildings resulted in charges or summons (Police Service of Northern Ireland, 2021). While the NI Equality Commission discrimination advice helpline received 221 race enquiries in 2020/21, this equated to 8.27% of all enquiries received across all equality grounds.

We know much work remains to be done to fully eradicate racism and achieve the goal of racial equality for all our citizens in Northern Ireland. It is only then that we will see the inclusive future that we really want and need. But in order to achieve this we all have a role to play. There has to be some onus and responsibility on our BAME communities to work towards a better and more inclusive future both for themselves and the common good. And there are also other serious issues that must be addressed by the British Government, the Northern Ireland Assembly and wider civic society as a whole, in order to fully address racism in all its forms and achieve racial equality. Do not be in any doubt, I have raised my concerns and called for action at the highest levels of government and will continue to do so.

Having set the scene, I now want to focus on prejudice and attitudes, the importance of a Racial Equality Strategy and the role of government and civic leadership alongside our BAME citizens in working towards the common good and seeking an inclusive future.

So, what do we need to do to achieve this inclusive future for our black, Asian and minority ethnic communities, a future that we all benefit from and is truly for the common good? Ultimately, to achieve an inclusive future for everyone, Northern Ireland needs commitment, leadership and urgent action from the government to tackle racism in all its forms.

As I have previously stated, the Black Lives Matter movement, the publicity about the perceived differences around policing of protests involving members of the ethnic minority communities, and the differential impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on minority ethnic groups, have brought racism and the issues faced by our communities into sharp focus. The failings highlighted must be addressed for the common good of everyone.

Racial discrimination has been an issue in Northern Ireland for many years and while numbers of incidents reported have been declining over recent years, they have not disappeared entirely. Simply put, in my opinion, one racist incident is one incident too many. Research has shown that black, Asian and ethnic minority people living in Northern Ireland are often perceived to be recent migrants, even when significant proportions of these populations were born in Northern Ireland. This can further deepen the perception of them as ‘outsiders’, that perhaps they don’t really belong here, they are stealing our jobs or are a drain on our public services, that they don’t really deserve to be here.

Whilst it is for the police and the criminal courts to deal with hate crime, there is a wider responsibility on all of us to challenge racial prejudice and speak up when people are being abused and treated unfairly because of their race or ethnic background. We need to get to a place where everyone is valued for what they offer to our society, but in order to achieve this we must understand why some people engage in this behaviour and actively challenge it in order to eradicate it.

Therefore we need to change mindsets, challenge behaviours, to change some language and long held beliefs that are, or may be perceived to be, racist. There is a strong moral case in society for equality and treating everyone with fairness, dignity and respect, and to engage in equality and inclusion as part of the greater or common good. Importantly, we need to ensure that all fully understand and appreciate the benefits that we can derive from a truly diverse society.

So, what do we know about prejudice and attitudes in Northern Ireland today? Across the world Irish people are renowned for their warmth, friendliness and hospitality. Are we a welcoming and accepting bunch regardless of another's race, nationality or ethnic background? Or is that just towards tourists? Do we have work to do to reach that point or would we rather just not engage with those whom we perceive as being different from us?

According to the Northern Ireland Life and Times Research Update entitled: 'Black Lives Matter? Attitudes to minorities and migrants in Northern Ireland' (Michael, 2021), in 2019 a quarter of participants described themselves as 'a little prejudiced' against people of minority ethnic communities, while 4% described themselves as 'very prejudiced'. The proportion of people describing themselves as 'not prejudiced at all' (69%) was the same in 2019 as in 2015, although it had reached 79% in 2017.

While the majority of respondents believed themselves not to be prejudiced, and figures are generally improving over time, the results show that almost a third considered themselves to be 'a little prejudiced' or 'very prejudiced', against people of ethnic minorities. This gives us just a little insight into the level of work we know has to be done to change these beliefs and attitudes on our journey toward achieving racial equality. The Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey Research Update (Michael, 2021) also reported that almost two-thirds of respondents (61%) felt that the culture and traditions of different minority ethnic groups added to the richness and diversity of Northern Ireland society, while 14% disagreed with this view, and 20% neither agreed nor disagreed. So while there is considerable work to be done to change perceptions, there are some simple things all of us can do by educating ourselves and exposing ourselves to other cultures. For example, the NI Equality Commission supports the *Mela* festival at

Botanic Gardens in Belfast every year. Festivals and events like this provide opportunities for us to get a valuable insight and experience of other cultures, food, music, craic and the common traits we all share. They can help breakdown psychological racial barriers, many of which are simply fear of the unknown.

Unfortunately, these statistics do not come as a surprise to us. In fact the results of the NI Equality Commission's Equality Awareness Survey in 2016 showed that while results were generally positive, all five of the most negatively viewed groups were racial groups: Travellers, Roma, asylum seekers and refugees, migrant workers and minority ethnic groups. So while there are some things that we as individuals can do to help ensure our black, Asian and ethnic minority colleagues, neighbours, family or friends are fully immersed in life in Northern Ireland and enjoy all the benefits our ever-growing diverse society has to offer, this simply will not be enough to turn the tide and build an inclusive future for everyone, regardless of race, ethnicity and background.

I think it is important to note that while Northern Ireland remains the least ethnically diverse region in the UK (according to Census 2011), it also has been the most dependent on migrant workers (NI Department for the Economy, 2018) and this appears to have had an impact on recent attitudes, both positive and negative.

Personally speaking, I think we each need to ask ourselves some soul-searching questions. If we expect and demand equality for ourselves as individuals, do we recognise that with such a right comes responsibility - a responsibility to ensure that everyone else can avail of that same right and we practice that ethos in our daily lives? This may sound a little utopian but let's be honest, in the scenario of our children or someone we care about moving to live in another city or country, have any of us worried that they will not fit in because this new community might have a different culture and set of values from our own, that they are somehow different? Does this hint at a little prejudice in our own attitudes? I'm not looking for an answer, I believe that a truly equal society starts with the individual.

To effect real change and build an inclusive future for everyone, we need strong political leadership to progress the implementation of the Racial Equality Strategies by ensuring that a series of concrete outcomes and focused actions are put in place. From its inception, Northern Ireland's Racial Equality Strategy 2015-2025 has lacked strong high-level commitment. It did not define a timetable or resource priority actions to tackle the issues that impact on people's lives on a daily basis.

In fact, in our comments on the draft Racial Equality Strategy, which was the predecessor to the current strategy, the NI Equality Commission expressed 'grave concerns about a strategy which does not have any associated actions

within it' (2005, p. 1). A strategy is both the framework and means of delivery, and part of this is still missing. We continue to be concerned about the credibility of this document, given that the development timescales continue to be undermined. Unfortunately, it is generally believed by the sector that very little happened as a result of the initial Racial Equality Strategy.

In our response to the consultation for the current Racial Equality Strategy, we highlighted that there was no detailed narrative to demonstrate why it is needed; it lacked strong high-level commitment; included no discrete funding and did not have an action plan (NI Equality Commission, 2014). We have continued to voice our concerns at the lack of practical measures in the strategy. It needs to include specific actions to implement long-term measures to tackle prejudicial attitudes, promote respect for difference, improve minority ethnic participation in public life and foster community cohesion. We need a timetabled commitment to reform the law on racial discrimination. To be effective, the Racial Equality Strategy needs to set out clear evidence of the social, political and economic inequalities faced by minority ethnic communities (including multiple identity issues); it needs to develop and communicate clear rationales in support of priority actions and ensure those actions are clearly defined, timetabled, allocated and resourced.

