

Breaking Down The Enmity

Enmity and Peace - 9th January, 1985

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'For he himself is our peace...He has made the two one, and in his own body of flesh and blood has broken down the enmity which stood like a dividing wall between them' (Eph 2:14, NEB)

INTRODUCTION

In the first section of this document we look at what we believe to be two aspects of God's judgement on our situation: fear and enmity, and how they lead to a vicious circle of conflict. In the second section we look at the Scriptures and what they have to say about fear and enmity, before considering in greater depth how they fit into the whole biblical story of God's covenant, sin, forgiveness and the Kingdom.

In the third, in the light of the actual situation in Northern Ireland and also of the Scriptures, we turn to the Churches and discuss what their role should be.

In the fourth and fifth sections we consider the relationship of faith to politics and what criteria can be applied from our faith to the actual political situation in Ireland.

Finally we turn in the sixth section to what we see as political realities in the Northern conflict. This section has a different status from the rest of the document. We claim it to be no more than the personal thinking of a group of Protestants and Catholics from North and South, based, we would hope, on some of the reflections in the earlier part of the document. But we do not claim these are the only conclusions which may emerge from a reflection on faith and politics in an Irish context. It is perfectly possible for people who have agreed with us until section five to reach different conclusions to us in section six.

We encourage you, the reader, to do your own thinking and to reach your own conclusions in the light of a reflection on faith and politics in the Irish situation.

We invite Churches, study groups and individuals to respond to our document by asking themselves can they accept the text as it stands or, failing that, suggest alternative ways in which the links between faith and politics might be made more appropriately.

We dedicate this document to the memory of Ernest Gallagher who was the first chairman of the group and who died in February 1984. We give thanks to God for his life and witness.

1 FEAR, ENMITY AND CONFLICT

In this section we look at what we believe to be two aspects of God's judgement on our situation in Northern Ireland: fear and enmity and how they lead to a vicious circle of conflict.

Idolatry and Judgement in Politics

It is our belief that the conflict in Northern Ireland is in part a judgement of God on the failure of Christians in Northern Ireland, Britain and the Republic to witness to the indiscriminate love of God, the God who has no favourites: 'Your heavenly Father makes his sun to rise on the good and bad alike, and sends the rain on the honest and dishonest' (Mt 5:43). By this we do not mean some arbitrary action on God's part, but that the conflict is something we in these islands have brought on ourselves: by the ways in which we have practised injustice in politics; by putting our commitment to political identities before our commitment to respect all groups in society; by forgetting who we are - people called to live in peace, respect, and forgiveness with all other men and women. This is what the Bible means by judgement. In short, the conflict is a judgement we have brought on ourselves by

worshipping the false God of sectarian interests and not the God who is revealed in Jesus Christ.

FEAR

In Northern Ireland, Britain and the Republic the conflict has aroused real fears and resentments. In this section we now attempt to summarise these. The list is necessarily a generalized one (there will be some in each group who will not share all of these fears) and is based on our own collective observations, indeed on a looking into our own hearts. We believe that unless these fears and resentments are understood and taken seriously no progress will be made.

Fears and Resentments: Northern Protestant/Unionists

From the Protestant/unionist perspective there are four major strands: religious, political, cultural, and economic. The emphasis varies from person to person, but all four are important.

a) Religious Fears: Many Protestant/Unionists fear the Roman Catholic Church. They see it as a basically authoritarian institution and feel that if it represented majority opinion it would seek to impose its ethos and values on the whole of society. Those who see the Church in this way interpret a number of factors as evidence supporting their fear: viz. the laws on divorce and contraception and the successive abortion referenda in the Republic; the pressure applied to couples in mixed marriages to bring their children up as Roman Catholics; the Church's desire to retain control of schools and what they see as the general power of the Roman Catholic clergy in social life. Vatican II is seen as a cosmetic exercise and many Protestants fear that instead of an open-ended encounter and search for truth the real aim of Roman Catholics who engage in ecumenical dialogue is to absorb Protestantism. Many of them believe it would be impossible for Protestant values and ideals to thrive in the atmosphere that they perceive in the Republic.

b) Political Fears: Politically the Protestant/unionist group want Northern Ireland to remain united to Britain. They fear for their lives because so many of them - especially in Border areas and in the security forces - have been killed by Republican paramilitaries. Many tend to regard all Nationalist/Roman Catholics as supporters of a United Ireland and therefore seeking the abolition of Northern Ireland. They also see them as - at the very least - ambivalent about the use of violence to attain this aim. They interpret the support of large numbers of people for Sinn Fein as evidence to support this. Many see the Republic of Ireland as a foreign country which is committed to taking over Northern Ireland, and although its leaders abjure violence many feel the Irish Government relies on the violent campaign of the IRA and the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA) to further the aim of a United Ireland. Many want the return of majority rule and resent British refusal to grant this. They also fear that any move towards power-sharing would ultimately lead to a united Ireland.

Many Protestant/Unionists have ambivalent feelings about Britain. They are proud to call themselves British and identify with British symbols such as the monarchy, flag, and national anthem. They are aware that they depend on Britain for military and economic support. At the same time they fear that Britain might withdraw from Northern Ireland in a precipitate way when it suits them. (This fear varies in strength according to the attitude of different British administrations). Being dependent on Britain many of them feel the British people look down on them and they are resentful because of this.

c) Cultural Fears: Because they feel under threat from Republican paramilitaries and the Irish Republic, many Protestant/Unionists have rejected what they see as the trappings of Irish nationalism: the Irish language, Gaelic games and, in many cases, any attempt to learn Irish history. They see these as symbols of an ideology whose aim is to annihilate their group

and they fear them as such. Despite the resentment many of them feel towards Britain their fear of Irish nationalism is greater and so they have developed very strong feelings of attachment to what they see as British values and a British way of life. Cultural and religious fears are intertwined because of the perceived role of the Roman Catholic Church in education.

d) Economic Fears: Protestant/Unionists have no confidence that Northern Ireland could prosper in an all-Ireland structure. The general level of welfare benefits and ultimately the opportunity to rebuild the economy are felt to be much stronger within the framework of the United Kingdom.

The above fears can be summed up by saying that Protestant/Unionists tend to fear that many Nationalist/Catholics are determined to undermine the State in Northern Ireland, to deprive them of their British citizenship, religious freedom and economic security, or else to drive them out of their own country at gunpoint.

