

Towards An Island That Works

Handling difference, North and South - 14th November, 1987

Introduction

Both faith and politics are important to many people in Ireland. We believe that many of our difficulties on this island are the result of making wrong connections between the two. In this document we intend to examine the way people in the South relate faith to politics and how this affects the Northern conflict.

This document is being issued by the whole Faith and Politics Group, and each member of the group commends it as a serious contribution to easing the conflict. However, the Southern members in the group have made a greater input than the Northerners. We have two aims: one is to give Northerners a better idea of what people in the Republic actually believe. A second aim is to raise questions for ourselves and others in the South about what effect belief in Christ should have on our attitude to Northern Ireland.

Our experience as a group, when we wrote *Breaking Down The Enmity* was one of slowly learning to express our deepest fears and angers together and of gradually moving towards a position on faith and politics in Northern Ireland that we could all accept. The process was difficult because of our varying backgrounds.

We assumed this process would be easier in the present document because the main input into it has come from Southerners within the group. In practice we have found it more difficult than we anticipated. This is partly because the questions faced by the South are in many ways more complex than those faced by the North, but also because there were differences between us in our interpretations of our own history and our priorities for the future. A basic message we would like to give to Northerners is that people in the South differ among themselves on questions of political unity far more than people in the North realise. This is just as true of ourselves as of other groups.

We have, however, agreed that there must be fair play for both sides in Northern Ireland and that the political identity of both Nationalists and Unionists has to be recognised. We differ in emphasis as to how this can be done. Some of us would see the Anglo-Irish Agreement, with the British and Irish Governments acting together, as the best vehicle currently on offer and we would hope power sharing within the North will follow in due course. Others of us feel that Dublin involvement - given that it is only consultative - actually complicates the matter, and that it will be extremely difficult to persuade Unionists to accept power sharing unless there is a reduced emphasis on Dublin's involvement.

All of us are agreed that new political and economic structures can be only part of the answer. The conflict has left so many dead, or physically, spiritually and mentally wounded, that there is a deep gulf of bitterness and resentment running right through this island and between this island and Britain. We believe the process of bridging the gulf will be a slow one and that all of us have a responsibility to take part in it. We also believe, as Christians, that we will not be able to do this task ourselves but that we will be dependent on the Holy Spirit for help. This process can only develop if Unionists' fears are reduced and a greater measure of trust develops. Equally Nationalists - and indeed all the parties to the conflict - will have to come to terms with the deep ambiguities there are in all their positions.

1. Social and political changes

Changes in the Republic

We would like to start by outlining some of the major changes that have taken place in the Republic in the decades up to 1987. Many of these will be familiar to Southern readers. However Northern members of our group have asked us to include them because they believe these changes are not widely known in the North. We are concerned with several areas: 1) social and economic change; 2) changes in the Catholic Church; 3) changes in the Protestant community; 4) changes in attitudes towards Britain; 5) changes in the South's policies towards Northern Ireland. Obviously we cannot discuss these changes in depth, but we believe it is important to list them because the changes in all these areas are greater in our view than many Northerners realise.

Social and Economic Changes

In the 1950s over 40,000 Irish people were emigrating to Britain every year. In the 1970s this changed to a net influx of immigrants. Now the previous pattern has almost reasserted itself, with approximately 30,000 emigrating

annually. There has been a significant decline in the average age of the population, with half the people now under the age of 27, due to a lowering of the marriage age and a rise in the number of births. The economic policies of the early 1960s which encouraged foreign investment were a complete break with the protectionism of previous decades, and they were accompanied by a large rise in wealth for a growing middle class and increased expectations of prosperity. They also led to a diversification of exports from the Republic. In 1972, 70% of exports went to Britain. By 1985 this figure had dropped to 30%, with 60% going to other EC countries. There was a huge increase in the number of students in vocational and third level education in the 1960s and 1970s. The advent of television meant the country was exposed to Anglo-American values much more than previously. A very large number of people moved from rural to urban areas - nearly one third of the population now live in Greater Dublin - and this was accompanied by marital breakdown, a very serious drug problem, and the growth in the number of video 'nasties'. All of this means that the Republic of Ireland is a very different place from what it was when, for example, the Mother and Child controversy was at its height in 1951.

Changes in the Catholic Church

There have been major changes in the Catholic Church at an international level. John Jay Hughes has written: 'One should always be suspicious of the claim that there is one single view of this or that position amongst Roman Catholics...Roman Catholics are united in their common assent to the Church's dogmatic teaching; and the body of doctrine officially taught by the Church is considerably smaller than is often supposed, even by Catholics themselves. The myth of a monolithic unity of Catholic opinion in other matters is fostered by two classes of people: those who wish thus to discredit the Church by showing that Roman Catholics have no intellectual freedom; and those who mistakenly suppose that by encouraging the myth of Catholic unanimity in all questions they are doing the Church a service.'

The freedom and intensity of debate at the Second Vatican Council were a shock to both classes of people, and there is evidence that many in both groups have not yet recovered from

the shock (*Absolutely Null and Utterly Void*, London and Sydney: Sheed and Ward, 1968, pp. 232-3).

Important changes were already taking place before the Vatican Council. Pope Pius XII, although in moral matters a 'conservative', made a major contribution to this in his encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (1942). This encouraged a more scholarly study of the Scriptures and allowed Roman Catholics to avail of, and to make their own contribution to, the work of Protestant scholars which had already been in progress for two hundred years. This in turn allowed a new respect to grow up between scholars in different Churches, so that in many modern commentaries on the Scriptures it is impossible to tell the author's religious affiliation at first sight.