I have written to the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, asking them to act on this and to ensure that the Executive and all departments complete the actions outlined in the existing Racial Equality Strategy, and develop them further to eliminate racism, tackle prejudicial attitudes and institutional racism. Hopefully there is a growing political will to make progress. During a debate in the Northern Ireland Assembly in September 2020 on racial equality and the urgent need to formulate and implement a more meaningful Racial Equality Strategy, it was reassuring to hear our concerns and calls for action reiterated by Alliance Party MLA Kellie Armstrong.

While the implementation of a Racial Equality Strategy, which is fully resourced with a funded action plan, is a vital component of successfully building an inclusive future for our black, Asian and ethnic minority communities, there is other significant work and considerations ongoing that are all important aspects of this incredibly complex jigsaw. We are working with government departments, statutory bodies and of course colleagues across the race sector to push forward with this work.

So what does the NI Equality Commission wish to see? Our long-standing recommendations to advance racial equality call for:

- Reform of the law, to address key shortfalls in legal protections, to strengthen the rights of people here against racial discrimination and harassment and to ensure that, at the very least, the law here keeps pace with legislative developments in Great Britain;
- Tackling prejudicial attitudes, racism and hate crime;
- Ensuring equality of opportunity in education, employment, accommodation, healthcare and access to social welfare;
- Ensuring effective monitoring and evaluation, supported by robust data collection.

The NI Equality Commission has long called for the collection of better data of the different equality groups in Northern Ireland. It is with the knowledge gained from this data that better public policy decisions can be made, which ultimately impact on and can significantly improve all our lives, while ensuring effective compliance with the equality and good relations duties established by the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The absence of key equality data means that it is difficult to assess the extent of key inequalities or to track progress in achieving outcomes.

We continue to call for the Programme for Government to include actions, particularly by departments and other public bodies, to collect comprehensive equality data, to address key gaps in the available

information (including on the grounds of race) and to rectify a lack of data disaggregation (including on ethnicity). Some shoots of progress are starting to emerge. NI Equality Commission staff met with departmental officials to discuss possible approaches to ethnic monitoring of employment in selected public authorities. An initial strategy, which involved piloting a harmonised approach to such monitoring, aligned to the 2011 Census questions on ethnicity, was discussed. It is hoped that this will lead to an inter-departmental working group on ethnic monitoring.

Finally, it would be remiss of me not to mention another important piece of external work on race. The Northern Ireland Affairs Committee in April 2021 launched an inquiry to investigate the experience of minority ethnic and migrant people in Northern Ireland to which the NI Equality Commission contributed. We look forward to considering its findings which will further inform our work. We expect that work at this level will provide important new insights, reaffirm what we already know, and provide new focus on the experiences of members of our black, Asian and ethnic minority communities. The inquiry could provide evidence that we may not have been aware of before.

In conclusion, as I have previously stated, the Black Lives Matter movement has given a renewed focus to racial inequalities over the last year. The full involvement of black, Asian and minority ethnic people and communities

must form a core part of delivering changes to equality laws and to the development and monitoring of public policy and service delivery.

To achieve an inclusive future that is desired by so many, we have a responsibility to work together. We need commitment and buy-in also from the highest levels of government through to individuals in communities across Northern Ireland. There is no doubt that we are all different, but we all have something positive to offer to society if we work together for the benefit of everyone and embrace the concept of the common good in our thinking and plans. I believe it is possible to achieve a shared society where all our citizens can flourish, and where everyone can share in the benefits of society. Let us all move forward together by focusing on the actions needed and commit to showing dignity and respect to everyone, to people of all races and from all ethnic backgrounds. It is only then that we will truly be able to successfully realise the ultimate goal of building an inclusive future for us all for the common good.

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TEACHING HOPEFULNESS FOR THE FUTURE: MENTAL HEALTH AND THE COMMON GOOD IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Professor Siobhán O'Neill

Good mental health and hope are central to the common good. In order to fully appreciate the role of good mental health and hope, it is important to consider what we know about the nature of mental health and illness, where it comes from and how the processes involved impact on all aspects of human life and behaviour. Mental health and illness are socially constructed representations of behaviour and thought patterns which are said to impair or impede functioning and our ability to achieve our goals regarding our relational roles. This is demonstrated by the fact that the criteria for mental illness vary over time and between different cultures. Nonetheless, the psychiatric definitions remain important and allow us to measure and track mental health, illness, and wellbeing over time.

The World Mental Health Survey Initiative (Kessler *et al.*, 2008) was an important series of studies which produced surveys of these phenomena in over 30 countries. These surveys used the diagnostic criteria of the American Psychiatric Association to establish the proportions of the population in Northern Ireland who met the criteria for a mental illness throughout their

lifetime and in the past year, facilitating international comparisons. The surveys measured the criteria for mental illness, which were essentially collections of very familiar feelings and behaviours, for example feeling sad, empty, depressed, or worthless. The diagnostic thresholds relate to the duration and intensity of the feelings. In order to meet the criteria for a mental illness these symptoms needed to be present for an extended period of time and importantly, caused suffering, or impaired the ability to function in one's roles. In addition, they were symptoms that could not be explained by having taken drugs or symptoms that were a natural response to life events such as bereavement. The studies also asked about a range of issues which were believed to be risk factors for mental illness. The diagnostic and classification process is helpful in understanding maladaptive behaviour patterns and how to address them. However, a foray into the world of diagnostic classification systems also reveals significant limitations to the psychiatric model of health and illness, and the inability of these methods to explain and capture the reality of the human experience.

One of the most powerful aspects of this research programme was how it transformed our understanding of mental illness by illustrating, using data from around the world, the similarities in the factors associated with mental illness. However, the manifestations of mental illness were somewhat dissimilar in different cultures. The findings matched those of one of the other seminal studies on mental health and illness, the first

Adverse Childhood Experiences Study. Both the World Mental Health Surveys and Felitti's study from the early 1990s showed us what many already suspected: the events that happen to us when we are children influence our mental and physical health throughout our lifetime (Felitti, 2002; Kessler *et al.*, 2010). It turned out that what previous generations have described as 'the formative years' really are the formative years. Both studies demonstrated that childhood adversities are much more common than we had previously acknowledged, and that they had a powerful correlation with adult health even a half-century later. Just over half of the middle-class population in the US Health Plan membership experienced an adverse childhood experience, or ACE (Felitti *et al.*, 1998). Adversities happen in clusters, and an exposure to one category is associated with an 80% likelihood of exposure to another (Felitti, 2002).

The reason why childhood adversities are so harmful (some commentators use the phrase 'toxic') is rooted in neurodevelopmental biology. The brain is growing at an enormous speed throughout childhood, and particularly in the first three years of life. It is during this time that neuroplasticity is at its peak and the neurological pathways are being formed which influence biological processes to support the person's survival. Of particular relevance are the pathways that govern the body's stress response. This period of development may be viewed as the brain's way of calibrating the stress response so that the child fits with the environment within which it will live.