Fears and Resentments: Northern Catholic/Nationalists

These will be listed under the same four headings we used for the Protestant/unionist group: religion, politics, culture and economics.

a) Religious Fears: Some Catholic/Nationalists fear that the influence of the Roman Catholic Church could be undermined not only by Protestants or British Government policy but by liberals within the Roman Catholic Church itself. There is also at times a fear that the Church could lose control of Catholic schools and that the present position in regard to mixed marriages, where most children are brought up as Catholics, will be gradually undermined. Many see the Catholic Church within Northern Ireland as the one major institution with which they identify and which has also been able to hold the Catholic/nationalist community together. Any action that is perceived as undermining the Church is seen, therefore, by many as an attack on the Catholic community as a whole. However the fears of the Catholic/nationalist group in relation to religion do not seem as strong as Protestant religious fears. Further, these fears are likely to be stronger among clergy than laity.

b) Political Fears: Many Nationalists resent the fact that the symbols of the state in Northern Ireland, such as the flag and national anthem, are those with which Unionists identify and that the nationalist identity is ignored. Many also feel the same way about the names of towns and estates and about Orange marches through Catholic areas.

Constitutional Nationalists resent what they see as the lack of opportunity to take part in government in Northern Ireland except on a majority rule basis. Many constitutional Nationalists, and nearly all who support violence, resent the existence of Northern Ireland as a whole and say they want a United Ireland.

The security forces, especially in poorer areas, are often regarded as representing the Protestant/unionist community and are hated as such. The use of plastic bullets and what is seen as the lack of police accountability are also resented by many. Many parents fear their children will be caught up in violence either through what they see as harassment by the security forces, or through being attracted by the IRA or INLA. However, a lot of Nationalists will co-operate with the security forces to an extent, especially in relation to non-paramilitary crime.

Courts are often seen by Nationalists as being biased in favour of Protestant/Unionists especially in relation to paramilitary crime. Supergrass trials and long periods of remand are seen as evidence of British injustice.

Underlying these resentments is a basic lack of hope among many Nationalists that the political situation will ever change and that they will ever gain what they see as justice. Many feel that the British will to establish justice is lacking, and, although at times many of them look to the Irish Republic for support, there is a feeling that the Government in the South has abandoned them and will not take any serious responsibility for their plight.

c) *Cultural Fears*: In some areas of Northern Ireland the use by the British army of GAA playing fields as bases is interpreted as a general attack on Irish culture; so also is the attitude of many in the Protestant/unionist community towards the Irish language and Gaelic sport. These are part of a general fear that the cultural identity of Nationalists will not be recognized.

d) *Economic Fears*: Nationalists resent the fact that unemployment is higher in Catholic than Protestant areas and they interpret this as being due to discrimination.

Fears and Resentments: Protestants in the Republic

Many Protestants in the Republic have integrated into society and the fears that have created ghettos in the North are much less evident. Thus Protestants are living in all areas of Dublin. There is little fear among Protestants of worshipping in Roman Catholic churches. However, the closeness of the two communities, especially among the young, has resulted in an increasing number of mixed marriages. Because of the Roman Catholic regulations regarding the children of such marriages there are fears that these marriages will lead to a decline in Protestant numbers.

Protestants do not seem to be worried by the attitude of the State except about the availability of divorce and contraception and - in some cases - of abortion.

Most Protestants seem to be happy to continue living in the Republic in the areas where they now reside.

Fears and Resentments: Roman Catholics in the Republic

Roman Catholics in the Republic fear that the Northern conflict will spread to the Republic and lead to a similar disruption of life and the institutions of the State as has occurred in Northern Ireland. This relates to a second fear: that Britain will withdraw from Northern Ireland in a precipitate and unplanned way and that this will inevitably mean a greater involvement of the Republic in the conflict.

Within the Republic, one group of Catholics fears the development of a secular pluralist society in which religion will be devalued and in which traditional Catholic morality will be undermined by the availability of divorce, contraception and abortion. The influence of the Catholic Church in the area of public morals could become minimal. These 'conservative' Catholics fear both Protestants and 'liberal' Catholics whom they see as working for these goals.

'Liberal' Catholics in fact see themselves as working for a pluralist society and they fear the power of the Church will be great enough to block this. They do not fear Protestants within the Republic and in fact would prefer if these were more vocal in demanding their rights.

A third group, which again would be mostly Catholic, fears a decline of Irish culture, generally, in the face of Anglo-American values. They are afraid that their language, music, dancing, and literature will all be affected by this, and that the people in the Republic will become West Britons.

Finally, a fourth and increasingly significant group fears that the Republic will lose its neutrality and that a deal will be made with NATO in return for some moves on the Northern problem.

Fears and Resentments: the British

There are fears that the violence may spill over from Northern Ireland to Britain, especially to Liverpool, Glasgow and to other places with considerable Irish immigrant populations. There is a marked reluctance to visit Northern Ireland and a lesser unwillingness to visit the Republic. Some relatives fear for the safety of members of their families in the armed forces or civil service who have been posted to Northern Ireland. There is a general unwillingness to think about and discuss Northern Ireland or to get involved in Irish matters. These are the fears of people who see themselves as living at one remove from the conflict.

Commentary

The fears and resentments of the different groups in the conflict are not symmetrical; for example, Protestant religious fears in Northern Ireland are greater than those of Catholics. Also the depth and objectivity of fears varies. Protestants living near the Border have very real reason to fear for their lives especially if they are in the security forces. The fears of people living in Britain and the Republic are much less intense than those of either of the two groups within Northern Ireland.

Secondly, in describing Catholic/nationalist attitudes the word 'resentment' is often a more accurate description than 'fear'. This reflects a difference between the two groups: the Protestant/unionist community has been the dominant group in Northern Ireland. Since 1969 its power has been reduced and it fears that its remaining influence and even existence as a community will disappear under the pressure of republican paramilitaries and the Dublin Government.

Catholic/Nationalists claim to want a United Ireland but on the other hand see themselves as the oppressed minority. Arguably they have less fear of losing power or status but feel more resentment at their failure to win what they would regard as a satisfactory recognition of their political, religious and cultural identity.

Thirdly, all the groups in the conflict have a degree of ambivalence: Protestant/Unionists want to remain in the United Kingdom, but resent Britain; Catholic/Nationalists claim to want a United Ireland but feel distant psychologically from the Republic; people in the Republic also claim to want a United Ireland but fear many aspects of Northern Irish society; the British Government is committed to remain in Northern Ireland as long as the majority there want this, but many British people regard all Irish, North and South, Protestant and Catholic, as foreigners.

Fourthly, the fears and resentments of the different groups often tend to reinforce each other. Thus the Roman Catholic Church's fear that any further change in the mixed marriage laws will lead to a weakening of the whole Church is seen by many Protestants as religious imperialism designed to overthrow Protestant religion and values. Similarly, Protestant fears that power-sharing in any form will ultimately lead to a United Ireland fuels the belief of many Nationalists that their identity will never be recognised in political structures in Northern Ireland.

Enmity

The second aspect of the conflict that we believe shows God's judgement on our situation is the enmity that exists between groups. This is most obvious in the thousands of violent deaths that have taken place, in the bitterness that exists within each community, and in the segregation - almost complete - that has grown between them.

