

# Declaration of Faith and Commitment

Christians respond to Anglo-Irish Agreement - 24th June, 1986

## DECLARATION OF FAITH AND COMMITMENT

BELFAST, 24 JUNE 1986

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Note: The Declaration is NOT a document of the Faith and Politics Group but many of our members signed it. It was reproduced in our 1993 compilation *Breaking Down The Enmity*.  
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Murder, arson, bombing, threats and violence of deed and word are every day increasing tension and spreading fear throughout the whole population of Northern Ireland.

Sectarian activists and false gods of party are demanding from our respective communities a total loyalty that belongs only to Christ.

Followers of Christ, living together in this land, must re-assert his sole Lordship.

At this time of choice, we make the following declaration of our faith and commitment.

### 1 *We Believe*

We believe that all our land belongs to God: not to Unionists or to Nationalists. All of us have to live in it and share it together.

We believe that all human life is sacred. All Christians must recognise that murder is evil by whomsoever and for whatsoever reason it is committed. The sin of murder is shared by those who co-operate in it whether before, during or after its execution.

We believe that for us obedience to Christ is more important than Nationalism or Unionism.

We believe that all of us without exception share in the blame for our present troubles and for the failure of our communities to live together in peace and mutual respect. Our differences are no excuse for refusing to seek reconciliation with God and with each other.

### 2 *We Seek*

We seek justice for everybody in our society.

Therefore we claim no rights or privileges for ourselves which we are not prepared to share with our fellow citizens of other traditions.

We seek freedom for all to express and practise their faith in accordance with their traditions but never at the expense of their neighbour's right.

Therefore the disruption of religious services and the desecration of churches must be totally condemned.

### 3 *We Reject*

While Unionists have a right to be British and Nationalists to be Irish:

We reject the lie that justice can be achieved by the use of violence. We are inter-dependent and we must accommodate each other. Bigotry, discrimination, intimidation and distortion of the truth should have no place in our relationships. Verbal violence is equally to be condemned, for example, words like traitor, collaborator, tout and quisling must be banned from our vocabulary.

We reject any kind of religious or political triumphalism and any arrogant assertion of one's tradition in the arranging of marches, the staging of illegal demonstrations or the provocative holding of ceremonies.

#### *4 We Declare*

We declare that it is the responsibility of government to protect human life and to uphold justice and the political, economic and social rights of both Nationalists and Unionists without exception.

We declare that government must respect the rights of both communities and the police must impartially serve both traditions.

It is the responsibility of every Christian to obey the law of the land and support the agencies of government, including the police, in the just execution of the law's requirements, unless obedience to Christ demands otherwise.

It is also our responsibility to recognise that such injustices as are now experienced by one or other community in Northern Ireland do not warrant any attempt by either to make government unworkable.

We declare that it is the responsibility of every Christian to work for just structures in society and to seek to rectify unjust acts of any kind on the part of government or society.

We declare our recognition that alienation and injustice have been experienced on the part of both communities.

All have a right to protest by peaceful means, without infringing the rights of others.

#### *5 We Pledge*

We pledge ourselves to obey God's will and word rather than give unqualified support to any political leader or manifesto, whether nationalist or unionist.

In this belief and in obedience to Jesus Christ, our only Lord and Saviour, as individual Christians, we pledge ourselves to God and to each other and in so doing we urgently invite others to join with us in this declaration and commitment.

### **SCRIPTURAL BASIS AND UNDERLYING REASONS FOR THIS DECLARATION**

#### **1 We Believe**

*The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof (Ps 24:1). The Lord, the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth (Isa 40:28) made man in his own image (Gen 1:27) and from him every family in heaven and on earth is named (Eph 3:15).*

The whole of creation belongs to God. All human beings are made in God's image. All human life is sacred.

Therefore we believe that all our land belongs to God: not to Unionists or Nationalists. All of us have to live in it and share it together.

We believe that all human life is sacred. All Christians must recognise that murder is evil by whomsoever and for whatsoever reason it is committed. The sin of murder is shared by those who co-operate in it whether before, during or after its execution.

*Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life (Jn 14:6). Every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phils 2.11).*

Jesus is the supreme authority for Christians. No other person, no power or cause, religious, political or cultural, must come before him.

Therefore we believe that for us obedience to Christ is more important than Nationalism or Unionism.

*All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Roms 3:23). None is righteous (Roms 3:10). Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures (1 Cor 15:3). God reconciled us to himself and gave us a ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18). Be reconciled to your brother (Mt 5:24). Love your enemies (Lk 6:27).*

None of us is without blame for the sin and suffering of society. We share a fellowship of guilt. Christ died for us all. We share a fellowship of forgiveness. Christ calls all of us to repent: this means to be reconciled to God and to each other.