Therefore, a child with a rapid stress response will be able to react quickly to danger and this means that they will survive. The response is the 'fight, flight or freeze' stress response that we are familiar with. Repeated trauma in childhood, or early life stress, impacts upon the child's developing stress-response system, which reduces resilience to stress and makes them more sensitive to even moderate levels of threat (Danese and McEwen, 2012; Pechtel and Pizzagalli, 2011). Childhood adversities are not only associated with poor mental health, but they are also related to poorer psychological functioning (Brown *et al.*, 2017), academic attainment (McKelvey *et al.*, 2018), conduct difficulties and risky behaviours (Troy *et al.*, 2021), and premature mortality (Brown *et al.*, 2009).

Research over the past two decades has demonstrated how allostatic load resulting from chronic stress, trauma and adversity in childhood, results in changes to the structure and chemistry of the brain to impact cognition and emotion. We are now starting to understand how these processes operate at a cellular level. For example, new techniques in biological sciences are revealing the ways in which gene combinations impact on mental health outcomes. Polygenic Risk Scoring shows us again how mental illnesses overlap with one another, with many of the common mental illnesses associated with multiple genetic variants, spread across the genome. Epigenetics research demonstrates how trauma and stress in childhood impacts upon the expression of a gene. In other words, environmental

impacts create chemical changes to the surface of genes, influencing whether parts of the gene are switched on or off which is in turn associated with the manifestation of the symptoms of mental illness (Dalvie *et al.*, 2021). These developments in our understanding of the systems biology of mental illness not only underscores the biological basis of mental illness, but also emphasises the possibility of the reversal of these processes and even the prospect of using these biological markers as outcomes in intervention studies.

Relationships are crucial to the creation of mental health promoting environments. The effect of this is seen most acutely in the devastating impact of abuse and neglect of babies and toddlers, and babies who have not had human contact. We now know more about the complex multisensory chemical interaction that happens within that mother and child dyad, which supports the child's physical development. For example, the sense of safety in the presence of the child's caregivers that shape the child's stress response pathways, moderating the speed at which the child's stress response is activated and the capacity for them to regulate their emotional responses (Fonagy *et al.*, 2004). Early research often focused on the role of the mother and built our understanding of the importance of the maternal relationship, however, recent developments in family and community neuroscience have extended our understanding. Research is telling us more about neurological mechanisms that have developed to detect and respond

to emotional cues from others. For example, mirror neurons are said to help us detect and respond to the emotional cues in others and interpret the meaning of their actions (Rizzolatti and Fogassi, 2014). One of the reasons why the COVID-19 pandemic was so detrimental to mental wellbeing worldwide was that we were required to separate from others, and we were unable to detect important behavioural cues, which limited the capacity to detect others' emotional responses (COVID-19 Mental Disorders Collaborators, 2021). Children were particularly affected by the separation; for example, the Co-Space study showed that girls demonstrated anxiety and boys experienced attention and behaviour problems as a result of separation from peers when schools were closed during the pandemic (Skripkauskaite *et al.*, 2021). The gender differences again reflect the results from the World Mental Health Surveys; stress response patterns vary as a result of social norms and biological and hormonal factors. Males were more likely to demonstrate externalising symptoms and disorders. Their stress response impacted upon their behaviour, they got into trouble and were more likely to meet the criteria for disorders such as Oppositional Defiant Disorder and Intermittent Explosive Disorder. Females were more likely to demonstrate internalising symptoms such as those characteristics of depression or anxiety (Bunting *et al.,* 2012). The widespread recognition of internalising disorders, depression, and anxiety as worthy of treatment within mental health services might be interpreted as pathologising women's responses as meriting treatment using medication and talking therapies. The impact of

men's externalising behaviours and disorders, social violence, and anger, are traditionally addressed in a very Pavlovian, behavioural manner through punishment and the justice system.

When we shift our thinking from viewing mental illness as an illness requiring treatment to the behaviours that result from maladaptive stress response, patterns that were laid down in response to stress and trauma, particularly in our childhood, we can start to see the links between mental health and the common good. We can begin to understand social problems as manifestations of behavioural responses to adversity, which affects us at a biological level. This is the basis of what we recognise to be a trauma-informed approach, an understanding of illness as a result of what happened to us, rather than what is wrong with us. However, it is also important to note the limitations of the adversity model and the importance of strengths-based approaches, and of promoting hope and resilience.

One of the most important findings from the Northern Ireland Study of Health and Stress (NISHS) was that Northern Ireland's high levels of chronic and persistent mental illness were in part a legacy of the thirty years of violent conflict. Our study showed that people with conflict-related trauma were more likely to have mental illness, and more serious and enduring mental illnesses (Bunting *et al.,* 2012; Ferry *et al.,* 2014). However, the finding that received less attention was that childhood adversities remained

a very important part of the picture. Whilst most people did not go on to develop mental illness, childhood adversities increased the likelihood of trauma leading to illness. A history of adversities in childhood was a risk factor for all types of mental illness and the addition of conflict-related trauma increased the likelihood of substance use and suicidal behaviour (McLafferty *et al.,* 2018). Troubles-related trauma also appeared to carry a higher risk of suicidal thoughts and fatal suicide attempts. This was hypothesised to be the result of an habituation to violence, and the use of substances for emotional regulation in the face of fear and hypervigilance that characterised the conflict (O'Neill *et al.,* 2014).

There is increasing concern about the transgenerational transmission of trauma and mental illness, so it is relevant to discuss it at this point. Parental trauma-related mental illness and substance use increases children's risk of mental illness, and both are included in the ACEs scale as adversities which impact the mental health of children (Felitti *et al.,* 1998). Within the international literature there is increasing consideration afforded to the view that the 'psychological reverberations' of trauma may continue into subsequent generations. This focus has been supported by several studies including those with offspring of Holocaust survivors and survivors of the Rwandan genocide (Ridhuan *et al.,* 2021). Transgenerational transmission occurs through a variety of biological, psychological, and social mechanisms, and early intervention can play a powerful role. Trauma, Post Traumatic

Stress Disorder (PTSD) symptoms (avoidance, emotional numbing and hypervigilance) and the associated mental illness and harmful substance use, can impact on parental attachment and parenting behaviour. Attachment influences the child's capacity for self-regulation and their subsequent risk of mental illness (Fonagy, *et al.,* 2004). There is also emerging evidence pointing to trauma leading to biological changes prior to birth which influence the stress response of the offspring (Ridhuan *et al.,* 2021).

The Northern Ireland World Mental Health Survey study, the NI Study of Health and Stress, showed that 39% of the population experienced a traumatic event that was related to the Troubles. Such events included bombings, shootings, and witnessing killings and mutilations (Bunting *et al.,* 2012). It seems that these types of traumas are particularly likely to have a mental health impact as a result of the ways in which the memory is processed. Terrifying and unpredictable trauma can result in the symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Whilst these responses are logical from an evolutionary perspective as a mechanism to protect the individual from future threat, they can have a detrimental impact on the parent-child relationship, and the attachment that is central to promoting resilience, social skills, and empathy (Punamäki, Qouta and Diab, 2019). The fight, flight or freeze response, which results from acute stress and the hypervigilance resulting from trauma or chronic stress is completely the opposite of what is required for problem-solving and empathy. We need

psychological safety to respond to difficulties with curiosity, we need to be able to calmly empathise, in order to see others' perspectives so that we can negotiate and work out solutions to complex problems. Thankfully, there is a generation of people in Northern Ireland and elsewhere, who are now parents themselves, who recognise the importance of childhood exposures and the value of early interventions.