The Second Vatican Council also made a profound impact on ecumenism. Previously the Catholic Church had seen itself as the 'one true Church'. Now, while still saying that the fullness of truth 'subsists' in the Catholic Church it acknowledges that 'very many elements' of the Church of Christ are to be found in other Churches and communities. The use of 'heretic' and 'schismatic' that characterised past ages is now replaced in Catholic theological language by the happy phrase of John XXIII 'our separated brethren'. Roman Catholics no longer seek to pressure others into the Roman Church. Rather they seek to discern with them the full implications of the Christian faith.

There are other areas of major change which we will simply list here: the liturgy is now celebrated in the vernacular (this had been one of the great areas of contention at the time of the Reformation); the laity are gradually acquiring a greater role; the legalism of the past, which involved a multiplicity of regulations concerning fasting and manual work on Sundays, has mostly disappeared; in moral teaching there is a much greater emphasis on human persons rather than on 'nature', and also on the rights of the 'erroneous' conscience and on pastoral tolerance. There is also an increasing willingness among both clergy and laity to engage in public disagreement with Church authorities (although even in the past non-Catholics often assumed incorrectly that the absence of such public dissent indicated acceptance of official views).

All of these changes have made an impact in Ireland to varying degrees in different places. Seminary teaching has changed dramatically from the early 1960s. Catholics are now free to attend Protestant funerals, and encouraged to go to ecumenical prayer services and conferences. There have also been changes in mixed marriages (although there still remain some controversial points which we will discuss later): now the Catholic partner is asked to do 'all in his or her power' to bring the children up as Catholics. This is a far cry from the days when both partners had to sign a written statement that they would in fact rear the children as Catholics. The Directory on Mixed Marriages of the Irish Catholic Bishops, published in 1983, states clearly that 'the obligations of the Catholic party do not, and cannot, cancel out, or in any way call into question the conscientious duties of the other party'. Furthermore, Catholic Bishops are now empowered to allow a mixed marriage to take place in the church of the non-Catholic partner. For those of us who remember even the recent past, this is change indeed.

There have also been changes in Church-State relations. The Catholic bishops are on record at the New Ireland Forum and elsewhere that they do not desire or expect that the law of the land should conform in all particulars to Catholic teaching. As we will see later this by no

means solves the problem of Church-State relations, but it is a very large change from previous attitudes.

Another area of change is the increased emphasis in the Catholic Church on social justice. Much of this springs from a stress on liberation theology that is prevalent among a minority of clergy and laity. But it also springs from the acceptance in Vatican II that God is to be found in secular matters and that the Church has to be concerned with right relationships in this world. The result of this is that many clergy and laity - out of their Christian commitment - have become involved in issues like economic policies and their effect on social justice, and in political questions, for example, the appropriateness of President Reagan's visit to Ireland or of the Single European Act. (One indication of the extent of change that has taken place is that not a single Irish bishop was available to meet President Reagan during his visit to Ireland in 1983.) There has also been a much greater emphasis on our Third World obligations.

Secularisation has grown steadily. In the 1961 census only one person in 2546 had 'no religion'. By 1971 this had become 1 in 391 and then 1 in 87 by 1981. These figures are even more marked in urban areas (and it is important to remember that very nearly one third of the people of the Republic live in Dublin): in the 25-29 age group, 1 in 38 females and 1 in 21 males described themselves as having 'no religion'. The 1981 census shows a greater number in the 'no religion' category in the Republic than there are members of Christian Churches, excluding the Roman Catholic Church. The 1987 MRBI survey also showed that there has been a significant decline in attendance at Mass among those aged between 25 and 34 in the Dublin area. Related to the general fall in religious practice is the decline in vocations to the diocesan priesthood and to religious orders, which have dropped significantly in the last 20 years.

The result of all these changes is that religious belief - in the Republic has - become much less assured. Some surveys show quite a degree of confusion about what the Catholic Church teaches. Many parents have found themselves rejecting their childhood beliefs and not being at all clear what they should teach their children. Interestingly, the MRBI survey indicates that while the Catholic Church has a significant influence on people's attitudes towards divorce, abortion and aid to Third World countries, it has almost no influence on attitudes towards Northern Ireland.

The Experience of Southern Protestants

The experience of Southern Protestants has been that of a small minority group in a State predominantly composed of Roman Catholics. Within a short period from the foundation of the State there was a large decrease in the Protestant population. For example, the Methodist Church in Clontarf lost half its congregation in 1922. Many, employed in either the Civil Service or the army, left the country when the British withdrew. Others left because they were uncertain about the stability of the State. Southern Protestants for the most part took some time to come to terms with the new reality of the Irish Free State and tended to keep a low profile and not become actively involved in public affairs. There are, however, some notable exceptions to this pattern, such as W.B. Yeats, Ernest Blythe, and Douglas Hyde, who became the first President.

By the 1940s Southern Protestants had come to terms with being citizens of an independent Irish State, but there were still aspects of national life with which many of them could not

fully identify, such as the emphasis on reviving the Gaelic tradition and the lingering anti-Britishness. The role of the Catholic hierarchy in the Mother and Child controversy of 1951 was something they found hard to accept. The application of the rules on mixed marriages caused distress, particularly the requirement of a promise to bring up the children of a mixed marriage as Roman Catholics. This was seen as a threat to the survival of the Protestant community. These rules, combined with a very low birth rate, emigration and war losses, have contributed to the decline of the Protestant population. While a more flexible interpretation of the mixed marriage rules in recent years has been welcomed by the Protestant community the position is not yet satisfactory from their viewpoint. Many have fears also about the influence of the Catholic Church on State laws governing Protestant maternity hospitals, especially in the areas of sterilisation, deformities and genetic research.