Many in the Roman Catholic/nationalist community hate the security forces whom they see as a symbol of oppression. Many in the Protestant/unionist community feel bitter towards all Catholics because they see them as supporters of the IRA whom they believe are intent on wiping out Protestants.

There is a sense of almost tribal enmity in the Northern Ireland situation, including its politics. This enmity has been inherited from the past and is implacably continued in the present. We seem to have learnt to love only the members of our own community, and to hate those who threaten that community's identity. The commemorative marches and other events that mark the life of both our communities are ways we maintain one community's identity and exclude the other. We have a negative 'cult of the ancestors' in Northern Ireland life, an endless commemorative round which ensures that the enmity continues between the two communities.

There is also the ancient enmity between Ireland and England which continues to fuel the Republican tradition and to colour attitudes in both countries.

The Vicious Circle of Conflict

These fears and resentments lead to a vicious circle of conflict in which the actions and behaviours of one set of participants reinforce the actions and behaviours of the others, and the conflict keeps going. Each side sees itself in the right and the other in the wrong.

Nationalists say that Unionists are intransigent because they refuse to share power. Unionists say that Nationalists have never supported the Northern Irish State. Nationalists feel that if only Protestants would accept a United Ireland all would be well. Protestants feel that if only Catholics would accept the existence of the Northern Ireland State all would be well.

The Provisional IRA say: 'If only the British would go, all would be well'. The British feel that they are not the problem; it is the Northern Irish who are at fault, both Nationalists and Unionists, and until they stop killing each other and come to some agreement there is nothing they can do except hold the ring.

The Republic blames the British for using their power to support the Unionists in their refusal to accept a United Ireland. If only that power were withdrawn then the Unionists would come to some agreement.

The other party is always the 'guilty' party, the obstacle to progress and therefore we, who are the 'just', the 'innocent' party, cannot do anything at all. Because we do not have to do anything, life in one way is very safe. At least everyone knows the rules. Yet at the same time we are building a prison together in Northern Ireland.

We turn now to Scripture, as it is from Scripture that the Christian community has obtained its self-understanding and its guidance on the issues that have faced it in many different circumstances down the centuries. We look, particularly, at how the themes of fear, enmity, and conflict are treated.

2 THE SCRIPTURES, CONFLICT AND RECONCILIATION

The Covenant and God's Community

The Old Testament is the story of God's Covenant with his people, a Covenant in which he freely and graciously calls the people of Israel to be his People, frees them from oppression in Egypt, brings them to a new land flowing with milk and honey, and promises that he will always remain faithful to them.

The people, for their part, are asked to respond faithfully, and the gift of the law, which commands them to love God and their neighbour, is to be a new pattern for their life.

The people's failure to do this results in their alienation from God and the experience of being under threat of destruction. But God's love is so great that he will not break his Covenant.

Injustice and Idolatry

His anger is directed principally at two things: worshipping false gods and oppression of neighbours. On idolatry we read:

'My people chose kings, but they did it on their own. They appointed leaders, but without my approval. They took their silver and gold and made idols for their own destruction. I hate the gold bull worshipped by the people of the city of Samaria. I am furious with them. How long will it be before they give up their idolatry?' (Hos 11:8).

And on social injustice:

'You people hate anyone who challenges injustice and speaks the whole truth in court. You have oppressed the poor and robbed them of their grain. You persecute good men, take bribes and prevent the poor from getting justice in courts. And so, keeping quiet in evil times is the clever thing to do' (Amos 5:10-13).

Idolatry breaks the relationship between God and his people. Injustice is a denial that God has called his people as one people whose identity and unity are based on the fact that he has chosen them. Through their practice of injustice the people come into conflict with each other. They bring judgement on themselves and ultimately destruction.

The people are called to repent, to turn away from their sins and idols and to seek forgiveness in a restored community. They are asked to recognize again who they are: that they are a people chosen by God and that they have a responsibility for every person through the Covenant Community.

The call to be part of the Covenant Community is never addressed to the individual in isolation but only to the group as a whole: to Abraham and his descendants (Gen 15); to Moses and the whole people of Israel (Ex 19:1); to Noah and all creation (Gen 9). That is why social injustice is so offensive to God and that is why when the people are called to repent they are called to enter into a new relationship not only with God but with all the community. There is a close relationship between idolatry and social injustice. The latter makes all worship false because the worship is being offered not on behalf of the whole community but only on behalf of a section of it. To meet God in true worship, in other words, is to enter into a new relationship with all our brothers and sisters.

The New Covenant and God's Kingdom

In the New Testament the proclamation of the Kingdom by Christ is closely related to the Old Testament theme of the Covenant. But here there is a new emphasis on universality: Christ emphasizes the Kingdom is not just for Israel but for many 'who will come from East and West' (Mt 8:11).

The Kingdom also reveals God's action in a new way. Now in God, revealed in his Son, a new power is available to people to respond to God's call, a power that often seemed to be lacking in the Old Testament and that seems only to burst out in the Resurrection Community of early Christians.

Central to the call of the Kingdom is the invitation to conversion, to admit one's sins, to turn away from them, to find forgiveness and to become part of the community of the Kingdom. Finding and showing forgiveness are marks of the Kingdom: 'Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us'.

Not only is the proclamation of the Kingdom an invitation to all to enter into a true community but the community has as its source and object the newly revealed community of the Trinity. The New People are called to live as a People united with the three persons of the Blessed Trinity.

As in the Old Testament the principal blocks to the Kingdom are false religion and social injustice. The attitudes of the Scribes and Pharisees are castigated because they practise both and fail to repent. Through Christ's identification with tax collectors, sinners and outcasts they accepted his call and repented and he then made them the chief symbols of the new community.

The Kingdom

The Kingdom, then, is not just a spiritual reality confined to the next life, but a call to a new concrete set of relations in this world, a set of relations that must include all who are Christ's brothers and sisters (Mt 25). Jesus, in line with the prophets, brought a whole new vision of love and justice to bear on the injustices inherent in the society of his day, a vision that liberated the poor and oppressed, and gave them a whole new dignity.

His questioning of the laws of ritual purity, with their emphasis on externals rather than on the attitudes of the heart, and his cleansing of the Temple were motivated by a concern for truth and justice. He also wanted to show love for deprived people and outcasts, to promote his Father's Glory and to see his will reflected amongst people. In the end Jesus was eliminated because his life and teachings embodied justice, truth, and love in such a way that he challenged the foundations of Jewish religious and political structures.

He forced people to consider whether he represented real authority. Jewish leaders conspired to have him crucified rather than recognize his authority as God-given.

In the Kingdom fear, enmity and domination are overturned.

Fear is overcome because perfect love casts out fear (1 Jn 4:18). People who have truly repented have entered into a new community in which they can fear nothing because, with the community, they trust God. This theme appears in the Old Testament in many of the Psalms where it is described as the 'fear of God' - a deep sense of dependence on and trust in God who is faithful and full of merciful love. This trust will be there always in the God-fearing person: 'In the valley of death I fear no evil for you are near' (Ps 23:4). Jesus himself faced the fear of death in Gesthsemane and overcame it by trusting in his Father: 'not my will but yours be done' (Mk 14:36).