We are also now starting to recognise that the impact of childhood adversities is more complex than we first thought. The ACEs study now stands accused of providing a simplistic, deterministic perspective of the world, promoting the view of a 'dose-response' relationship between adversities in childhood and later illness. When it first emerged, the ACEs scale was used as a means by which to count adversities, which has been critiqued for pathologising normal experiences and failed to account for the differences in why some children flourished despite adversity, and indeed how many children and adults grew in spite of, or even as a result of, trauma. There is a recognition that post-traumatic growth is possible and increasing interest in the conditions in which it occurs (Linley and Joseph, 2004). The concept of resilience is subject to scrutiny. The recent study of the mental health in children in Northern Ireland found that almost half (48%) experienced one or more adversity. The most common adversity, experienced by 35.8% of children, was parental separation, an experience which is so common that it must surely need to be reclassified as part of the natural trajectory of

life (Bunting *et al.*, 2020). Of note is also the finding within the Northern Ireland Study of Health and Stress showing that people who experienced no adversity in childhood had a moderate risk of mental illness after a trauma, in other words some adversity appears to be beneficial in helping to build resilience and coping skills (McLafferty *et al.*, 2018). This finding was mirrored in a study of college students, where over-controlling and over-indulgent parenting styles were found to be associated with a higher risk of poor emotional regulation and coping skills (which themselves are characteristics of poor mental health) (McLafferty *et al.*, 2019). It is therefore important that we avoid pathologising relatively common life events and consider how, in families and communities, hardships can be restructured as opportunities for modelling problem-solving, negotiation, and conflict resolution.

Studies show that the proportion of young people suffering from stress-related conditions and poor mental health is rising (Bunting *et al.*, 2020). These problems impede learning, and the education, healthcare and justice systems are charged with managing the behavioural difficulties that result. Mental illness and the behaviours that result from a maladaptive response to overwhelming stress are a huge challenge to the common good. Externalising behaviours, manifestations of fear, anxiety and trauma, result in social violence and are a threat to peace. They lead to illness, human pain, and more suffering. They result in us harming others, impair our

ability to see others' perspectives and find creative solutions to the major problems of our time: a global pandemic, sectarian conflict, climate change, and poverty. The opposites of mental illness are not happiness or wellness, or mental health, as in the absence of illness. The true opposites of mental illness are joy and hope. According to Snyder's Hope Theory, hope is our perception of whether we are able to walk certain paths leading to a desired destination, it also helps people stay motivated when walking these paths, and the path is the journey towards what gives our lives meaning. It is a world away from the deficit model of mental illness and yet it resonates with the idea of role impairment as the key variable (Snyder *et al.,* 1991).

Snyder's Hope Theory is based on the assumption that all purposeful human activity is goal-directed. It therefore includes the ability to set and achieve meaningful goals, the identification of pathways to those goals, as well as agency and freedom of choice (Snyder *et al.,* 1991). Research is demonstrating how childhood adversities and the behaviour patterns that result, diminish hope (Muñoz and Hanks, 2021). Hope is having a vision for a meaningful life and the capacity to achieve that vision through positive feelings, and autonomous actions that align with core values. Hope is a teachable concept and when we break it down into its various components, we find that they represent a series of teachable skills. For example, the components of the International Foundation for Research and Education on Depression's Hopeful Minds programme (iFred, 2021) that

is now being used in many schools throughout Northern Ireland. Included in the programme is teaching children how to set achievable goals, and teaching self-awareness and emotional regulation strategies, so that young people can recognize and respond to negative feelings and manage their stress response. It also incorporates the development of problem-solving skills and effective coping strategies. Importantly, it teaches children how to respond to failure, to use adversity to grow and builds social skills so that they develop the support networks that will protect them.

There is also a very real reason for hope regarding the mental health of the population of Northern Ireland. The 2021 Continuous Household Survey illustrated the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and highlighted higher levels of loneliness, poor wellbeing and anxiety, however, it also found that self-efficacy and internal locus of control had increased and were at the highest levels ever (The Executive Office, 2021). In other words, more people felt that they had control over their lives and outcomes. In 2019, the New Decade New Approach agreement heralded the return of the Northern Ireland Assembly after three years, and this agreement included a commitment to reform mental health services (The Executive Office, 2020). In 2021 a 10-year Mental Health Strategy was published containing 35 actions to address the gaps in provision, and deliver a Regional Mental Health Service, where evidence-based treatments are available to all who need them. Importantly, the strategy's first theme emphasises early intervention and prevention.

It includes actions to address the impact of inequalities on mental health and improve the availability of services for children and young people. The Department of Education have also provided a Framework for Emotional Health and Wellbeing in Education, endorsing a whole school approach to resilience-building and prevention, early intervention, and specific services for children and young people who have developed mental health difficulties (Department of Education NI, 2021).

Whilst there are many positive developments, we must continue to work to recognise and address the role of mental health and wellbeing as fundamental to the common good. This means that we need to treat mental illness to reduce suffering and limit transgenerational trauma, which will help to address the causes of mental illness and poor wellbeing. In addition to the urgent and pressing need to target childhood adversities, we also need to inoculate our children and young people against mental illness by teaching hope and incorporating this approach into the curriculum. Whilst this would go some way to promoting individual resilience, it is important to recognise that we exist as part of communities and groups, and the interconnectedness and attachments within the groups also needs to be nurtured. Teaching and promoting hopefulness would support calm minds and foster the creation of the sorts of connections within our groups that keep us psychologically healthy, enabling us to achieve our goals and flourish.

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VALUING A COMMON GOOD: RE-IMAGINING A JUST AND SHARED FUTURE

A Conversation with Chancellor Mary McAleese

Dr Johnston McMaster: Before we get into the theme for this evening, which is 'Valuing the Common Good: Re-imagining a Just and Shared Future', you had 14 very significant years as the President of Ireland, you did a huge amount to re-shape that high office to bring it into the 21st century and that was about 10 years ago. Where has the journey taken you since you left *Áras an Uachtaráin?*

Chancellor Mary McAleese: Shortly after I left office, I had planned to become a canon lawyer. I'm already a civil lawyer so I wanted to augment my legal background and to really get to know the bones of the juridic structure of the church in which I was raised, the Roman Catholic Church. I already had a master's degree in canon law, that was a start, and so immediately after leaving office, I headed for Rome to live in a monastery directly behind the Colosseum. It's an extraordinary place, I think it was the Emperor Nero's mother's garden, which hangs literally over the top of the Colosseum, a magnificent sight. I lived in the monastery and there is a place called the Lay Centre on one floor. The monastery itself is huge,

anybody who is there rattles around it now but in the days whenever it was first built it was probably for hundreds, now there are few. It's a mixed community at the Lay Centre. I was living in community with rabbis, with imams, with dervishes, with members of the Eastern Catholic Churches, the Orthodox. It was an absolutely brilliant experience with us all living together. We were in the Pontifical University studying something or other, so we'd dash out to class in the morning, up past all of the Forums. The university was right next-door to the *Trevi Fountain*.

I spent three very happy years in Rome. I did my *licentiate* there, that's the qualification you get when you become a canon lawyer, then I decided to stay on and do a doctorate. By then I had moved to a seminary and was living just up the road from the Lay Centre, near the *Lateran Basilica* in a little cottage belonging to the Irish College. I had a whale of a time, except for the Italian and the canon law of course! I worked my way through those in womanful fashion and got my doctorate and then decided that that was where I was going to place myself for the future.