The Protestant community welcomed the discussion on pluralism which took place in the Republic in the 1970s. The notion of a pluralist society was attractive to them as a means of embracing legitimate diversity in an overall unity. The more conservative climate of the 1980s (which is part of a wider conservatism in the West), and in particular the debates regarding the referenda on abortion and divorce have been very discouraging from their viewpoint. This experience has led many Protestants to fear that in any particular issue of importance the Catholic ethos will prevail, and that bishops and clergy will exert their moral influence to see that it does. The Republic is therefore seen as having a long way to go before it becomes a genuinely pluralist society. At the same time many Protestants would themselves be strongly anti-divorce and anti-abortion.

Southern Protestants for the most part live at peace with their Catholic neighbours, many of whom are equally perturbed about some aspects of the State. Protestant dissatisfaction, then, is not primarily part of a religious struggle, but rather one about different visions of what a modern democracy should be.

Changes in the South's Attitude Towards Britain

There have also been changes in the South's attitude towards Britain. There is a broad spectrum of attitudes ranging from the close ties of the Anglo-Irish to the indifferent or even hostile attitude of the Republican tradition. These attitudes were to a large extent moulded by the experience of the struggle for independence and the Civil War which followed it. Those who took part in these conflicts are now either dead or nearing the end of their lives. With the passage of time anti-British feeling has declined gradually among the majority of the population. The tension over the Free State's neutrality during World War II has now passed into history, whatever about current tensions over neutrality. The dominant relationship between Britain and the Republic of Ireland since 1973 has been common membership of the EC. Continuing consultation about Northern Ireland has, on the whole, brought the two Governments closer together, notwithstanding occasional periods of tense relationships.

There are over one million people of Irish birth living in Britain. There is hardly a family in the Republic that does not have close relatives who live there. This forms a social bond of great importance. There are very extensive academic, professional, business and financial links between the two islands. Sport and entertainment in Britain are followed closely by large numbers of people in the Republic. There is a considerable interest in the Royal Family. Some English trade unions have Irish branches. Many English newspapers have Irish editions. English TV is widely watched in the major urban areas of the Republic. The volume

of free movement of people between the two islands is very large. People in the Republic are more likely to have visited Britain than Northern Ireland.

The two countries have a great deal more in common than is the case with some other friendly European States with very distinct cultures. This is not surprising, given the historical links between the two countries, their geographical contiguity and the fact that the vast bulk of legislation in the Republic is unchanged from those laws carried over from the pre-1921 period when Ireland was governed by Britain. As is usually the case in relationships between a small country and a larger one, the residents of the small country are much more aware of events and developments in the large country than vice versa.

The Northern conflict has caused wounds that still await healing. The succession of horrific IRA bomb attacks in Britain has left a legacy of anti-Irish feeling among some British people. Fortunately most Britons can distinguish clearly between a paramilitary organisation and ordinary Irish people they meet. On the Irish side there are unresolved questions about the activities of British secret service agents in the Republic. There was a strong belief in Ireland that some serious miscarriages of justice took place in trials of Irish people accused of being involved in bombing incidents in the 1970s, and that people served long prison sentences for crimes they did not commit - a belief subsequently shown to be true.

Another bone of contention is the Prevention of Terrorism Act. In 1985, 55,328 people were subjected to searches and detention for up to one hour under the provisions of the Act. This figure rose to 59,481 in 1986. The number detained in the first six months of 1987 was twice that of the same period in 1986. Hugo Young, political commentator of the *Guardian* commented: 'For such stopping and searching and interrogation to be happening to nearly 60,000 a year, in an exercise that produced at the last count 13 charges under the Act, 23 other charges and 16 exclusions or deportations, seems a disproportion sufficient to alarm all but the most obdurate of anti-libertarians, (*The Guardian*, 24 September 1987). This is a source of bad feeling towards the police among the Irish community in Britain and it also affects the attitudes of people in the Republic of Ireland.

Thus the effects of the Northern conflict impede the development of fully normal friendly relations between Britain and Ireland. It will require a political settlement and the ending of paramilitary operations to create a context in which the healing of these wounds can take place.

Southern Attitudes Towards the North

In the South there is much ambivalence towards Northern Ireland. One example of this is the attitude towards the question of changing Articles II and III of the Constitution. In 1968 an all-party committee of the Dáil recommended that these Articles be changed. However no political party has attempted to do this, presumably on the assumption that public opinion would not support such a move and because of the risk of increasing support for republican extremists. There is certainly a large group that wants to have nothing at all to do with the North and are perfectly happy that it should remain under British sovereignty. All political parties have Northern policies. but when it comes to elections these are not given prominence.

There is still support in the South for the IRA, although its extent is not clear. Some of this support exists because of a belief that there will never be peace on the island until Britain

withdraws and that - as the IRA see it - the only way to achieve this is through force of arms. This view is linked to the tradition of physical-force Republicanism which has been prominent on and off in Irish history since the time of the Fenians. Supporters of this view do not seem to have any specific idea of the political shape of the island after British withdrawal, beyond hoping that it would lead to a socialist Republic.