Enmity also is overcome in the Kingdom. In the Old Testament, paralleling the frequent interpretation of the Covenant as a call only to the people of Israel, there are frequent places where God is called on for vengeance against enemies:

'In thy steadfast love cut off my enemies, and destroy all of my adversaries for I am thy servant' (Ps 143:12).

In the New Testament, however, Christ's emphasis on the universal aspect of the Kingdom leads to a deeper understanding of who the people are called to love and respect. The story of the Good Samaritan is relevant to the Jews precisely because the Samaritans were their enemies. Christ calls us to love our enemies and 'do good to those that hate you' (Mt 5:43).

'Why should God reward you if you love only the people who love you? Even the tax collectors do that... You must be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect' (Mt 5:46 ff).

Domination gives way to service in the Kingdom. If the Covenant was the Old Testament sign of God's love then the Kingdom is the New Testament expression of God's reign, and his reign is one of love and of service. No longer are the people of Israel told to conquer other peoples; now they are called to serve. The Scribes and Pharisees are criticized for lording it over the people, for doing everything so that people will see them, for loving the best places at feasts and synagogues. But the disciples are told that the 'greatest one among you must be your servant' (Mt 23:11), like the Lord himself 'who is among you as one who serves' (Lk 22:27).

The greatest revelation of the new way in which fear, enmity and domination are transcended is on the Cross: the fear of pain, of humiliation, of evil, of death, of annihilation is overcome in trust: 'Father into thy hands I commit my spirit' (Lk 23:46).

The enmity and conflict between God and us is overcome through Christ's loving solidarity with us as he prays: 'Father, forgive them for they know not what they do' (Lk 23:34). And this prayer is offered 'while we were still sinners' (Roms 5:5).

The defeat of the Cross, the apparent victory of Christ's enemies, is in fact the triumph of love, the overpowering of the forces of evil, and the redemption of the world: 'It is finished' (Jn 19:30).

The Kingdom, then, is a call addressed to all men and women to turn away from sin, idolatry and injustice and to enter into a new Covenant relationship with the One God who is Three Persons, in which fear, enmity and domination will be overturned.

The people of God - the Church - receive a particular calling to witness to the Kingdom, not only by what they say but also by what they do. They are called to be a sign of the Kingdom, to live as a Risen People, united to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and thereby united also to each other. Their task is to show to the world the Good News that Christ is Risen and through encounter with the world to be caught up in Christ's work of revealing his Kingdom to every class and creed.

3 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE IRISH CHURCHES

In our study we have looked at two factors in Northern Ireland which we believe are of crucial importance: the fears, especially the fear of domination, of the different groups in the

conflict and the enmity, real and bitter, that exists between them. We then saw how this fear and enmity lead to a cycle of conflict that tends to repeat itself continuously.

In our section on the Scriptures we saw that two central themes of both the Old and New Testament are idolatry and social injustice, and that they are closely linked because they both contradict God's call to his people to enter into a new relationship with him and with each other. We also saw that the proclamation of the Kingdom in the New Testament meant a new emphasis on God's universal love and also that in Christ, especially on the Cross, fear, enmity and domination are overturned.

In this section we want to address ourselves to the question: what are the implications of all this for the Churches in Ireland?

A Task for the Churches: to be the Kingdom Community

The Churches' greatest political task in Ireland and its greatest service to society is to be the Church, the Kingdom community of justice, peace and service. 'The Church must be a sample of the kind of humanity within which, for example, economic and social differences are surmounted. Only then will she have anything to say to the society that surrounds her about how those differences must be dealt with'.

Over-Identification

Roman Catholicism in Ireland has been over-identified with what many Protestants have seen as an exclusivist Gaelic-nationalist culture. Northern Irish Protestantism has been over-identified with the unionist ascendancy in Northern Ireland and with the Orange Order. We need, with God's Grace, to find ways of releasing ourselves from these captivities for the sake of the Gospel so that our Churches achieve a more healthy relationship with their own community and with the whole of society. A Church's concern should be with the whole of society, not just the part of it with which it is, by reason of history, culture, etc., more closely associated - for God is concerned with all.

Reconciliation in the Churches

The Churches' task is to be the sign of the Kingdom and of God's desire for reconciliation. When we fail to do this our failure is serious because it contradicts our mission: how can we, called to reflect the Kingdom and yet divided as we are, call on politicians to work together for peace and justice? Our disunity makes a mockery of our mission. It contradicts the universality of Christ's love. It makes our condemnations of violence sound hollow. Our disunity undermines our mission. But not only that: to the extent that we do not seek to recover our unity our prayers are false and our worship blasphemous. How can our prayer or our worship be pleasing to Our Lord when he has asked us: if our brother or sister has anything against us - not if we have anything against them - to leave our gifts on the altar, be reconciled with them and then come back and offer our gift?

In order for us to be credible in the Churches we need:

- to acknowledge that both sides were to blame for the disagreements which have resulted in and have perpetuated the separation of many Christian communities;
- to eliminate those words, judgements and actions which do not respond to the condition of other Churches with truth, fairness and love;
- to dialogue more intensively on theology and doctrine in a way that would identify common ground and disentangle those issues which are truly theological and doctrinal from those that are social and cultural;
- to follow up social consequences of theological and doctrinal differences and to attempt to ease some of them;
- to worship together;
- to co-operate on projects for the common good.

Differences will remain between our Churches which are deeply rooted and important but what is vital for Christian credibility is that enmity and fear are taken out of these differences, and that they are contained in a relationship of love and respect.

Ecumenical Co-operation

An immense amount of ecumenical work has already been done in very difficult circumstances in Northern Ireland. At an official level the Irish Council of Churches and the Irish Commission for Justice and Peace have worked together on questions of peace education and social justice. The regular meetings of Church leaders have been an opportunity for those in authority to get to know each other. The Irish Interchurch Meeting has also been a very worthwhile venture. It is important not to underestimate the importance of such efforts at coming together in a divided society.

There are a multitude of unofficial ecumenical groups in Northern Ireland. Some of these have formed communities such as Cornerstone and the Columbanus Community. Others are involved in prayer groups. Some, like the Irish Association have approached the question of political identity, and the Irish Theological Association has also held seminars in this area. The Irish School of Ecumenics has been conducting research and teaching in the field of reconciliation since 1970. Corrymeela existed before the present phase of the conflict and has sought to bring many different conflicting groups together, as also has the Glencree Centre for Reconciliation. Protestant And Catholic Encounter (PACE), the Women's Day of Prayer, the Church Unity Octave, the Society of Friends, Pax Christi, Columba House, the Christian Renewal Centre and the annual conferences at Glenstal and Greenhills have all helped to develop contacts across the religious divide.