I like research, I like writing and I liked the subject matter because the area that I write on is children and children's rights in canon law. Well actually, if I was writing about children's rights in canon law that would be very little, however, I also write about children's obligations in canon law, so I write on children's rights and obligations in canon law and I love the work.

I work on a part-time basis at the Department of Theology in Glasgow, which is a great place to work. That's what I've been doing, more or less, ever since.

Also, I've been in a few other universities since. I spent a semester in Boston College, a semester in the University of Notre Dame in Indiana, a semester in St Mary's University in Twickenham and I've also been involved in setting up a terrific institute called the Ansari Institute in Notre Dame. It is part of the new School of Global Affairs, the first new school that they've opened since the university was founded actually; and it's designed to engage with civic society, particularly with the media in civic society to try and up, what I might call, the literacy level around religions and religious issues. So that's terrific, really great. That's what I've been doing, and other bits and pieces, the odd sojourn back in my old base in RTE doing the occasional programme and like everyone else, I've been at home for the best part of the last 16 to 18 months.

Dr Johnston McMaster: Sounds busy and sounds like almost the presidency might've been easier!

Chancellor Mary McAleese: In many ways you're absolutely right because a lot of the time the job was in the House as well, which helped. So now, I live 100 miles from Dublin, we live in the west of Ireland, we're just on the

shores of a little lake that is part of the Shannon system. My back window overlooks my father's old back window, the only thing between us is the Shannon. So, I'm looking out at the Shannon, which is very beautiful, but it is 100 miles from Dublin and you begin to realise when you live in places like this how many things you have to be in Dublin for. So we're always on the road, always going somewhere. Our kids and grand-kids are in Dublin, so we've really missed them over the last while. It's not retirement as it used to be known but I'll be time enough doing that in a while. Of course I have to mention Trinity as well, the chancellorship, it's a nice role.

Dr Cathy Higgins: I remember meeting you Mary, when you invited an inter-church group I was working with down to *Áras*, they were people from the Lower Falls, from the Lower Shankill and from Sandy Row, and you made us feel very welcome.

Chancellor Mary McAleese: That was the whole point, I hope we did. It was about hospitality and good neighbourliness.

Dr Cathy Higgins: Yes, we experienced that and it's a theme that runs through your memoir, 'Here's the Story'. In it there's a huge emphasis on building bridges, which is a theme that didn't just start with your presidency, it was something that had roots in your earlier experiences living in Belfast during the Troubles. One of the things that struck me in your book is your

emphasis on the need to be inclusive and ensure that everybody's good is being considered. This particular programme of civic conversations is exploring the question: 'Is there a Common Good?' and it would be helpful if you could share your understanding of the common good.

Chancellor Mary McAleese: I think my understanding of it comes from living in a jurisdiction where, from first principles, we realised that we hadn't achieved the common good. Northern Ireland was a place that had not subscribed to the common good, unless it was the common good just for one section of the community and I happened not to be part of that section of the community. So growing up in Northern Ireland, I came to understand the importance of the whole concept of human dignity and what human dignity means, and how from human dignity you move to equality, you move to justice and you move to a sense of the inclusiveness of every human being of God's creation and their entitlement to the equality that flows from their human dignity. When you grow up in an environment where that isn't conferred on you by the state, by the organs of the state, very quickly I think you rub up against the raw edges of an absence of common good and so, Northern Ireland became a place where people had to work through that. Because in fairness to those who were in government, at partition and after partition, they believed, for whatever reason, God had intended that Northern Ireland would be Protestant in perpetuity and that it was their right. It also, of course, would be British, essentially an extension

of the old colonies, the old empire that Ireland had left. The Republic of Ireland had left the union, moving into its independence and its republican status. So Northern Ireland saw itself as continuing a tradition of empire, rather than rupturing a tradition and the Catholic community there saw itself, by-and-large, as Irish and really did not like the disruption that came from partition. So that unsteadiness and instability was always there in Northern Ireland, there was always a 'them' and an 'us' and an 'otherness'.

What begins to happen from after the Second World War, with the advent of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), is that we begin to get the distilled thinking of really good minds who are trying to put together a programme for the common good that doesn't pit cohorts of people against each other. We think of all the revolutionary times, such as the French Revolution, the revolutions in Ireland, we think of the world wars where people believed they were pursuing the common good but always it ended with death, dislocation and dysfunction. The first half of the 20th century, from a human dignity point of view, was probably as miserable as it's ever been on this planet with so many dead. In particular, Europe was a graveyard, especially of young men. In this context of loss and horror, you've got these brilliant, extraordinary minds and one has to say, an amalgam of thinking on a way forward, a way to a stable peace. When I look at the four people who were most closely associated with the European Union project, designed essentially to bring peace, and to guarantee peace

and prosperity on a shared basis precisely built on the common good, I see in those four men a straight line back to the *Rerum Novarum* Encyclical of Pope Leo XIII on Capital and Labor (1891).

You can't go much further back than Pope Leo XIII because if you go back to the one before him, he was a disaster for the common good. Pope Pius IX was an imperialist and believed that God wanted the entire world to be run by the Catholic Church, he was both pope and emperor. Pope Pius IX was also the man who lost the Church's empire after a millennium of popes who were emperors. Pope Leo XIII, who succeeded Pope Pius IX, by the time he got to his 37th Encyclical, figured that they weren't getting the Papal States back. I mention the Church because it's true of Christian churches in general and it's true of other religions, they have been such hugely influential conduits in terms of culture, legislation, identity, thinking and philosophy. Here was a very powerful one in Europe, particularly when you get to *Rerum Novarum*. Suddenly there was this ecclesial watershed, which unlike previous papal documents talked positively about rights. Now it was of course nuanced and limited, for Pope Leo XIII was talking about worker's rights over and against Marxism. *Rerum Novarum* was now 50 years down the road from Karl Marx and the workers are banging on the door, they're banging on church doors, they're banging on government doors and they're demanding a new way of looking at the common good because they want to be included in it. The truth of the matter is, other people defined the

common good as essentially the good of the elite. If you read Pope Pius IX, for example, his idea of the common good was that he was basically in charge of everything and everybody obeyed him. Now there arrived a new way of defining the common good, which was about inclusion, and about listening, and about voices that did not want to continue to be oppressed and repressed but wanted to shine in life, wanted their chances in life not to be defined by elites.

When I look at the four men who were so closely associated with the European Union, I see a straight line back to *Rerum Novarum*, because they all come from that Catholic tradition. Then I see the great work of Fr John Ryan in America who picks up on *Rerum Novarum* around 1918/19 and is so hugely influential in an America that has passed out of memory now, the 'Fair Deal America', where what they were talking about was the pursuit of the common good. All of these people had come to America from all over Europe where they had been oppressed and repressed. They're coming to a new country and they are intuitive that there is this thing called 'the Common Good' that they've been deprived of and they want to create it in this new land.

From that of course, we move directly, more or less, after the appalling vista of the two world wars, to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 and I think that is where we begin to get a visualisation of what

the common good means. For the common good to have any meaning, it has to be based on the fundamental acceptance of the human dignity of every human being. Whether you believe in God or not is irrelevant but for people who do, the very idea that those who believe in God would have a hierarchy of rights and would create elites, by the time we get to the latter half of the 20th century that's being challenged right, left and centre. I think the Universal Declaration of Human Rights begins that really dense discussion around the common good. The European Union is designed to be a flagship, really, of the common good and of sharing. Countries that had just battered each other to death and killed each other's young men in their millions, that had paraded their hatreds and their vanities in such an awful way, suddenly now are humbled by it all and by the bloodletting. They welcome and embrace this new language and I think the Universal Declaration of Human Rights gives them that language.