Support for Sinn Fein in the Republic should not automatically be seen as a desire for a United Ireland. Some of their support is in inner-city areas and is based on community issues such as campaigns against drugs dealers, or is the result of a protest vote against the other main parties. Many of those who support them on such issues have no interest in Northern Ireland. Less than 2% of the Southern electorate vote for Sinn Fein.

The real issues facing the Republic result from a breakdown in the consensus about what the Irish nation is. Up to the 1950s people in the South would generally have shared the joint ideals of being Irish (including a desire for a United Ireland) and being Catholic. These are not now universally accepted in the South as valid ideals. The South is a fragmented society. To quote Dick Walsh, political correspondent of the *Irish Times*, it now lacks 'the old enemy on which to focus attention, (and) has searched for and found the enemy within: religious fundamentalism for the liberals, (for whom Vatican II was a watershed); for the militant Nationalists it is anyone who seeks to be conciliatory to the North; for rural Ireland it is the dominance of Dublin; and for many it is the politicians who for years have pretended they hold answers to the real economic problems of the South' (the *Irish Times*, 10 February 1987).

All of this suggests that interest in a United Ireland in the South is quite limited. This view is supported by the 1987 MRBI survey which indicated that almost half of the people in the South believe that Ireland will never be united, and only two thirds of them still hope that it will be. The number desiring unity drops to less than 40%, according to this survey, when it is suggested that the price of unity might be an increase in taxation.

Changes in the Political Policies of the South Towards the North

Relationships between the two parts of Ireland were better during the 1960s than in previous decades, but the civil unrest of 1968 and 1969, followed by the IRA campaign, brought new tensions. As the troubles continued into the 1970s successive Irish governments articulated with increasing clarity the rejection of the notion of achieving a United Ireland through the use of violence.

The New Ireland Forum discussions between the four major nationalist parties in 1982-1983 were, in a way, an encapsulation of a slow learning process of nationalist Ireland about the different nature of Northern Ireland, and what the practice of politics might entail. For the first time nationalist politicians made a serious effort to formulate a policy which would take account of the central problem of dual identity in Northern Ireland - the fact that a majority of the population of Northern Ireland define themselves as British, while nearly 40% see themselves as Irish.

The Forum Report contains a formal statement by the four parties (Fianna Fail, Fine Gael, the Labour Party - all in the South - and the SDLP from the North) that 'their shared aim of a united Ireland will be pursued only by democratic political means and on the basis of agreement'. The aim is 'to create a society that transcends religious differences and that can

accommodate all traditions in a sovereign independent Ireland united by agreement'. The task, therefore, is 'to develop and promote an Irishness that demonstrates convincingly to Unionists that the concerns of the unionist and Protestant heritage can be accommodated in a credible way and that institutions can be created which would protect such concerns and provide fully for their legitimate self-expression' (Section 4.6).

In seeking to accommodate both identities in a new approach, the Report outlines an ideal of a new Ireland characterised by freedom of belief and practice, freedom of conscience, social and communal harmony, reconciliation and the cherishing of diversity. The need for a distinction between private morality and public legislation is underlined.

'The implementation of these principles calls for a deepening and broadening of the sense of Irish identity. No one living in Ireland should feel less at home than another or less protected by law than his or her fellow citizen. This implies in particular, in respect of Northern Protestants, that the civil and religious liberties they uphold and enjoy will be fully protected and guaranteed and their sense of Britishness accommodated' (Section 4.13).

A new Constitution will be required to allow for the social and political realities of the whole island (4.14). New structures must accommodate two sets of legitimate rights, the nationalist and the unionist, to give effective political, symbolic and administrative expression of their identity, their ethos and their way of life. The hope is expressed that a dialogue which fully respects both traditions can overcome the fears and divisions of the past and create an atmosphere in which peace and stability can be achieved (4.15). This kind of settlement transcends the context of Northern Ireland, and requires joint action by London and Dublin to create a new political framework (4.16).

By any standards a statement of this kind is a landmark, a noteworthy political event. It comes after decades of lip service to the ideal of Irish unity by nationalist politicians, quite unsupported by any serious effort to give such an ideal a real content having any sort of relationship to the actualities of political life in Northern Ireland.

The Forum Report envisaged unity of the island by consent as its preferred solution but left the door open to other possibilities. It appeared initially that the conclusions of the Forum were rejected by the British Government, but after prolonged diplomatic contacts the Anglo-Irish Agreement emerged in November 1985.

The evolution of majority nationalist attitudes, North and South, from a position of rejecting the rights of Unionists in Northern Ireland on the grounds that their majority was contrived and therefore undemocratic to one where that majority is seen as being democratically valid, is a major change. The irony is that while most Unionists see the Agreement as giving the South power over Northern Ireland, most Nationalists see it as a limitation of the claim for Irish unity, because it accepts formally the right of the majority in Northern Ireland to remain separate from the rest of the country. Both the Irish Government and the electorate, through their political representatives, have accepted this limitation, and have done so in an internationally binding agreement.

It is obvious that the aspirations of the Forum about pluralism have not so far been fulfilled. However, it is very important that they have been articulated. These ideals would not be identical with those of many of the Catholic bishops and this shows the extent to which some

politicians in the South are becoming more willing to differ publicly with Catholic Church leaders on certain issues.

This overview of the experience of the Republic in recent decades should show Northerners the extent of change that has taken place. It should also give some idea of the items that are a priority for most Southerners, and the context within which any reflection on Northern Ireland, from a Southern viewpoint, must be carried on.