This is a very incomplete list but it is nonetheless impressive. However, the combined impact of these groups has not built a society of peace and justice in Northern Ireland. Nor could it, because the task of these groups is to be a pathfinder, to sow seeds, to lay foundations and to provide a framework for individuals and small groups to work together. As such, their work is important and will be necessary long after any political settlement has been achieved.

Non-Violence

Christ did not try to bring about change in society by violence. He proclaimed the transforming power of God's Spirit as a new possibility for all. Both Simon the Zealot, who supported armed combat against the Romans, and Matthew the tax collector, who collaborated with the Romans, answered his call to follow him. Christ taught us to deal with violence by responding unexpectedly in a variety of ways which could challenge people to question their own actions, e.g. 'if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles' (Mt 5:41). It is, then, particularly appropriate for those of us who wish to follow him ourselves to bear witness to the possibilities for human reconciliation that are contained in non-violent action. Condemnations of violence have done little to change the behaviour of those involved in it. Many of these would argue that there is no alternative means to redress the injustice they suffer. If we are to follow Christ we have a special calling to make known ways in which non-violent actions have led to justice.

The cycle of violence cannot be broken by talking down to people, but if a real dialogue can be initiated then people can become open to the Spirit. An example of such dialogue is given in John's Gospel (Ch 4) where Jesus meets the woman at the well. He raises the moral question of her living with a man who is not her husband, but when she moves on to the question of where people should worship he goes with her and thereby leads her to the revelation that he is the Messiah. This discovery changes her life for she returns to give witness to him in her village and others come to believe. If Jesus had simply condemned her moral behaviour she would not have changed.

It is essential then to register the pain of those involved in violence whether physical or institutional, to avoid stirring up feelings of revenge, and to avoid imposing on others

oppression we ourselves have experienced. If we in the Churches are to be credible in the work of reconciliation we must empathize with the suffering of those who are violent as well as with their victims, without condoning violent actions. So instead of merely condemning violence we need to understand its sources, to identify the mechanisms by which it operates and to recognize the changes necessary in us all if right relationships are to be established.

Taking the First Step

It is only if each Church becomes aware that it needs to be changed and is willing to take the first step towards reconciliation that other Churches and communities will be enabled to change. Asking other Churches and communities to change first merely ensures that conflict continues.

Practical Steps

What practical steps could be taken by the Churches in Ireland and Britain in order that they might better fulfil their calling to reflect God's Kingdom? We cannot answer this question in detail but we would suggest the following as areas the Churches might seriously consider:

The depth of ecumenical commitment: How much time, energy and resources do any of the Churches in Ireland and Britain spend on ecumenical exploration in comparison with time spent on worship, social action, education and pastoral visitation? To what extent are we in the Churches anxiously trying to defend an exclusive faith, rather than allowing ourselves be caught up by Christ in his mission of reconciliation to people in every class, nation and culture?

Exclusivity: How seriously do any of the Churches in Ireland and Britain take the values and interests of other Churches? Are Protestants who are 'born again' open to the possibility of the Holy Spirit working through Roman Catholics? Do Roman Catholics place too much stress on the 'One, True Church', a phrase that appears nowhere in Vatican II in reference to their Church? How much emphasis is there in preaching and catechesis on the changes in the way the Roman Catholic Church views other Christian communities since Vatican II?

Mixed marriages: Can the Roman Catholic Church, given the seriousness of inter-Church divisions in Ireland, interpret its laws with even greater flexibility? For example, could permission to marry in Protestant Churches not be given far more easily as a means of helping reconciliation? Could all Churches not work harder at respecting the genuine difficulties that different Churches have on this question, and try harder to respect the good intentions of others even where painful differences remain; and realize that many of the differences over mixed marriages spring from deeper disagreements about the nature of the Church?

History: Could all Churches in Northern Ireland, Britain and the Republic work together in the task of developing a common understanding of their history and, in so doing, seek through prayer and dialogue a healing of the memories that cause so much bitterness?

Accepting other Churches' self-understanding: Could members of all the Churches decide to end the practice of imputing to other Churches beliefs they may not hold so that, for example, Roman Catholics will be allowed to explain what they believe about the Eucharist and Presbyterians be allowed to explain what they understand by the Westminster Confession?

The deprived: Given Christ's concern with deprived people, the time he spent with them, and the increasing political awareness of less well-off people in Ireland, Northern Ireland, and Britain, could all the Churches ask to what extent they contribute to a paternalistic attitude towards deprived people, and also how much influence those who are marginalised have over Church attitudes and actions?

Political over-identification: Could each Church ask itself to what extent it is over-identified with one particular community in society? In this regard could Protestants in Northern Ireland ask to what extent they make the Union with Britain an absolute priority and how much have

they accepted in practice that there will never be peace as long as either one of the two traditions within Northern Ireland tries to dominate the other?

Protestant Churches could profitably ask themselves certain questions, for example: should flags fly in or near church buildings? What should their association be with army regiments? What should their relationship be with the Orange Order and what should be their attitude to alleged abuses of human rights by the security forces?

Could Roman Catholics in Northern Ireland ask how much they are still ambiguous about the use of violence to attain political ends? Do they stress the need for compassion for enemies? Is the concept of justice something that is extended often to members of their own community but not to members of the Protestant community?

Is there a danger of developing a theology of the oppressed which tends to dehumanize all who are associated with one's enemy and lacks a vision of a new relationship between enemies?

Could Catholics also work at clarifying under what conditions they are willing to support structures of Government in Northern Ireland?

Could Churches in Britain seek to educate public opinion about British responsibility for Ireland both in the past and the present? Could they do more to increase awareness among their own members of the different issues involved in the conflict?

Could all the Churches in Northern Ireland, Britain and the Republic promote joint study of the political issues involved in the conflict in order to understand each other's view better and to see how they might appropriately contribute to the easing of conflict? Could such a joint effort also encourage greater respect between Protestants and Roman Catholics in relation to games, language and religious traditions? Can any of us in the Churches ask politicians to work for political reconciliation unless we also contribute what we can?

These are difficult issues, but we do believe that they are important areas for self-examination by those of us who belong to Churches if we are to witness credibly to God's call to reconciliation.

Forgiveness and Repentance: Nothing is more central to the resolution of the conflict in Northern Ireland, Britain and the Republic than forgiveness, so this must be central to the witness of all our Churches. Just as Christ's forgiveness preceded and created repentance, our forgiveness can be used by God to do the same.

We cannot, if we are to follow Christ, wait for repentance from our enemies before we offer forgiveness. It is remarkable that often those who have suffered most in the conflict seem also to be the best at forgiving.