I think we're both a fortunate and an unfortunate generation in some ways. We're a very fortunate generation to have been born after that, so I've grown up with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. I've grown up with the concept of the European Union and I've also grown up with the idea that the Vatican contributed something, probably not as much as is claimed, but it certainly contributed something to the debate. More importantly, not so much the Vatican but I think some of the Encyclicals from the Catholic Church after *Rerum Novarum* were important. There are a number of them

that really did make a big contribution to collective thinking, given that the Catholic Church is present in five continents and at that time had a fair intellectual resource at its call that it doesn't have any more, I regret to say, because it's been silenced. Then there was that intellectual foment. So you had the *Quadragesimo Anno* Encyclical of Pope Pius XI on Reconstruction of the Social Order (1931), an absolutely first-class document. There you can see the common good in the language of rights and again, he's talking about workers but more than that, he's moving it on. You then get to, if not the best encyclical it is the best encyclical of the 20th century, *Pacem in Terris*, the Encyclical of Pope John XXIII on Establishing Universal Peace in Truth, Justice, Charity, and Liberty (1963). He's talking about human rights and he's also talking about women's rights, saying that we can't go on the way we've been; we can't keep doing that because we've excluded so many people. He's talking, of course, from the point of view of someone who believes in God, a Creator God and he's saying that we have to start listening, we have to start moving and opening up and he's about inclusion. Now, I don't think he's a rampant feminist back in the late 1950s, but I do think he's caught the *zeitgeist* and that is about the common good. You can't have it without equality and justice and that means equality for everyone, not just men, not just heterosexuals, not just all of the cohorts that for centuries claimed that space, in that it was theirs and not to share.

Dr Johnston McMaster: Mary, that's a wonderfully broad sweep of

a history of the development of the common good and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. One of the other questions we've been trying to explore in this series is, 'Is the past preventing the future and the common good?'. Now you've touched on a past in our European history, a 20th century past that was quite horrendous and out of it, nevertheless, a common good did seem to emerge, or a vision of a common good. Do you think it's possible nearer home, to deal with our past in a way that enables us to realise something of the common good for our society in Ireland, North and South?

Chancellor Mary McAleese: I think that's a really important area of debate and it's a debate we're in the throes of, in many ways. I look back now at the start of the debate about centenaries, and maybe I have to go back a bit behind that again because we grew up in essentially proselytising communities, which believed that the 'Other side' needed to be evangelised because they were plain wrong. They were wrong about politics; they were wrong about religion. We had a very strong identification with not just evangelism, but really strong proselytism and I think part of that was the way in which we treated history. We ransacked history for ammunition to throw at the 'Other', to keeping othering the 'Other', reasons why that 'Other' wasn't really on the right track, and we needed to put them on the right track, and this was being done both ways of course. The best example probably is the whole story of the First World War and the way in which

it was so forensically but dysfunctionally edited, so that the Irish men of a nationalist tradition who fought in it were edited out by both sides. They were edited out in the North, so that when I was growing up you would've believed that the only people who took part in the First World War were those Protestant unionists who fought in the 36th Ulster Division. South of the border you'd have thought that the only people who fought for anything were those Irish Catholics, nationalists and republicans, who fought in the Rising against the British. So, that whole story of tens of thousands of men from both religions and political perspectives who died in British uniform, was conveniently edited out in order to flatter two stories that kept people apart. It should have been a shared memory, it *could* have been a shared memory, but shared memories were dangerous then, you didn't want to share platforms with people who you wanted to 'other'. God forbid that you would begin to realise that you actually did have a shared history, not a divided one. So I think that beginning to reclaim the true story of the First World War, not to stand and say, 'Yah Boo! A bunch of nationalists also fought in the First World War', but rather to say, 'Hang on a minute, if anybody is worthy of respect, and those who fought in this war are, then they're all worthy of respect'. Who are these 'all'? They're people from all traditions. Each side eventually began to realise that they had to honour all. For example, there was the wonderful campaign that eventually led to the All-Ireland Peace Park in Messines, the Island of Ireland Peace Park that Her Majesty the Queen and I were both involved in opening in 1998. So,

when I look at history, we have ransacked history and we were always in danger of being overwhelmed by the version of history that keeps us apart, because we're always waiting to distrust the 'Other'. We were raised on distrust, dislike, contempt, fear, the fear that my share is going to be taken away by 'them', that 'they've got more than I've got', 'I'm entitled to more than them', all of that kind of language.

In the Republic, in the aftermath of the First World War there were commemorations, quite a lot of commemorations. The Islandbridge Park is an example of that but then they all faded. The wrong, the fake narrative came out of nowhere and suffocated them, so we ended up being told a skewed narrative that kept us apart. I think when we got to the 90th anniversary, we had learned a lot by then, we'd learned an awful lot. So, the Irish Government in its wisdom, wanted to reinstate what had been abandoned, which was the anniversary of 1916. The mood by then had moved on. I think it was driven also by a groundswell of public support, as the public were tired of this binary story of history. We'd already had the Good Friday referendum both North and South, which showed that the vast majority of people really wanted to compromise, wanted friendship and good neighbourliness, wanted a decent outcome to the peace proposal and they were prepared to compromise to get it. I think that that backstop was very important. Then, along comes the Somme anniversary. That particular year was the 90th anniversary of 1916 and the Battle of the Somme, and

so we had the two official commemorations. We had them close together. I think that was really remarkable in terms of the impact it had, it was so strongly supported and was what people wanted. Even the sceptics, I think, were impacted by the realisation that if you soften the language, if you show inclusivity, generosity and caring, more people gather to put their arms around each other than go back into their bunkers to throw bricks at each other. So, I think that's been a great success really, the way in which the centenaries, for the most part, were marked by care around language, around inclusion, and care to make sure that the wells of history wouldn't be disturbed and wouldn't become volcanic and erupt, as they so often do if you send one word in the wrong direction. I think for the future, we've learned a lot from that.

I see the solidarity behind the Good Friday Agreement as being so strong. We still have a problem with loyalist threats and we have had a manifest problem with republican paramilitary fragments, but I don't think either of them are able to get traction. There's not enough space for them to get traction, I think that space is now eaten up, it's gobbled up by the support for the Good Friday Agreement, which is cross-community. If you look, for example, at the growth in the Alliance Party of Northern Ireland, that's really encouraging and led of course by the wonderful Naomi Long MLA. I look at Doug Beattie MLA in the Ulster Unionist Party, great man, absolutely super character. These are people that you can do business with,

people that you can like and respect and differ from, but sure that's grand. We differ, of course we will, but we're not going to lose sight of the human dignity of each other and we're never going to experience from them a lessening of the dignified and respectful way in which they treat members of the community who disagree with them. That's not universally true of representatives in politics, certainly not in Northern Ireland regrettably, but it is truer today than it was in the past.