2. Reflection on Scripture and Faith

Our purpose in this document is not just to give a secular analysis, but to measure our secular reality over against the Scriptures and our faith in Christ. In this section we shall select scriptural themes that we think are especially important in our situation, and later we shall discuss what challenges these hold for us.

The Covenant Community

In *Breaking Down the Enmity*, one of the central themes we used in the Scriptural section was that of the Covenant Community. In the Old Testament this means that God makes a Covenant or Agreement with the Chosen People: God will free the people from oppression, bring them to a land flowing with milk and honey, and will always remain faithful to them. For their part the people are asked to respond by loving God and loving their neighbour. The principal way they will do this is by obeying God's law, which is given to them as their guide in the Covenant.

In practice the people break the Covenant in two ways: by idolatry, and by social injustice; both of these alienate them from God. In idolatry the people put things before the God of all creation. By acting unjustly they deny that God has called the people as one people whose identity and unity are based on the fact that they have been chosen by God. There is a close relationship between idolatry and social injustice: the latter makes all worship false because the worship is not being offered on behalf of the whole community, but only a section of it. Meeting God in true worship requires entering into a new relationship with all our brothers and sisters.

The Kingdom of God

A second theme explored in *Breaking Down The Enmity* was that of the Kingdom of God. This was at the very centre of Christ's teaching in the New Testament. The Kingdom is the new society of respect, forgiveness and justice that Our Lord wanted to bring about. It is not just for the Chosen People, but for the many who will come from 'the East and the West'. One joins the community of the Kingdom by repenting and turning away from sin, by finding and showing forgiveness. 'Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us'. The Kingdom is really the upside-down world of the Beatitudes where the poor, those who mourn and those who hunger and thirst for justice are blessed. It is the new society where barriers and divisions, like those between the Jews and Samaritans, or between the Pharisees and the tax collectors, are broken down. It is not just a spiritual Kingdom, but one in which all our relationships are based on respect.

Christ himself is the perfect example of the Kingdom person. In him fear, enmity and domination are broken down: fear is cast out in the Garden of Gethsemane, enmity on the

Cross as he prays 'Father, forgive them for they know not what they do', and domination by the life of him 'who came to serve and not to rule'. '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, the redemption of the world' (*Breaking Down The Enmity*, Section Two).

Idolatry

Idolatry was one of the ways in which the Chosen People rejected God. 'Worshipping idols' is not just a quaint, pictorial Old Testament phrase, now obsolete. It refers to something very real in every society, including our own, namely, regarding something as more important than love of God and love of our neighbour. The Old Testament emphasises the rights of certain groups - the widow, the orphan, and the stranger - precisely because these were their inheritance. The degree of idolatry in our society can be measured by the extent to which people's rights and dignity are culpably disregarded. To the same degree the Kingdom of God is disregarded in that society.

It is easy to see in Ireland how either Nationalism or Unionism can become an idol - that is, something we put before God. But Catholicism or Protestantism can also become idols if we see our particular version of either as something absolute and not open to change or development. Consumerism and materialism, in either their capitalist or socialist forms, are also likely candidates for becoming idols in the modern Irish context.

Repentance and Forgiveness

At the very start of his preaching of the Kingdom Jesus insisted on the need for repentance. Repentance is an admission of our true condition: that of being sinners who have turned away from God in pursuit of selfish idols and in exploitation of other people. It means a turning towards God, an admission of our dependence on him. And it means taking on our responsibility to each other as fellow members of Christ's Covenant community.

Often we think of repentance as something we have to do as individuals. However in the Bible the community is also confronted with the need for it. The Chosen People constantly turned away from social justice (cf Amos and Hosea) - and it was as a people that they had to seek forgiveness (2 Chron 6:38). Without admitting guilt and seeking forgiveness they could not return to the Covenant community.

Churches, as well as individuals, are called to conversion and repentance, to confess the exclusivity and seeking after security which has contributed to our present crisis. The call to repentance is as urgent today as it was for the Chosen People and for those who first heard the Lord proclaim the Kingdom of God, but too often we apply it to others, not to ourselves. Failure to repent, both as individuals and as Churches, is a basic reason why our island lacks so many of the marks of the Kingdom of God.

Sharing Suffering and Overcoming Division

When Christ became man he took on himself our brokenness. At the very heart of love is a demand to enter into the suffering of those we love. The incarnation and the Cross, which is at its centre, is a symbol of God's love and of his inability to ignore our suffering. Entering into human suffering through the Cross was one of the principal ways Christ used to bring about the Kingdom of God.

There is deep suffering on our island. In both communities in the North, and also in the South, the poor suffer, as always, disproportionately. Among the poor, women especially bear the brunt. Following Christ requires a willingness to be compassionate towards others, as he was. This means meeting those from whom we differ, listening to their story and caring about what they are going through. It means Nationalists listening to Unionists, Southerners listening to Northerners, Irish listening to British and vice versa.

Where the division is deep, as it frequently is in Ireland, and the suffering on both sides acute, Christians in attempting to break down enmity face the risk of rejection by different groups. In that no-man's land between warring sides all Christians may discover their crucified vocation. It is there also that they may hope to find the life and love which as grace 'superabounds' beyond the sin, the death and the hatred of brothers and sisters at war.