Repentance is needed in relation to the conflict for the crimes of injustice committed by the paramilitaries and also by the security forces; for acts of cover up and intimidation; for the lies that have been told in public; for the ways in which so many of us have seen the injustice committed against our own side and ignored the wrongs committed against others; for the idolatry we have committed in putting our devotion to Nationalism or Loyalism, Republicanism or the United Kingdom before our calling to follow Christ in all others. This call to repentance comes first to those within the Churches. It is also a call to seek a political expression of repentance. Often an inspired gesture, which cannot be legislated for, can free a political log-jam. The example of Anwar Sadat, a Muslim, going to the heart of Israeli Jews in Jerusalem is surely an example that Christians - Protestant and Roman Catholic - in these islands could reflect on. Could Roman Catholics in the Republic and Nationalists in Northern Ireland begin, out of religious conviction, to take seriously the political rights of Unionists? Could Unionists and those living in Britain, again out of religious conviction, begin to take seriously the political rights of Nationalists living within Northern Ireland? Could each begin the long task of healing of bitterness through offering and accepting forgiveness? These are not tasks that anyone can take on lightly. They can only be done with the grace of Christ.

Imaginative Acts: Imaginative acts by individual groups of clergy and laity have a role to play in peacemaking, for instance by going together to funerals of victims of violence, and entering into dialogue with paramilitaries.

4 FAITH AND POLITICS

The Nature of Politics

Politics is pursued in a fallen world where the collective egotisms and self-interests of powerful groups operate. Where these clash there is conflict, and conflict is endemic to human affairs. There will be conflict, in the sense of conflict of interest - of differing views about the proper policies to be pursued in particular circumstances - and rivalry over the power to control what is done. This seems to be implicit in the nature of politics. Most political structures provide a framework within which such conflicts can be

Politics is part of the powers and principalities of this world, the structures that are necessary for an orderly life. These structures (which also include the authority of the state, the legal and economic frameworks, the nation's cultural and moral values) are part of what is in essence a good creation. But this creation has fallen: all structures fail to serve peoples as they should. They do not enable men and women to live a genuinely free, human, loving life and can very quickly become idols. All human structures, within which we are required to live and which we need for our life together, therefore have an ambiguity about them. In this perspective there are clear limits to what we can expect from politics and political arrangements. They can have no absolute hold on us. Political action cannot establish the Kingdom. A relative justice and peace is all that is obtainable.

Faith and Politics

The Kingdom of God, made present in Jesus, concerns the whole of human life in its public (which means political) as well as its private aspects. There is no basis in Scripture for the withdrawal of the public aspect of human life from the obedience which the disciples owed to the Lord. 'Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.' 'God was in Christ reconciling the whole world to himself' (II Cor 5:19). But Jesus was not proclaiming a political programme or a model society. He was proclaiming the approaching Kingdom of God - God's reign - and this Kingdom was not to be brought about by political action or by coercive power but by the absorbing and overcoming love of God.

Christians cannot identify any particular political programme unconditionally with obedience to the will of God, otherwise they fall into idolatry. But Christians do have a concern and a responsibility for the health and well-being of society, including its political life, because God is concerned about the whole of human life and the ordering of society ('For there is no power but of God', Roms 13.1). The Churches in Ireland recognize this fact:

Cardinal Cahal Daly has said:

'The message of Christ is a spiritual message, a call to renewal of heart. But it has social and political consequences. It is also a call to renewal of society and its structures and institutions, so that God's reign of justice may be established on earth as in heaven. Renewal of hearts and renewal of society are inseparable from one another. It is neither the right nor the competence of a churchman to propose constitutional or political blue prints. But it is a responsibility as a right of a churchman to identify the moral parameters within which these blueprints must be framed if justice is to reign' (*New Heart for Peace*, 1984).

The Church of Ireland also sees a contribution that they can make in the area of politics:

'If the Churches are to make such a positive and worthwhile contribution to social and communal well being in Ireland, North and South, then the Churches must be willing to examine and resolve the issues, tensions, and suspicions which have divided Christians and others in this land. This means involvement in an examination of constitutional, economic, social, legal, ecclesiastical and political structures in so far as these either encourage or

impede the development of a healthy free stable society in Ireland' (Report of the Role of the Church Committee, 1973, pp. 3-4).

A Presbyterian Church Document in 1977 said:

`The Church should more positively seek to encourage dedicated Church members to undertake political responsibilities whether in established parties or in community organizations. This should be extended to established politicians to encourage them to persevere with seeking for greater agreement upon policies which might benefit the community as a whole and not just serve interest or commitments. Encouragement should be given to political participation across all sections of society and sharing of political power and responsibility to the basis of some common loyalty, always having regard for the basic rights of those who prove unwilling or unable to participate' (*Have we a Word from the Lord?*, a study document prepared for Church Courts and members to assist in thinking on the Northern Ireland situation, June 1977).

The Conference of the Methodist Church in Ireland in 1979 said:

`It is the obligation of all the Churches to encourage their members to seek a form of government so just that all human beings in the State may live and develop to the fullest of their abilities and be seen to have the opportunity of participating in the decisions affecting themselves and their children. Since Unionism and Republicanism in their present manifestations seem to be irreconcilable that form of government may have to be outside our present structures if no solution can be found inside them' (Report of the Special Committee to examine `The Current Situation in Ireland', p. 6).

So both Roman Catholic and Protestant Church leaders are clear that Churches should be involved in some way in politics. But Churches have neither the task of drawing up constitutional blueprints nor of implementing them. Such tasks belong to politicians. There will always be among Christians different opinions, different discernments, different commitments among the relativities of politics. But not everything in politics is relative, a simple matter of preference. There can be options in the field of public life which are incompatible with an authentic expression of Christian Faith, for example, Christian support for apartheid and Nazism.

Christian discipleship in the political field has to be wrestled with, not abandoned. It is therefore to the question of Christian criteria in politics particularly in Ireland, that we turn in the next section.

5 CHRISTIAN CRITERIA FOR POLITICS IN IRELAND

In this section we consider some criteria which we feel have to be met in politics in Ireland in the light of the discussion on fear and enmity (section 1), the discussion on scripture (section 2) and the relationship of faith and politics (section 4). All these criteria are inter-related.

Idolatry

Any attempt to make an absolute of any political structure or ideology is idolatry. For Christians following or supporting any political ideology must be subordinated to following Christ. Republicanism or Loyalism cannot therefore have the same claim to our allegiance as following Christ.

When we confess Jesus Christ as Lord (Acts 2.35) we confess that no earthly ruler or political structure can be absolute. The claims of a United Ireland or union with Britain are subordinate to the Kingdom of God.

The Welfare of All

God is concerned with the welfare of all. He has no favourites. A concern for the welfare of all means a concern for the different identities of groups in society. Ways must be found to recognize the identities of both communities within Northern Ireland.