If you think back to Terence O'Neill's time, he came up the road I lived on at one stage. I lived at the top of the Shankill Road, an extension of the Shankill Road called the Woodvale Road. He was talking at the time about how Ulster was at a crossroads, they were going to have to include the Catholic population and they were going to have to be given what were very modest civil rights. He came to the local Orange Hall, just down the road from where I lived, with this message of inclusion. They threw eggs at him, and these were, what you might say, his 'own people'. So, he had to endure all that in order that eventually 30 years later we would have the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, or to use Seamus Mallon's famous expression, 'Sunningdale for slow learners'. You could also say that Terence O'Neill was the person who inserted into unionist discourse the language of the common good, the language of equality, and the language of sharing. These words were not popular words in an elitist system that was also fundamentally sectarian. They weren't popular because people interpreted

them as being asked to surrender something that meant a lot to them, and that would make them more vulnerable to the big bugbear, which was a united Ireland.

So, I think we're a lucky generation to be part of this onward march of discussion about the common good, to have reference points like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the huge body of human rights treaties that have come on-board since that time. We have that and we have the Good Friday Agreement because again, built into the Good Friday Agreement, the word 'sharing' appears in our discourse, 'parity of esteem', 'shared governance', there it is. If you want a happy future, if you want to be able to walk about your streets and for your kids to go about their business without being afraid of sectarian attacks, or being 'othered', then sharing is key, and it has to be a true and genuine sharing based on parity of esteem. That's the way forward, that *is* the common good, that's what you're pursuing. So, we're lucky, we're part of the generation that is striving towards that. I don't think that it is an even journey, I don't think you can put your foot on the accelerator and maintain a steady state, that's not the way it's been. We only have to look at America for the four years before President Joe Biden to see how push-back happens. We only have to look at parts of Europe today where we see anti-Semitism raising its ugly head again, where we see anti-Islamism, with Islam routinely characterised simply as a religion of terrorism, which is an awful, dysfunctional way to

look at it. So, I think there's an impulse, there's momentum, we're past colonisation, we're past empires, which really are mostly gone now but not all. Still, even in those places where democracy has got a good, strong hold, there are evil impulses, therefore, people who believe in the common good and who work for it have to be prepared to counter, like they did in America during the last election.

Dr Cathy Higgins: Mary, we associate a just future with the common good, but justice can be quite an elusive idea. How do you envision justice and how important, in your view, is justice for building a future society?

Chancellor Mary McAleese: I think Cathy, the language of justice is highly problematic coming out of the Troubles. It's pretty evident that when we've talked about justice it has generally meant, and generally does mean, vindication in some way, where a person who has been victimised is able to go to an official source, where whatever way in which they've been hurt can be vindicated. It could be by a civil action, or it could be by a criminal sanction on the person who victimised them, or the person who killed someone belonging to them. We've seen that's very difficult now in Northern Ireland because there are so many cases that have remained unresolved and are probably likely to remain unresolved. So people are beginning to get their heads around the idea that justice may not mean anymore, at least in certain circumstances, what we've conventionally

thought it to mean, which is generally speaking, arrest, trial and conviction. Take for example, the most recent Ballymurphy case. For some people the coroner's case would be enough justice and for others it won't be. That you had the coroner say after 50 years that the events there should never have happened, that this was an army behaving in a criminal manner and that for those killed, there was no justification for the killings, they were all innocent people. So for some people it would be enough that after 50 years of seeking justice for the dead that that would be said by a coroner, that they would get an apology from a Prime Minister, and for others it wouldn't be. Others would be saying, 'But justice demands that the people who did that, whoever they were, that they should stand trial', and that's where you get into trouble because the chances of people standing trial after this length of time, and in view of difficulties with evidence for example, are getting increasingly remote by the day, by the year, and we saw that with the Bloody Sunday Tribunal.

One of the things that occurs to me about the pursuit of justice is that there's the pursuit of truth, which is one thing, and in many ways reconciliation is postponed for as long as people believe that their truth has not been told and, worse than that, that it has been not just misconstrued but quite deliberately and mischievously told incorrectly. This happened after Bloody Sunday, for example, when you did have a tribunal but it didn't tell the truth. Similarly, after Ballymurphy, you did have the coroner's court but

again the truth wasn't told and so there was a pursuit of truth. At this stage, truth and justice seem to be about the same business, get the truth out and you get justice. However, some will insist that justice has to take you beyond truth because at the end of the day, when you get to the justice part, you mightn't always get the truth. Someone may be found 'Not Guilty' in circumstances where that person manifestly carried out the act but for some reason there's a bit missing from the jigsaw puzzle. It could be in their mind, it could be in the act, it could be in a lack of evidence that you can't make the connection, so here you could get what is called an 'injustice'. We've also had the dreadful phenomenon of miscarriages of justice where people were charged with offences that they did not commit. I was involved in a number of those campaigns for the Guildford Four, the Birmingham Six and the Maguire family for example, because in the heat of the IRA's activity in Britain, with the awful things that they perpetrated and the sediment they stirred up, police forces and evidence became essentially compromised in the pursuit of justice. To try and assuage the public's demand for justice, you ended up with injustice. So we have a lot of experience in these things now, particularly coming out of the Troubles and whilst we have a lot of experience in this, we're by no means through the woods yet.

People talk about a forum for truth and reconciliation and what that would look like, what the shape of it should be. People insist that of the several

thousand murders committed in Northern Ireland that somebody should stand trial, but then you look at the Good Friday Agreement and it says that for any acts that were associated with the Troubles that give rise to, have given rise to, or in the future will give rise to criminal proceedings, nobody can serve more than two years. So, then people talk about amnesty, and whether we should put it all behind us and move on, and there are those who are prepared to move on and there are others who are not. Many people harbour a deep, deep sense of injustice, or of being the victim of injustice and they won't rest until those are righted.

However, I think we're beginning to see that the options are limited. We had 4000 deaths, the vast majority of them of course were the result of Republican/IRA activity and realistically, how many people now are going to be brought to court? Then you look at the Holocaust and how they never give up, and 90-year-olds and 95-year-olds who were associated with the appalling treatment and murder of Jews, the wiping out of Jews, can still be brought to court. Why? To make the point that justice and the pursuit of justice never stops, that it is relentless and you'll never be safe from it. So, there are lots of different perspectives. Some think it's tragic to drag old men who were warders or jailors at *Buchenwald* or *Auschwitz* before tribunals in their 90s, and yet, part of you says 'Well, you know, they had a long life and they got away with it' and we're in a time when maybe people need to be reminded of what a sophisticated country like Germany and

her surrounding neighbours were capable of. We need to be reminded of that in order to make sure that as the same patterns of thinking emerge in our time, that they are confronted and maybe part of the confronting is those trials. So, truth and justice aren't always the same thing and yet, I think they both have an integrity that is worth pursuing, though we might disagree with when you stop, when enough is enough.

Questions for Chancellor Mary McAleese from Participants

Question 1. When do you think we will see the fruition of the common good?