Therefore we believe that all of us without exception share in the blame for our present troubles and for the failure of our communities to live together in peace and mutual respect. Our differences are no excuse for refusing to seek reconciliation with God and with each other.

## **2 We seek**

*The result of righteousness will be peace, quietness and trust for ever (Isa 32:17). The Lord requires that we do justly, love kindness and walk humbly with our God (Mic 6:8). The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed (Lk 4:18). If a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand (Mk 3:24).*

The wholeness we seek will come only when we practise righteousness. God wants us to build a just society. We reject the notion that anyone can follow Christ without taking seriously the rights of the poor and of all deprived people. A divided society will destroy itself.

Therefore we seek justice for everybody in our society. Therefore we claim no rights or privileges for ourselves which we are not prepared to share with our fellow citizens of other traditions.

*In many and various ways God spoke of old ... but he has spoken to us by his Son (Heb 1:1). Jesus, the Good Shepherd, has other sheep, but there shall be one Shepherd (Jn 10:16). Each of you says 'I belong to Paul' or 'I belong to Apollos' or 'I belong to Christ'. Is Christ divided? (1 Cor 1:12-13).*

None of us has the right to deny another's experience of God's grace in Christ. We must respect each other's differences. We all belong to Christ and must love each other.

Therefore we seek freedom for all to express and practise their faith in accordance with their traditions but never at the expense of their neighbour's right. Therefore the disruption of religious services and the desecration of churches must be totally condemned.

## **3 We Reject**

*As you would wish that men would do to you, do so to them (Lk 6:31). Love your enemies (Lk 6:27). Bear one another's burdens (Gals 6:2). Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamour and slander be put away from you, with all malice, and be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you (Eph 4:31-32).*

We all belong to God and consequently to each other. We must never advocate the rights of one part of the family to the exclusion of the other. Christ expects us to love our neighbours and our enemies.

Therefore, while Unionists have a right to be British and Nationalists to be Irish we reject the lie that justice can be achieved by the use of violence. We are inter-dependent and we must accommodate each other. Bigotry, discrimination, intimidation and distortion of the truth should have no place in our relationships. Verbal violence is equally to be condemned, for example, words like traitor, collaborator, tout and quisling must be banned from our vocabulary.

*The rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them: it shall not be so among you: but whoever would be great among you must be your servant (Mt 20:25-26).*

We must seek an understanding, compassionate society. If it is wrong for political leaders to lord it over their own people, it is equally wrong for one community to seek to lord it over another. Christ calls us as individuals and communities to be servants of each other. Therefore we reject any kind of religious or political triumphalism and any arrogant assertion of one's tradition in the arranging of marches, the staging of illegal demonstrations or the provocative holding of ceremonies.

#### **4 We Declare**

*Let every person be subject to the governing authorities ... Pay all of them their dues, taxes to whom taxes are due, reverence to whom reverence is due, respect to whom respect is due, honour to whom honour is due (Roms 13:1,7). Hate evil and love good and establish justice in the gate (Amos 5:15). Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's (Mt 22:21). We must obey God rather than man (Acts 5:29).*

The state has the duty of upholding justice and peace for all its citizens without exception. The Christian has a duty to the state and to the people living in it. There are immoral structures and injustices in every State. We must condemn these and commit ourselves to work for their removal. Scripture calls us to obey lawful authority except when obedience to God demands otherwise.

Therefore we declare that it is the responsibility of government to protect human life and to uphold justice and the political, economic and cultural rights of both Nationalists and Unionists without exception.

We declare that government must respect the rights of both communities and the police must impartially serve both traditions.

It is the responsibility of every Christian to obey the law of the land and support the agencies of government, including the police, in the just execution of the law's requirements, unless obedience to Christ demands otherwise.

It is also our responsibility to recognise that such injustices as are now experienced by one or other community in Northern Ireland do not warrant any attempt by either to make government unworkable.

We declare that it is the responsibility of every Christian to work for just structures in society and to seek to rectify unjust acts of any kind on the part of government or society.

We declare our recognition that alienation and injustice have been experienced on the part of both communities.

All have a right to protest by peaceful means, without infringing the rights of others.

#### **5 We Pledge**

*The Word of God is not fettered (2 Tim 2:9).*

We reject as false that Christians should regard any political cause or human desire as more important than the word and work of God.

Therefore we pledge ourselves to obey God's will and word rather than give unqualified support to any political leader or manifesto, whether nationalist or unionist.

**SIGNATORIES**