Conflict and Justice

Being God's people, being committed to his Kingdom means choosing: choosing to respect others rather than despise them; to work for conversion in oneself and in the other rather than killing; to stand beside the poor rather than the rich; to look for real social justice; to insist on the dignity of those whose political, social or cultural identity is threatened (insofar as their rights are compatible with the rights of other traditions). None of this can happen without conflict because to do any of these things provokes fear or resentment among the privileged. Yet Our Lord's life was full of conflict as he constantly sought to question the actions of religious and political leaders of his day, as he exposed hypocrisy, as he denounced unjust actions. Those of us who belong to the clerical order in particular need to remember that it was the Scribes and Pharisees who caused Our Lord most anguish in his life. We cannot therefore afford to be self righteous in challenging those we believe are going against Christ's way. At the same time we cannot avoid speaking the truth and this necessarily entails conflict. We must also remember that the purpose of conflict in Christ's life was to bring people to repentance and to bring them into a new relationship of justice and respect with each other. He did not engage in conflict for its own sake, or with the aim of trying to conquer people.

Peace Based on Justice and Forgiveness

As followers of Christ our task is above all to work for peace and an end to divisions. But peacemaking involves more than the ending of violence. It can only happen through liberation - the liberation of the poor from oppression, of oppressors from blindness and arrogance, of the prejudiced from fears and bigotry. It is the Christian's task to stand beside the oppressed, as Christ did, but in a way that is aimed at practical liberation, and in a way that will not simply scapegoat the oppressor. As Christians we are not called simply to win our freedom. We are called to enter into a new relationship with the oppressor based on forgiveness, acceptance, understanding and justice. The person or group who suffers oppression often needs to be freed from bitterness.

Christians tend to make one of two mistakes: the first is to side with the oppressed in a way that scapegoats the oppressor. This means that one never has to enter into a relationship with the oppressor, and that the oppressor is blamed for all the suffering of the people, thus overlooking the sins committed by the people themselves. Often when this happens the oppressed become oppressors themselves when they get the opportunity. The second temptation is to emphasize what Our Lord has said about peace, reconciliation and

forgiveness and forget what he said about justice, so that we become over-tolerant of an unjust situation. Both of these temptations have to be avoided if we are to get an island that works. We also need to remember that at times we can find ourselves in a position where we are oppressed, while at other times we ourselves act as oppressors. Such is the complexity of our relationships.

Shared Prayer and Acceptance of Difference

When Our Lord taught His disciples to pray his first concern was for our Father's will and the establishment of his Kingdom on earth as in Heaven. One of the most obvious aspects of Christ's life was the time he spent in prayer with his Father, and the way he taught his disciples to pray. Many questions in the area of faith and politics cannot be answered simply at the level of reason. A deeper discernment is necessary. This cannot happen without prayer. However, prayer is often used as an escape by Christians, either by leaving everything in the hands of God and forgetting our role as co-creators, or by using prayer to reaffirm our own view of the world and shielding ourselves from challenges. Christian prayer is different.

To pray to God, who is the Father of us all, in the name of Jesus makes a `nonsense' of our historical separations and division. Unless we continually remind ourselves of this in our prayer it will lose its authenticity and distinctiveness. If we do remind ourselves we will feel compelled to seek more and more occasions for explicitly shared prayer. Prayer is too often diminished in our attempts at separate expression and it is destroyed when that deliberately excludes fellow Christians.

Unity is at the very centre of what it means to be a Christian. We are called to be united with each other and with everyone in the world because we have one Father in heaven and one Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Unity should not mean the destruction or suppression of difference. Responses to the Third World and to the United Nations provide some evidence of the willingness of Irish Christians to contribute to a unified world of difference. The more severe test is how far we can come together as a people on this island to share suffering, work and prayer while respecting our genuine and valuable differences.

3. CHURCH REALITIES

In the last section we looked at relevant passages in the Scriptures, which show that Christians are called to be part of the Covenant Community and to pray and to work for the coming of Christ's Kingdom. The Church is called to be the sign of the Kingdom and to be a witness to it. This means showing solidarity with those who are suffering, working for justice and reconciliation, seeking and offering forgiveness rather than holding on to bitterness. It also means that Churches have to move into new relationships with each other. How well do Christian Churches in Ireland, North and South, measure up to the demands of witnessing to the Kingdom? This section attempts to answer that question and also to point to realistic ways in which we believe improvements could take place.

Because Churches are very important institutions in Ireland the stance they take even on spiritual issues can have affects that go far beyond their own boundaries. In both North and South religion and politics intertwine. This is not surprising as both are important to many people in Ireland. However it is useful to ask if the way Churches act in this area accords

with the values of the Covenant Community and the Kingdom, or if it sometimes shows elements of idolatry.

There is a range of religious issues that have been bones of contention between Churches in Ireland for many years. These include interchurch marriages, integrated education, intercommunion, and the perceived validity of different Churches as ways of following Christ. The attitude of the Churches on these issues points out how divided they are from each other, often in a way that is lacking in basic human and Christian respect. One result is that bitterness over religious matters spills over into political attitudes. For example, the Catholic Church, for religious reasons, insists on certain conditions for mixed marriages. Protestants object to these not only on religious grounds, but also on the wider political grounds that - as they see it - these conditions are leading to the decline of the whole Protestant community. Thus, in a variety of ways, religion and politics intertwine in both the North and the South.

Secondly, divisions over religious matters undermine the missionary endeavour of all our Churches. This is true not only in Ireland, where many people find it difficult to listen to the main Churches because of the divisions, but also abroad where missionaries are frequently asked: 'If Christianity is such a good thing how is it that Christians are so divided, for example, in Ireland?'