Chancellor Mary McAleese: I don't know. I think elements of the common good have been achieved. I think that the country we have the privilege of living in has a good record in pursuit of the common good. Does it mean that we share everything equally, that everybody in our community is equally looked after? Well, anybody who read the report today on the Travellers in a certain county council will know that that is not true, that there are cohorts that are still excluded. However, I think our instinct is that we pursue the common good and that we're offended when the common good is betrayed, so I think that that is the broad instinct of our country. When will we arrive at a situation when we've achieved the common good and when all share equally? That I don't know because I think we're a way

off it, yet we're on the path to it. I think that's our momentum, that's our vision, that's the vision we have for ourselves. Not all countries have that vision but I think that we do and I don't think that we'll be content until we get there. It's like, back to the Suffragette movement way back when people thought that if you get the vote for women then you've got equality for women, we've learned over the 100 years since, that it was never going to be that easy. You get the vote, then the work starts and little by little you chip away at all the embedded sediment that drags not just women back but drags society down. Perceptions are so loaded with historic baggage that keep women from making the full hundred per cent contribution they could and should make that would allow society to fly on two wings. So we can see even there that we're just chipping away at it bit-by-bit and I'm told that in certain areas it could be 60 years, some say 70, some say 100 years before we achieve full equality for women. So that tells us we're on the journey but we're not there yet, we've a lot to do. Look at LGBTQ+ rights, we've made huge strides, big strides but there are many more strides to be made. We're not there yet, far from it.

Question 2. How can we assuage the current wave of fear and mistrust in Northern Ireland which prevents us from flourishing as a community?

Chancellor Mary McAleese: I think one of the most important things to do at the moment is to remember the Good Friday Agreement, to remember

the referendum that followed it and the huge, overwhelming 'yes-ness' that was on all sides of the community and became manifest. If you remember, the Good Friday Agreement was signed in April and then we had the referendum in May of 1998. It was wonderful, I just remember that day as a day of phenomenal grace being released into the body of politics because now everybody knew what everyone else was thinking, more or less. People who did not share political aspirations because those aspirations were in fact oppositional, were prepared to go journeying together to create this new entity, the new shared government based on parity of esteem and that was their future. That was wonderful but you know what? Within a few months we had August 1998 and we had Omagh, the worst bombing in the history of Northern Ireland happened. If anything was designed to send people back into their bunkers and to end that sense of grace and sharing, bearing in mind that we'd literally just crawled out of them to put our X on the ballot paper to say we're all on this shared journey, then that was it. When along came this evil entity which gave us the Omagh bombing. But it didn't do it. It did not do it. Remember those times when we were tested and challenged.

Yes, it was a generation ago and that's important to remember too. A new generation has to be led to that water; they have to be allowed to drink from that much healthier well than the well I grew up with. That's the true water that will help us to flourish. I think that's been tested many

times since then, not just through Omagh but there have been a number of killings and murders of police officers, of soldiers, of prison officers. These things were designed, each of them, to send us skittering back into our bunkers, to pull the shutters down, to send us back into the binary world again, but it didn't happen, and it hasn't happened. So, I think it's important to remember that. It's also important to remember if when push comes to shove, to think about where you are, where you're at, what you want for the future. Do you want to be dragged back by the past? Do you want whenever there's a political problem to reach for the old playbook of paramilitarism? Do you really want to do that and to open up that Pandora's Box that it took us 30 years to put the lid back on? Do you really want to do that? Or, do you want to do the decent thing and talk things out between people who are equals, to discuss, debate and deliberate and try to work for consensus. That's the way that you'll guarantee your own children a decent future. Reaching for the old paramilitary playbook, that's the way that they could be the victim of the next tit-for-tat killing because that's the way Northern Ireland worked in the days when the old paramilitary playbooks were the story in town. They've been persuaded to put those playbooks away, they belong to another era, a different time, so I think it's important to remind people of what was sacrificed to get those playbooks off the agenda. There's a whole new playbook, it's the Good Friday Agreement, it's a wonderful document and sometimes I think, have we forgotten? Do we read it enough? Do we know it enough?

Question 3. What are your views on the impact of children being educated in separate systems? Do you think it's time now to educate children together?

Chancellor Mary McAleese: My views on that are difficult enough to explain. One of the problems in Northern Ireland is the fact that children are educated apart, and I don't think that it's good to educate people apart. I think that there is great value in ensuring that children are within each other's orbit. Whether it's in the playground, whether it's in the street, whether it's in the school, whether it's in different schools but on the same campus, whatever way you do it, I think it's important that they're in each other's orbit. I always regard myself as really, really fortunate, I grew up in a Protestant community. I grew up in Ardoyne, which most people characterised as a nationalist, even republican ghetto. I didn't live in that part of Ardoyne, I always lived on the Protestant side of Ardoyne; so, I grew up with Protestant friends who are still life-long friends. That was important because you couldn't be swamped by the vanity of being told about the 'Other', and what that 'Other' is, or how it should be feared, when that's the person you went to the park with, and that's the person you got an ice-cream with, or in our case, the people you went on holiday with.

Here's the problem, Northern Ireland has become a very, very ghettoised society. Over 90% of people live in areas that are hallmarked by religious identity, and that's your basic, fundamental problem that comes out of a

fear of each other. That could change in a generation because if you look at the history, even of the area that I grew up in, when things were quiet, people wanted to live together. I lived in Ardoyne, so you had the Crumlin Road and the Shankill Road coming up almost in parallel to an apex and on those little streets Catholics were regarded on one side and Protestants on the other. You've got a big peace-line up them now, a peace wall which is a very attractive wall but it's there for unattractive reasons, with Catholics and Protestants on either side. The truth of the matter is that really, going right back into the 19th century, there were regular pogroms and people scattered to live in ghettos out of fear then, when the fear subsided and they became less cautious and more trusting, people started to move back across the road and mix those areas. When the Troubles came everybody scattered again. So the scattering is really the fundamental problem, that's based on fear. I think what is needed is a period of good governance in Northern Ireland, stable and settled governance that embraces the Good Friday Agreement wholeheartedly. If people were able to talk generously about parity of esteem and not express fear of the Trojan horse of a united Ireland on the one side, or wave the flag of Republicanism on the other, but speak instead out of a deep sense of both communities, there's a generation that would learn to live beside one another as we once did. They would learn to live beside each other in a cultural parity of esteem and equality. I think that would then create the sub-structure that would allow children to be educated in each other's orbit. In many ways, for me it is really important

what children are taught, and that can be on the street, in their home, it can be in their community, and while those communities are divided and the schools also divided, then they're all a part of the one problem. I don't think you can address it in a piecemeal fashion, I don't think you can say that integrated education will solve the problem. I wish it could, but I don't think it would without addressing all of those other strata that also need to be smoothed out, and that at the moment are still very rough and still sectarianised, unfortunately.

** This conversation with Chancellor Mary McAleese took place on 24 May 2021.*

Is There A Common Good?

Is the Past Preventing the Future and the Common Good?

To mark its 50th anniversary in 2020, the Trust of the Steering Committee of the Irish School of Ecumenics, Trinity College Dublin, decided to fund and support the development of an education and research project for Northern Ireland and the Border Counties exploring the question: Is there a Common Good? This book revisits a series of civic conversations that took place over zoom from February to May 2021, which launched the project. The contributors to this book explored the question of a common good from diverse areas of expertise, shedding light on how past actions and perspectives continue to impact on the future. Significant turning points in Irish history from Partition, to the Troubles, to the signing of the Good Friday / Belfast Agreement (1998) and Brexit provide contexts for exploring what a common good future might look like. Individuals and institutions come under scrutiny in the search for clues on common good leadership and practice.

Our civic conversation series affirmed that the common good and the future of community was too serious to be left solely to politicians. There is something positive about conversations not becoming stuck in the past, but exhibiting, instead, a willingness to talk about what a future common good society might look like. The hope is that this book will enable and resource those all-important civic conversations.

Cathy Higgins is the director of the education and research project and Kirstie Wright is the project administrator.

IRISH SCHOOL OF ECUMENICS