Order

No human life worthy of the name is possible in society without well-ordered relationships or stability. These concepts are included in the biblical theme of peace (shalom). Fundamental is a need for a measure of security for all citizens. So much is obvious in Northern Ireland. Some people have been driven to despair, anger and fury by this lack of basic security. Others in Northern Ireland have felt that at times the security forces themselves have violated the 'order' of society through some of their actions. For us to have a life together and not a chaos in Northern Ireland all citizens need to give their assent to law and order and the legal system within the context of a just society.

Justice

God in the Old Testament is seen as a disturber. When he comes across a situation of imbalance, deprivation and injustice he is prepared, using human events and agents, to act against it, even if it means destroying Jerusalem and Israel itself. Injustice brings judgement, as the prophets never tire of telling us, often with passionate force. We hear and see the judgement of God in events, including political events, and we must face up to how we are distorting the humanity of others. Injustice in biblical terms is generated by oppression and failure in communal relationships, when the poor and deprived are not protected and included in the community. In Northern Ireland we hear and see the judgement of God in the way that humanity has been distorted, for example, in the way that the Roman Catholic community has not received full parity of treatment and esteem. There will be no peace in Northern Ireland until both communities feel included. This has clear implications for political power, distribution of jobs etc. At the same time attempts to coerce the Protestant community into a United Ireland are clearly unjust as well.

Overcoming Fear and Enmity

'Sharing of power can only exist in the context of love since it is impossible to share with your enemy'.

If the enmity continues along with the fear that wants domination and the resentment that wants revenge, there is no future for either community in Northern Ireland.

The Churches have a role to play in engendering the spirit of forgiveness in the community and we have already addressed this in Section Three, but we need a politics of forgiveness too. Policies which increase in sections of the population the sense of being wronged, which increase fear, resentment and enmity, must only exacerbate the situation.

Democracy and Forgiveness

Democracy is not only about majority rule; it is also, and perhaps more fundamentally, about individuals and minorities having a say and having their interests recognized and protected. The process of democracy is in fact a kind of healing in which 'we take our violently self-assertive passions and submit them to the common rules of the game - written and unwritten - deliberating, negotiating and reaching agreement... Democracy is the slow, powerful effort to put right the blunders we have incorporated into our conditions of life'.

Even if we do have a submission to the common rules of the game it is unlikely that the Westminster model is suitable for us. Stanley Worrall has noted that there are three factors essential for its success:

that the opposing parties have a common allegiance and are agreed on the basic nature of the state;

that they represent opinion rather than identity;

that neither side is assured of a permanent majority.

These do not at present exist in Northern Ireland.

Even if the enmity and fear lessen they are not likely to disappear completely for a long time. Each community will need some protection from the other. Constitutional safeguards, outside guarantees, and a Bill of Rights could all have a role to play in this.

Submitting to the rules of the game excludes the use of violence. The strategy of an armalite in one hand and the ballot box in the other is a complete contradiction of democratic politics.

Common Security

There is no security for the aspirations, values and identity of one community without security for the other.

Violence

Attempts to 'solve' the Northern Ireland problem finally through violence, either through the armed struggle or through 'law and order' solutions alone, will fail. They will ensure that the conflict will go on and on and that fear and enmity will increase. In fact support for 'law and order' solutions alone will encourage support for the armed struggle and vice versa. Groups who espouse such solutions really need each other.

6 POLITICAL REALITIES

In this section we list what we see as political realities in the conflict. As we said in the Introduction this section has a different status from the rest of the document. We believe our views are in accordance with the Christian criteria outlined in Section Five but we accept that many people will disagree with us. The fact that our own group is composed of people from different religious and political backgrounds should give some weight to our suggestions. We invite those who disagree with us to develop different ideas which would be in accordance with Christian criteria for politics and which would also respect the different communities within Northern Ireland.

We did not come to any agreed conclusion about what ought to be the long term constitutional position of Northern Ireland. This was partly because some of us are from the nationalist community, some from the unionist community. But it was also because few of us see major changes coming in the next ten years; and because all of us are agreed that no matter what changes occur in the constitutional status of Northern Ireland there will still be two groups - Nationalists and Unionists - living within Northern Ireland.

New political structures therefore need to be created to reflect and legitimize full recognition of both these traditions within Northern Ireland. There can be no reconciliation between the two communities until the separate identity of each is recognized. For there to be one community there must first be two. It is this more than anything else that we would like to emphasize. Within this context the following is a list of realities that we believe must be recognized if there is to be political progress.

1 Northern Ireland should Remain as an Administrative Unit

The reasons for this are the following:

Unionists see the continued existence of Northern Ireland as essential for the preservation of their identity and physical security.

Most Nationalists aspire in some sense to a United Ireland. However, such a solution is unworkable at present because Unionists who are opposed to it have the numbers to make it so. Secondly it is unclear exactly what the aspiration to a United Ireland involves. It may be that it is primarily an expression of despair about Northern Ireland as a political entity because of British/unionist domination. The best way to fight this despair is to introduce alternative political structures that include a real and just expression of nationalist identity fears.

Northern Ireland has existed as an administrative unit for over sixty years. Despite the differences between the two communities both sides identify with Northern Ireland to a considerable extent.

2 Both the London and Dublin Governments have a Role to Play in the Future of Northern Ireland

Both Governments have a legitimate interest in Northern Ireland. Britain is currently governing the area and supporting it with a large annual subsidy. Members of the British forces, parliamentary and official representatives and members of the public have lost their lives in the conflict and sadly it is likely that more will die in the future.

The conflict has also cost lives in the Republic, including parliamentary representatives and members of the Garda Síochána, and there is also a heavy toll in Border related security and in loss of tourist revenues. Many Nationalists within Northern Ireland feel a relationship with the people of the Republic. Given that the Republic and Northern Ireland are each part of the same island both are inevitably affected by what takes place in the other's territory.

Both Governments must acknowledge that a settlement involving either exclusively is unworkable.

We would argue that both countries need to work together on the problem. Two key areas would be in the domain of guaranteeing security of lives and the recognition of the identity and just aspirations of each of the two communities within Northern Ireland. If both Governments decided to work together and seriously at these tasks it would introduce an entirely new factor into the situation. Any political or legal changes agreed between the two Governments would need to be entrenched in International Law. It would obviously be necessary to convince both communities within Northern Ireland that any proposed changes are just. This would also apply to influential groups in the EC and in the US.

3 There should be a Devolved Government within Northern Ireland

Direct rule is rule by the British Government. While Nationalists regard this as preferable to majority rule they do not regard it as an adequate means of expressing their identity or of receiving physical security. Some Unionists are unhappy with it because it increases their dependence on the Westminster Government whom many of them do not trust; others accept it reluctantly because they despair of any other means of safeguarding the Union. Under Direct Rule neither group has to take responsibility for the consequences of political decisions. The only way this can be changed is through some form of devolved government.