Changes in the way Churches relate to each other could lead to a growth of reconciliation in Ireland as a whole. We believe that the following basic principle is crucial in Ireland today:

when there is tension over important religious values then Churches should opt for the interpretation which will enhance relationships in the interests of peace and reconciliation, and ultimately of life itself.

This is not to suggest that differences over religious beliefs can be glossed over, but rather to point to the important insight of Vatican II that there is a hierarchy of truths. Some truths are more important than others. In Ireland Christ's call for reconciliation takes on particular significance because of our historical divisions. Therefore, if there is a possibility of different views being validly held within any of our Churches on controversial issues, there is an onus on us to opt for that view which will best help reconciliation, because this is important to Christ. In what follows we shall deal first with issues in which we think there is room for improvement by the Roman Catholic Church. Then we turn to matters that in our view concern other Churches more.

Interchurch Marriages

We saw earlier how Roman Catholic theology changed dramatically at Vatican II in its assessment of other Churches. There is still tension between the Church's view of other Churches as bodies where very many of the elements of the Church of Christ are to be found and its view of itself as the institution where 'the fullness of salvation' is present, because this is often understood in a pre-Vatican II sense.

While the Roman Catholic Church has continued to struggle theologically with this tension, there have also been changes in Christian practice. In Ireland, one of these has been in the area of interchurch marriages where there are indications that more couples are choosing to bring up their children as Protestants. The period since 1970 has also seen the birth of

interchurch marriage associations, North and South, in which efforts have been made to bring the children up as members of each of the Churches of the parents, as far as possible.

Some Roman Catholics believe they are bound by divine law to bring their children up in their own faith. The Irish Catholic bishops support this position. However, they point out that in a mixed marriage `the obligations, rights and responsibilities in regard to the upbringing of the children do not belong to the Catholic party alone but are shared by both partners. While the obligation to be true to one's faith is, therefore, an unqualified one, the Catholic parent can only be obliged to do everything possible - no more, but equally no less - to pass on his or her faith to the children,'(*Directory on Mixed Marriages*, 1983, para. 6.4). This is a recognition that in interchurch marriages sincerely and deeply held values can at times clash. For instance the desire to bring up one's child as a Catholic can be in conflict with the need to respect the religious rights of one's partner, or with the stability of the marriage. The Irish Catholic bishops recognise that `The possibility exists that, despite his or her best efforts, the Catholic will be in a situation where some or all of the children are brought up in the denomination of the other party.' (*Directory on Mixed Marriages*, 1983, para. 8.5).

The reasonableness of this approach is confirmed by the *Declaration on Religious Liberty* of Vatican II which suggests that Protestants not only have the right, but also have the duty to pass on their knowledge of God to their children, even though the Catholic Church may see some error in their views. As the Catholic bishops of England and Wales put it `error may have no rights; people do, and we must respect the rights of others' (The Episcopal Conference of England and Wales, *Mixed Marriages*, London: CTS, 1977, p.10).

Many Protestants have a deep fear of the Catholic promise because in parts of the Republic of Ireland insistence on it has been one of the main reasons for the decline of Protestant numbers and traditions. The number of areas where the Protestant population is disappearing completely is increasing. In Northern Ireland Catholic interchurch marriage laws are seen by many Protestants as evidence of `Catholic imperialism'.

Already some Catholic dioceses give greater freedom to interchurch couples to marry in Protestant churches and they also stress the responsibility both parents have to pass on their religious values to the children. We would warmly welcome a similar approach in all Catholic dioceses. We also welcome the training courses for interchurch couples that have been held in Dublin and elsewhere and the documents on interchurch marriage produced jointly by the Roman Catholic and Church of Ireland dioceses of Ferns. These are a real contribution to reconciliation.

Integrated Education

One of the changes that has taken place in recent years in Ireland is the growth in the number of integrated schools. This has been more obvious in the North, but it is also happening in the South. In our view it is an important issue because what happens in and between schools will affect the growth of reconciliation in society at large. Also, given the importance that Churches have traditionally placed on schools, we believe attitudes to integrated education will either help or hinder interchurch relationships.

In the South many Protestants tend to fear integrated education because, as a minority community, they feel their identity would be threatened.

In the North many Catholics, again because they are a minority, also fear integrated education. Various reasons are put forward: some see the Church as the institution that plays the greatest role in maintaining the cohesiveness of the Catholic/nationalist community. Without the Church they believe the community would fall apart. Catholic schools are seen as a very important instrument in enabling the Church to fulfil this task. Church leaders have also insisted that only Catholic schools can allow a child to experience a full Catholic ethos. Some would argue that Catholic schools are the only way to protect Irish culture within the North. Other Catholics also resent integrated schools because they think some parents use them only as a means of improving job opportunities. This is because they believe employers may be more likely to employ children from integrated schools than children from Catholic schools. This is seen as reinforcing unjust job discrimination against Catholics. Finally, in a declining employment market Catholic teachers may well feel that integrated schools will threaten their livelihoods.

Many Protestants in the North are also opposed to integrated education. This can be seen from the fact that in some state schools Catholic priests, brothers and sisters are unwelcome.

We would like to make two points that apply equally in the South and the North: one is that parents have a right to send their children to integrated schools and this right should be respected. Churches may feel they cannot support integrated schools, for example by appointing chaplains, because of their already heavy commitment in personnel and finance to the Church schools system. But again, because of the peculiar religio-political problems in Ireland, we feel that, at the very least, no obstacles should be placed in the way of sincerely intentioned clergy and laity who wish to give these 'experiments' a fair trial.

Secondly, if reconciliation is to be the priority for Churches, both South and North, then there is a great need to organise fruitful contacts between those schools - the vast majority - that are not going to be integrated. While we realise that many such contacts are already being made we would like to see them being increased and deepened.

Inter-communion

All the major Christian Churches value the eucharist and believe sharing in it is an important means of grace. Because Churches in Ireland have one organisational structure that covers both North and South, their rules about sharing the eucharist are the same in both parts of the country. Some, like the Presbyterian Churches, have an open table for members of other Christian Churches. Others, like the Roman Catholic Church, do not.

The *Decree on Ecumenism* of Vatican II pointed out that the eucharist is a sign of unity and where such unity does not exist there should not be inter-communion. Most Catholic Church leaders have appropriated this teaching and therefore tend to refuse permission for eucharistic sharing. However in the very next sentence of the same paragraph (No. 8) the Decree goes on to say that the grace to be obtained sometimes commends intercommunion. In practice the way the Decree is interpreted would suggest that this openness to intercommunion by Vatican II has been forgotten. Interchurch couples who have received the sacrament of Baptism, which is recognised by all Christian Churches, and who in Catholic eyes have together received the sacrament of matrimony, often find it especially painful that they cannot share together in the Lord's Supper. We believe their situation is one that demands exceptional consideration. Could the Church, therefore, not offer the possibility of communion to interchurch marriage couples when requested?

We would also like to see all Churches introduce changes in their discipline on this question in the light of the various agreements that have emerged from interchurch dialogues, such as the Anglican Roman Catholic International Consultation (ARCIC).

Co-operation between Clergy

Greater sharing of pulpits between Catholic and Protestant clergy would be an important witness to the unity we seek and share. It would also show a willingness by Churches to learn about Christ from each other. Joint pastoral visits and other community projects by Catholic and Protestant clergy, when feasible, might also contribute to reducing tension. It should be easier for clergy in the South to work on this than it is in the North where there is greater inter-communal tension. A related question for Catholics is the status they give Protestant ministers and the criteria they use for assessing them. This is a complex theological question but it needs to be faced in order to facilitate proper cooperation. We welcome the work of various interchurch groups, such as ARCIC I and II, on this question.

What is needed is a greater effort to move ecumenical activity out of the confines of the Church Unity Octave so that it becomes part of the ordinary life of the Church. Some years ago the then Bishop Cahal Daly sent a circular to his clergy asking them what proportion of their time was spent on ecumenical activity. There are many demands made on the time of clergy. Finding out what proportion of time they spend on ecumenical activities is one way of assessing the priority they give to the Church's task of reconciliation.

Protestant Churches' View of the Catholic Church

There is often great ignorance among Protestants about Roman Catholic teaching and practice. There are a number of widely held stereotypes such as the belief that the Church obstructs direct access to Christ for its members, so making the experience of 'new birth' impossible for them. This may be combined with a selective view of predestination which excludes Roman Catholics from the salvation offered by Christ. Should such a position not be exposed by Protestant leaders and preachers as unscriptural and untrue to the present reality of Roman Catholic teaching?

Vatican II *has* led to great changes in the Catholic Church. There is a challenge to Protestants to discover and present the facts of these changes. There is a challenge to face the question of what they mean for the identity and witness of Protestantism. But, above all, there is a challenge for Protestants to make the step of personal encounter with Roman Catholics to discover the commonalities and differences in faith and practice. It is only in real meeting that fear can be driven out. Southern Protestants, for the most part, differ from Northern Protestants in their experience of Roman Catholics. Sharing this experience with Northerners could help communication between different Churches.

These questions have been raised before, in fact so often that many find them boring. This is a symptom of despair. The questions are still valid, because not enough has been done about them. Certainly some things have improved, but the overall impression of Irish Churches is that we are more interested in survival and in keeping our flocks than in living and preaching the full force of the Gospel. Increasingly there is a common challenge to all our Churches. Secularisation is growing in both the North and the South. How can all our Churches find ways of presenting and living the Gospel in a way that will have relevance, meaning and credibility in such societies? Christians will only be credible witnesses to society when the

enmity and fear are taken out of the relationships between them. This does not mean everyone becoming the same; it means living together in difference in a relationship of love and respect.

4. FAITH AND POLITICS

Most Catholics, in our experience, do not easily see a connection between faith and politics. Protestants do, although we question the way the link is often made. It is our belief that there ought to be a connection between the two but that the process of working out the right sort of connection is a long and tortuous one. One of our primary aims, in this as in our previous documents, is to encourage Churches in Ireland to take this task to heart and to engage in it more vigorously.

The Legitimacy of the State

A crucial task facing everyone on this island is that of relations between the public and the security forces. However this raises a prior question, namely the legitimacy of the state, because the security forces act on its behalf. In the Republic this has not been a major problem since the 1930s. There has been plenty of dissatisfaction with many aspects of the state, but the vast majority of people have been willing to work for change within its confines. However, there has been a problem about the legitimacy of the Northern state, because for so long, either in word or in practice, the South denied its legitimacy. As we have seen, the Southern attitude to this question has changed considerably over the years.

In our view, as Christians, the primary criterion for judging the legitimacy of any state is whether or not it acts justly, or in a way that helps the common good. This is not an easy criterion to assess. Every state in the world would fail to some extent, if measured against it. But we do not live in an ideal world and often we have to face the question: inadequate as the present state is, what are the alternatives