3 Criteria for Devolved Government

At the moment the Westminster Government controls political power and the security forces. The official political symbols of Northern Ireland are those of the United Kingdom with which the Unionist community identifies. Any way forward that is going to respect seriously the identity of both communities in Northern Ireland has implications for each of the following areas: political power; security forces; political symbols; distribution of jobs.

a) *Political power*: If the separate identity of each community is to be recognized it may be necessary to give a degree of autonomy to each group within a Northern Ireland wide structure that respects as far as possible the rights of each community while ensuring neither one dominates the other.

A distinction should be made between areas that are not a matter of controversy between the two communities such as health and social services, agriculture, and education, and those that are, such as security, jobs and constitutional change. The three Northern Ireland MEPs, although one comes from the nationalist community and two from the unionist community, work effectively together in the EC on non-controversial matters. This is an indication of unexplored possibilities in Northern Ireland.

In those areas that are a matter of dispute between the two communities the Northern Ireland-wide structure would have to include mechanisms of weighted majorities to protect each community.

In parts of Northern Ireland the two communities are for the most part geographically separated (e.g. West Belfast, Derry/Londonderry, Portadown). In other parts this is not true. In some areas both communities could work together, in others this will not be possible. Within the wider Northern Ireland structure it might then be worth examining seriously the

possibility of a local government structure based on quite small areas, some nationalist, some unionist, each with a certain amount of autonomy. Basic community needs and services would have to remain under the control of the Northern Ireland-wide administration.

It would obviously be preferable if relations between the two communities developed in such a way that autonomous areas were not necessary.

Both communities need guarantees that any settlement arrived at cannot be changed against their respective wills. This means that a consensus within each community would be necessary for any change to occur.

b) *The Identity of Each Community Needs to be Reflected at the Level of Security Forces:*

The question of identity is felt most keenly by both communities, with respect to the security forces. It is unreasonable to expect Nationalists to identify unambiguously with security forces that are controlled exclusively by either the Westminster Government or the unionist community. It is unfair to expect Unionists to join security forces that do not have the acceptance of both communities because this is simply exposing them to violence and asking them to support the continuation of the present situation with all its inherent defects.

The only answer to this dilemma is for both communities to be increasingly represented in the control and membership of security forces. This can only occur if the governmental structures to which the security forces report are composed of members of both traditions.

It is impossible to carry out policing anywhere without the broad support of both communities. The implications of this for police work in local communities will have to be faced. This is particularly true in more deprived areas.

Given that the development of political structures reflecting the identity of both communities is going to take time, every effort should be made to get each community to co-operate with the security forces and each community should also do all in their power to ensure that these obey the law.

4 The Economy

The economic situation in Northern Ireland is critical. There is an urgent need both for government initiative and imaginative support for local efforts in this area. We would appeal to the British Government and other international agencies to do whatever they can to improve this situation, particularly in job creation. In this context it is important that any new jobs are distributed as fairly as possible between the two communities.

5 The Power of the British Government

We recognize that government cannot force people to choose good but the way it exercises its power can encourage or discourage the process of reconciliation. In this context it is unreasonable for the Westminster Government to maintain either that it is powerless or that it is neutral in the Northern Ireland situation. There is no such thing as a power vacuum. Any government that controls finance, the security forces and can make and unmake laws has considerable power. The Government should use this power to encourage both communities to work together or, where that is not possible, it should encourage them to work separately without seeking to dominate the other tradition. The British Government must not permit either community to have a veto on political progress. Neither the British nor the Irish Government should allow themselves to be used by one tradition.

6 A Task for People in the Republic

We welcome many aspects of the Report of the Forum for a New Ireland, especially the section on Present Realities and Future Requirements. We regard this Report as an important document which gives real possibilities of development. We value the serious process which the politicians of the Republic of Ireland and the SDLP entered into in drawing up the Forum Report. However it is obvious from the above suggestions that our Group does not support the emphasis of the Forum on a unitary state.

We believe that there is still a lot of ambiguity among people in the Republic about the question of a United Ireland and this ambiguity has a serious effect on people within Northern Ireland. People in the Republic need to establish realistic relationships with the United Kingdom as a whole and with both communities in Northern Ireland in order to clarify further what sort of political structures they hope to achieve ultimately and what responsible measures they are using to achieve them. The extent to which many people both in the Republic and in Britain, even at the highest political level, remain unaware of many of the realities of Northern Ireland is a cause for serious concern.

CONCLUSION

We recognize that the above realities are not a blueprint for a new political structure within Northern Ireland. We do not mean them to be that. However we believe that if any of these realities are ignored it will be impossible to make just political progress. At the same time we recognize that taking account of these realities involves real difficulties for politicians and communities.

Political structures will not of themselves end the conflict but they may provide a context in which respect between the two communities and between Britain and Ireland might slowly grow again and in which enmity might gradually be turned into friendship. Churches are called to be a sign of the Kingdom of God, a Kingdom in which fear and enmity are overcome. We in the Churches are called to this task today in Northern Ireland, Britain and the Republic.

It is our submission that being a sign of the Kingdom means in part that we work for new political structures in Northern Ireland in which the identity of both Nationalists and Unionists is respected, and in which neither one can dominate the other.

Notes

1. John H. Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Erdmans, 1972, p. 154.
2. Bishop Buthelezi, interview in *International Review of Mission*, Geneva: WCC, October 1984, p. 418.
3. Stanley Worrall, *Testament of Sojourner*, Belfast: Queen's University, 1984.
4. George Konrad, *Antipolitics*, London: Quartet, 1984.

BACK COVER

The Gospels call us to reconciliation. But what does this mean in practice? What demands are made on Nationalists and Unionists in Northern Ireland, on British and Irish people, on members of different Churches, as they struggle to form new relationships?

How can we be faithful to the God who calls us to forgive our enemies, but who also opposes all injustice? How should Christians deal with the memory of events like the Battle of the Boyne in 1690 and the Easter Rising in 1916? On a pastoral level how should clergy conduct 'political' funerals? How should we respond to political events like the Anglo-Irish Agreement?

These questions are particularly important in Northern Ireland where religion and politics interweave in a potent mixture. 'Politics has taken on some of the dimensions of a religious crusade; political positions have been absolutised and exclusive commitments have been demanded of people' (Introduction).

This book is an attempt to address this problem, to do theology in the context of the conflict within Northern Ireland, and of the constitutional disagreements between Britain and the Republic. It is thus an effort by people living and working in the situation to do serious contextual and prophetic theology.

The book is a collection of seven documents that the Interchurch Group on Faith and Politics have produced since 1983. It thus represents a decade's work by an ecumenical group committed to justice and reconciliation, and struggling together to reach agreement on issues that matter deeply to people. These documents will be of use to groups and individuals who want to reflect seriously on what they can do to bring peace and justice to Northern Ireland.

'In these pages you will find more than morsels of hope. You will find the ideas from which a democratic future can be constructed'

(Kevin Boyle, Director of Human Rights Centre, Essex University, in his Foreword).

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